MAPPING PROFESSIONAL WORKING EXPERIENCES OF BLACK WOMEN: A NARRATIVE RESEARCH STUDY EXPLORING MID-CAREER BLACK WOMEN'S SOCIAL IDENTITY AS THEY ASPIRE TO BE LEADER IN THEIR PROFESSIONAL ROLES

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This work is dedicated to:

All Black women accused of being an “angry Black woman”

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Abstract

The community college system is integral pathway for minority populations to advance upward into meaningful careers. Research is often focused on how minority populations achieve higher graduation rates when the administration is reflective of their identity; however, it is rare to find a community college campus in which the profile of the campus professional staff is equivalent to the campus' student population. This narrative research study explored how mid-career Black women working in community colleges describe their social identity as they aspire to be leaders in their professional roles. The participants of this study were ten Black women working in the community college setting for at least two years, at least 30 years of age, and serving in a professional position for at least two years. The findings highlighted the experiences of the participants and focused on race, gender, social interactions, relationships, networking and mentoring. The study concluded with implications for practice to include support groups, professional development opportunities, and mentoring programs. The suggestions for future research included more studies that emphasize the social identity and the identity development of Black women professionals.

Keywords: Social identity, Black women, community colleges, higher education

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CHAPTER 1: INTROUCTION

This doctoral thesis focused on the experiences of Black women college professionals working in community colleges, as these women describe their social identity while aspiring to be leaders in their professional roles. This chapter describes the context of the study, in which the problem of practice is derived driving the main focus of this investigation. After stating the problem of practice, the purpose of the study, and the research question, the theoretical framework guiding this research is discussed. Finally, the chapter concludes with examining the significance of the study, the research plan, and a list of key terms that appear throughout the document.

Context Overview

Community colleges are known as academic institutions that provide educational opportunities to meet the changing needs of the communities being served. Community colleges tend to be inclusive institutions that welcome all who desire to learn, regardless of one's socioeconomic status, ethnicity, or educational level. The mission of the Community College System in a large Southeastern state is to "open the door to high-quality, accessible educational opportunities that minimize barriers to post-secondary education, maximize student success, develop a globally and multi-culturally competent workforce, and improve the lives and well-being of individuals" (NC Community College, 2014-2017). Community colleges play a significant role in providing affordable, quality educational access and opportunities to students, especially minority students (Zamani, 2003).

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Statement of the Problem

Over the years, the student population attending community colleges has become more diverse, increasing the need to develop additional multicultural communities on campuses (Patitu & Hinton, 2003). These multicultural communities can provide support and assist students with feeling connected to the campus, administrators, and other students. The increase in diversity can be attributed to a surge in unemployment rates, the reduction in manufacturing jobs, and constant economic changes in society. These factors often motivate individuals to pursue additional education in order to obtain stable employment to support their families and themselves. Among one population that has taken advantages of opportunities presented by higher education institutions, particularly community colleges are Black females.

For roughly thirty years, the enrollment of women students in higher educational institutions has increased at a faster rate than men students. In fact, women students still outnumber men students in all varieties of higher education institutions (Zamani, 2003; Townsend, 2009). However, when it comes to the representation of women in administrative positions, especially Black women administrators, there is a disproportionate representation between women students and women administrators (Townsend, 2009; Henry, 2010). Limited research suggested that Black women administrators play a significant role in facilitating the learning and development of minority students, as these women administrators can model the appropriate behaviors needed to be supportive and successful (Henry, 2010). Additional research indicated a strong link between the enrollment, productivity, success, and degree completion of Black female students in relation to the number of Black women administrators present on the campus, particularly at predominately White institutions (Patitu & Hinton, 2003; Henry, 2010).

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Problem of Practice

Women have emerged as powerful leaders in the realms of business and government, disproving many of the long-standing distorted perceptions that females are the weaker beings (Coyne & Stufft, 2009). The majority of women in the labor force work in management, professional, and other related occupations and it is estimated that forty-four percent of women will occupy management jobs in various companies (Ballenger, 2010). In 2008, it was projected that the growth of women in the labor force would increase more rapidly than that of men (Ballenger, 2010). Even though women are making strides in the workforce, their progression into senior level management positions remains slow and restricted as even basic level positions remain dominated by men (Ely & Meyerson, 2000). This slow progression leads one to inquire about the reasons prohibiting the upward mobility of women in the workplace.

For more than 300 years, Black women have played a vital role in the American educational system and have made unselfish contributions within academia to support the institution, colleagues, and students. However, their contributions, along with their skills and knowledge, are often unrecognized (Zamani, 2003; Rosser, 2004). The lack of these acknowledgements cause Black women in academia to appear invisible and voiceless, while having their experiences overshadowed by those of Black men and/or subsumed by the realities of White women (Zamani, 2003; Rosser, 2004; Johnson & Thomas, 2012). In addition, the mainstream economic categories cast women into one of two roles, those of productive workers and reproductive mothers (Fennel &Arnot, 2008).

These economic categories often hinder women, especially Black women, from developing an identity that is respected and viewed as professionally competent. An individual's identity usually reflects their own personal traits and talents, while responding to gendered

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expectations from constituents (Dunn, Gerlach, & Hyle, 2014). According to hooks (2003), a woman's identity, as determined by her status, often follows her into the workplace and shapes her work experiences (as cited in Johnson & Thomas, 2012). In an effort to succeed in these environments and viewed as proficient workers, many Black women find they must adapt to more male-centric leadership models and norms in order to be seen as serious leaders, and to be able to access senior-level positions (Dunn et al., 2014).

The public images of Black women are often constructed as having no sensibilities, lacking values or morals, and preying on the "lascivious shortcoming of the 'respectable' White men in the community" (Holmes, 2003, p. 47). Frequently, Black women reported ill-treatment received from White colleagues due to the distorted images that are regularly rooted in the vestiges of race, gender, and class oppression (Holmes, 2003). In addition to distorted public images and unfavorable treatment, Black women may also encounter significant psychological and communicational challenges that may require a complex adjustment in language and behaviors to survive the male dominated workforce (Tedrow & Rhoads, 1999). Despite these challenges encountered, Black women continue to make tremendous strides within the realm of higher education. In fact, in 2008, The American Association of Community Colleges reported that women hold 53% of the executive/administrative and managerial positions in community colleges (Gill & Jones, 2013).

Purpose of Study

For many years, women (Ballenger, 2010), particularly Black women, (Becks-Moody, 2004) in the United States higher education administration system have not been afforded a fair and equitable opportunity to advance to senior-level leadership positions as compared to their White male counterparts, despite similar levels of education, broad experience, and career tenure.

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In fact, a large percentage of senior-level positions in the United State higher education administration are held by males, particularly White males (Ballenger, 2010). These same males are also responsible for developing and implementing policies that influence hiring practices, staff development, and resource distribution in higher education that may affect the treatment, status, and visibility of women (Ballenger, 2010).

Community colleges are viewed as a friendlier career pathway for women interested in senior- level administrative positions; however the representation of women, especially African Americans, in these leadership positions remains limited (Eddy, 2008; VanDerLinden, 2004). In addition to the slow growth of diversity in leadership positions, Black women are constantly dealing with certain labels that impede their efforts to be seen as strong, competent, and viable leaders (Coyne & Stufft, 2009; Lloyd-Jones, 2009; Jackson, 2004; Lepkowski, 2009). These labels can often hinder the leadership development of Black women and stifle their social identity as it relates to their social groups and environments. According to hooks (2003), a woman's identity, as determined by her status, often follows her into the workplace and shapes her work experiences (as cited in Johnson & Thomas, 2012).

The purpose of this research study was to explore how Black women working in community colleges described their social identity as they aspire to be leaders in their professional roles. Specifically, this study sought to examine strategies for developing and retaining the social identities of Black women college professionals. This study also sought to identify strategies to assist with establishing successful work environments and uncover how these professionals' experiences and aspirations are shaped through the social structures and interactions with others within their respective workplace.

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Research Question

The following research question was designed to support this objective.

RQ: How do mid-career Black women working in community colleges describe their social identity as they aspire to be leaders in their professional roles?

Significance of the Study

This research study was significant for several reasons. First, the study sought to gain a better understanding of the role social identity plays in the lives of Black women college professionals. Black women are constantly struggling with developing an identity that can be viewed as professional and competent, while remaining true to their cultural or ethnic background, with regards to their race and gender. In addition to developing an identity that is viewed as professional by colleagues, these women must also learn how to effectively navigate, negotiate, and utilize the numerous identities they possess in order to be eligible for leadership positions or even recognized as leaders in their current positions. Second, higher educational institutions are receiving more diverse students, which could indicate a need for a more diverse professional staff to address the varying needs of the student population. Therefore, this study examined strategies for recruiting and retaining Black women college professionals. Finally, this study added to the limited body of research on the identity and social identity of Black women college professionals working in higher educational institutions.

Theoretical Framework

The word "identity" has numerous meanings and definitions, depending on the disciplinary perspectives. For the purpose of this research study, "identity" has been defined as an awareness of self through self-image, self-reflection, and self-esteem (Shields, 2008).

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Identities can be shaped and developed through personal and professional experiences originating from social environments and interactions with others. Therefore, the concepts of identity development can be understood as a cyclical process rather one that is hierarchical (Stewart, 2009). Social identities are then derived from one's involvement in specific groups and/or categories. This involvement aids individuals with defining and refining their social identity as they work to maintain or increase their self-esteem and positive image (Turner, 1975; Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Tajfel, 1982; Trepte, 2006; Cornelissen, Haslam, & Blamer, 2007).

To adequately examine the social identity of Black women college professionals, along with the social environments/influences and interaction, the theoretical framework shaping and guiding this study was Social Identity Theory (SIT).

Social Identity Theory (SIT)

SIT is a social psychological analysis of the role of self-conception in group membership, group process, and intergroup relations. The theory assists with defining group cognitively; meaning how people understand their self-conception as it relates to being a group member (Hogg, 2006). SIT addresses various phenomena such as prejudice, discrimination, intergroup conflict, conformity, group polarization, and leadership; and focuses on norms, stereotypes, and prototypes of groups to explain group behavior in terms of concepts that articulate societal and psychological processes that recognize the primacy of society over individual (Hogg, Terry, & White, 1995; Burke & Stets, 2000; Hogg, 2006; Korte, 2007). Overall, SIT incorporates three main points (a) people are motivated to maintain a positive self-concept, (b) the self-concept derives largely from group identification, and (c) people establish positive social identities by favorably comparing their in-group against an out-group (Padilla & Perez, 2003). The following graphical representation (Figure 1.1) depicts the theoretical framework used for this study. The

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key constructs this study sought to examine was the development of one's social identity, the concept of social groups, and the relationship between in-groups and out-groups.

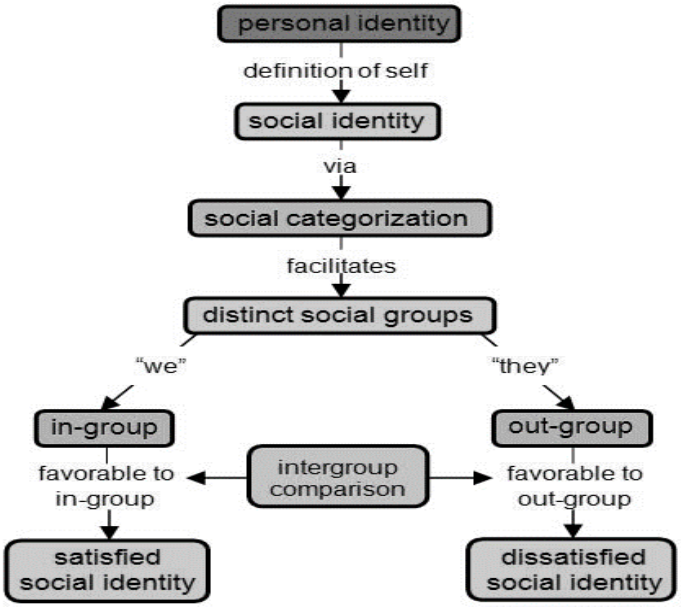

Figure 1.1: Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979)

Basic Principles

The basic concept of SIT states that individuals fall into and belong to a social category that defines who they are in terms of the characteristics particular to a certain category (Hogg et al., 1995; Brown, 2000; Hogg, 2006; Ellemers & Haslam, 2012). These characteristics are considered self-defining and part of one's self-concept. As a member of a specific social category, individual members develop a social identity that describes and prescribes one's attributes as a member of the group (Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Hogg, 2006; Ellemers & Haslam, 2012). After individuals define themselves according to a particular social categorization, they seek to achieve positive self-esteem by positively differentiating their in-group from a comparative out-group (Cornelissen et al., 2007).

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Psychological Process

SIT utilizes three psychological processes for explaining and understanding how people's social identities are different from their personal identities: social categorization, social comparison, and social identification (Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Hogg et al., 1995; Trepte, 2006, Korte, 2007; Ellemers & Haslam, 2012). Social categorization allows individuals to classify and organize their social environment into groups (Turner, 1975; Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Ellemers & Haslam, 2012). These groups assist with defining and establishing a self-reference and function as social stereotypes that helps interpret, explain, and even justify group behaviors (Trepte, 2006). Social categorization enables individuals to create and define their own place in society, while specifying how a particular group or groups share their beliefs, experiences, interests, and ideas (Turner, 1975; Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Trepte, 2006; Korte, 2007).

Social comparison is a behavior triggered by social categorization and assumes that individuals not only categorize themselves but also others; it also assesses and establishes distinctiveness between the in-groups and out-groups (Tuner, 1975; Burke & Stets, 2000; Trepte, 2006). Social comparison aims to evaluate the social groups in which people belong, usually takes place within groups that are similar to one's own group, and refers to the dimensions that compose a particular group (Trepte, 2006).

Social identification is the self-image or self-concept of individuals derived from the social categories in which they perceive themselves belonging; and is developed through a process of self-categorization (Turner, 1975; Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Korte, 2007). Therefore, the knowledge gained from membership in a particular social group or groups is combined with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership to create one's social identity (Turner, 1975; Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Tajfel, 1982; Trepte, 2006; Cornelissen et al., 2007).

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Padilla & Perez (2003) view social identities as satisfying individuals' simultaneous needs for inclusion and differentiation from various social groups. Social identification is viewed as an ongoing process that is descriptive and prescriptive, but also evaluative by furnishing an assessment of social groups, their members, and social comparisons with regards to other relevant social categories (Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Hogg et al., 1995; Ellemers & Hasalm, 2011).

The social identities of individuals are taken at face value and based on the cultural norms of expected behaviors of the group membership (Clair, Beatty, & MacLean, 2005). Therefore, if one's group membership is devalued, one suffers from a negative social identity. In order to achieve a positive social identity, a group may implement a range of cognitive and behavioral strategies to improve the group's status (Desmette & Gaillard, 2008).

The power of social identities varies, but is more powerful than an individual identity and can function as a catalyst for competition among various in-groups and out-groups (Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Korte, 2007). This competition assists in-group members with identifying and developing a positive distinctiveness, strengthening their favoritism of the in-group members and excluding members of the out-group (Brown, 2000; Dovidio et al., 2005). Therefore, groups and their members are constantly defining themselves positively in order to distinguish their group from other groups that may be viewed as negative or devalued. In order for devalued groups (out-groups) to be viewed positively, these groups often adopt specific strategies to improve the value of the social identification of the group (Desmette & Gaillard, 2008; Ellemers & Haslam, 2012). These strategies include individual mobility, social creativity, and social competition.

Identity Management Strategies

Individual mobility is a personal strategy, in which people may seek to escape avoid, or deny belonging to a devalued group, and seek to be included in a group of higher social status

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(Ellemers & Haslam, 2012). For example, some Black women community college professionals may believe that in order to be accepted as an effective leader, they need to abandon their natural feminine qualities and adopt a more male-centric leadership model (Coyne & Stufft, 2009; Campbell, Mueller, & Souza, 2010; Dunn, Gerlach, & Hyle, 2014). Individual mobility emphasizes how the individual self is different from other group members. However, this strategy may furnish some group members with a positive social identity, but the strategy does not benefit the status of the group as a whole (Ellemers & Haslam, 2012).

Social creativity is a process in which the group attempts to redefine the intergroup comparison by representing the group in terms of their positive values instead of their negative characteristics. This strategy can be achieved in three ways: focusing on other dimensions of intergroup comparisons, including other groups in the comparison, and changing the meaning of low- status group membership. While this strategy assists members with coping with their devalued status in society, it does not address or change their status quo or improve the group's objective outcomes (Ellemers & Haslam, 2012). For example, Black women community college professionals may focus on their education, their accomplishments in the workplace, or their motivation and determination to be successful in an effort to create a more positive image of the group and its members.

Social competition is a strategy in which group members engage in forms of conflicts designed to change the status quo in a manner unlike individual mobility and social creativity (Ellemers & Haslam, 2012). For example, Black women community college professionals may seek to educate colleagues and other individuals on the challenges they encounter in the workplace, while others may strive to change policies and procedures that deter Black women from developing the skills needed to move into leadership positions (Coachman, 2009; Chan,

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2010). Social change often addresses the situation of groups as a whole, and focuses on achieving changes to objectives or outcomes (Ellemers & Haslam, 2012).

The social identities of individuals are taken at face value and often based on the cultural norms of expected behaviors of the group membership (Clair, Beatty, & MacLean, 2005). Social identities are also fluid and change over time, allowing individuals to move in and out of groups on a consistent basis depending on their life experiences. (Shield, 2008; Amiot et al., 2010). Therefore, the social identities of Black women are often different from those of Black men and women of other ethnic groups. It is these differences that may contribute to the unique and diverse experiences encountered by Black women community college professionals.

This study sought to explore how mid-career Black women community college professionals described their social identity as they aspired to be leaders in their professional roles. This study also sought to examine the role identity plays in their leadership journey. The theoretical framework (SIT) selected for this study assisted with interpreting how one's social identity was shaped through personal knowledge and social environments/influences (Padilla & Perez, 2003). As individuals' identities are defined, SIT will assist with examining how individuals make sense of these identities, particularly in relation to defining social groups and categories.

Overview of Research Plan

To assist with exploring how mid-career Black women college professionals describe their social identity while aspiring to be leaders in their professional roles, an interpretative, qualitative study has been incorporated. A narrative approach allowed the stories of participants, regarding their perceptions of themselves and their interactions with others to be collected and analyzed (Moen, 2006; Creswell, 2013). Study participants were Black women college

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professionals working in public community colleges in a Southeastern state in the United States. The study recruited ten participants who self-identified as being Black women professionals. Participants were interviewed in a one-on-one session for 30-90 minutes and semi-structured, open-ended questions based on the concepts of SIT were utilized. Interviews were recorded and transcribed, and copies of the transcripts were shared with participants for validation of information received. The coding strategy of the data collected was a mixture of manual and computer aided software. NVivo assisted with identifying any commonalities and differences between the experiences of the study participants. Analysis of the data consisted of the inductive and deductive interpretation of the information congregated from the coding progress, and utilized Braun and Clarke's six step guide for data analysis (2006). A more detailed explanation of these processes is presented in Chapter Three.

Assumptions/Delimiters/Limitations

Research is a personal journey embarked upon by the researcher(s) (Creswell, 2012). Research involves the challenges that must be confronted as well as the obstacles that must be overcome. When conducting a qualitative study, all research subjects must be treated with respect and compassion even if one personally disagrees with their opinions. The researcher must always strive to understand and respect their perspectives.

Research Assumptions

The following assumptions were made with respect to this study:

1. Participants had a good knowledge and understanding of social identity.
2. Participants had similar experiences to each other, and to the researcher
3. Participants would be open about their experiences and interactions with colleagues.

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Research Delimitations

The researcher identified three research delimitations:

1. Did not capture enough experiences around social identities and their impact on participants
2. A narrative approach was used to collect the data.
3. English speaking participants

Research Limitations

Three important research limitations should be noted:

1. The entire sample was Black women college professionals, no faculty
2. Study was only conducted in one state
3. Study was limited to ten participants

Key Terms/Definitions

- Identity - A quality that enables the expressions of the individual authentic sense of self (Shields, 2008).
- Identity Theory - The social behavior between an individual and society (Burke & Stets, 2000)
- Social Identity Theory (SIT) - Social psychological theory that focuses on group processes, behaviors, social conflicts, and intergroup relations; while seeking to understand how individuals make sense of themselves and others in a social environment (Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Hogg et al., 1995; Trepte, 2006, Hogg, 2006; Korte, 2007).

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- Social Identity - is defined as an individual's self-concept resulting from his or her perceived membership in a social group such as race, gender identity or sexual orientation (Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Hogg, 2006; Ellemers & Haslam, 2012).
- African American or Black - a person having origins in any of the Black racial groups in Africa; this excluded persons of Hispanic origin and did not include international Africans from the African continent (Collins, 1986)
- Black Feminist Thought (BFT) – Theory that focuses on the unique experiences and standpoints of Black women (Collins, 1986; Reynolds, 2010).
- Community College – Two year higher educational institutions providing opportunities for students not traditionally served in higher educational institutions (Zamani, 2003; Townsend & Twombly, 2007)

Chapter One Summary

This chapter provided an overview of the study, statement of the problem, and significance of the research that led to the focus of this study. The central research question and theoretical framework that guided this study were also identified. Following was a presentation of the research plan and a discussion on the significance of this study. Finally, the limitations of the study are noted, and a list of key terms was presented. The next chapter reviews the most relevant scholarly literature that surrounds the problem of practice and theoretical constructs.

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CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter introduces the relevant literature reviewed that informed this research study. The literature covered in this section provides a comprehensive discussion on the following topics; identity, social identity theory, higher education, and Black women. The purpose of this literature review is to permit a thorough examination into the social identities of Black women college professionals and the challenges associated with their identity throughout their leadership experiences.

Identity

Identity is a broad term with various meanings for different people. In psychological terms, identity relates to the awareness of self, self-image, self-reflection, and self-esteem (Shields, 2008). According to Stets and Serpe (2009), an identity is a set of meanings attached to roles individuals occupy in the social structure (role identities), groups they identify with and belong to (group identities), and unique ways in which they see themselves (person identities) (p. 8). Torres, Jones, and Renn (2009) define identity by how individuals understand their beliefs about themselves in relation to various social groups and the ways they express these relationships. Therefore, identity is shaped by how individuals organize their experiences within environments that evolve around them (Torres et al., 2009). Stryer and Burke (2000) define identity in three distinct ways: (a) as a culture of people, (b) as a common identification within a collective or social category, and (c) as part of a self –image composed of meanings that individuals attach to multiple roles (p. 284).

Lüchrmann and Eberl (2007) suggest that traditionally identity is something deeply entrenched within individuals, their innermost attitudes and feelings. Modern thinkers view identity as a "theory or schema of an individual, describing and interrelating one's relevant

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features, characteristics, and experiences" (Lüchrmann and Eberl, 2007 p. 117). The notion of identity has become one prominent way to re-conceptualize self, in which self is viewed as a series of identities invoked in various circumstances, but it also functions as a filter for selective perception and interpretation of self and others (Turner, 2012). In other words, identity is socially constructed over time and occurs within different contexts.

The study of identity has a rich tradition in a number of disciplines, such as psychology, sociology, social psychology, and human ecology as each discipline seeks to understand identity and identity development. Although there will not be an extensive examination on each approach, this section will provide a brief overview. A psychology approach focuses on the understanding of the distinct differences between self or personal identity and social or group identities; and utilizes the works of Freud, Erik Erikson, and Arthur Chickering (Spencer – Oatey, 2007; Torres et al., 2009). The sociology approach considers an individual's identification within certain social groups, and focuses on the identities and roles of individuals in these groups along with group interactions. This particular approach utilizes the works of Mead and Stryker (Torres et al., 2009). The social psychology approach seeks to understand how one's wellbeing, sense of community, and belonging to groups contribute to the development of positive self-esteem. This approach focuses on identity formation and emphasizes questions centered on adopting group identities and how the identities are expressed through behaviors (Torres et al., 2009). The human ecology approach suggests that identity is an individual characteristic that plays a role in influencing intersections between the developing person and their environment. This approach considers identity development as an interactive process between individuals and their environments, leading to an increasingly complex understanding of self and self in context (Torres et al., 2009). The research on identity and identity development has evolved to more

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inclusive, nuanced, and interdisciplinary; and contains a wealth of information about individuals, groups/collectives, relationships, and environmental influences. The next section will focus on two primary theories associated with identity.

Identity Theory

Identity theory has its origins in the early writings of George Herbert Mead (especially 1934), who focused on the concepts of society, self, and social behavior. Mead's formula consisted of: "Society shapes self shapes social behavior" (Stryker & Burke, 2000 p. 285). Mead considered self to be a product of social interaction in that people come to know who they are through their interaction with others (Hogg et al., 1995; Stets & Burke, 2000). Theorist William James (1890) suggested that individuals possess multiple identities that correspond to the different groups/networks in which they interact. It is believed that throughout their life spans, individuals activate their different identities to address various situations, and research suggests that multiple identities are activated in situations when the identities share meanings (Hogg, et al., 1995; Stryker & Burke, 2000; Stets & Serpe, 2009).

Sheldon Stryker (1980) utilized the writings of Mead, James, and other early contributors, and organized and formulated these ideas of "self, identity, and society" in an approach that could test, research, and further explain the specific concepts (Stryker & Burke, 2000). The combination of these ideas viewed self as a multifaceted, social construct that emerges from an individual's role in society (Hogg, et al., 1995). Identity theory sought to explain the social behavior between an individual and society; and it is strongly associated with the symbolic interactionist view that suggested society affects an individual's social behavior through its influences on self (Hogg et al., 1995). This theory focused on behavior, role taking, self-verification, and dissonance reduction, along with examining the causes and consequences

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of identifying with a particular role, (Hogg et al., 1995; Burke & Stets, 2000), which is consistent with the foundational components of identity theory. Each component of the theory is discussed briefly below.

Role Identities are seen as self-conceptions or self-definitions that individuals apply to themselves. These role identities apply meaning for individuals because they allow for the labeling and distinguishing of roles within groups and society (Hogg, et al., 1995; Stryker & Burke, 2000). The role identities adopted by individuals are then linked to behavioral and affective outcomes in which some identities become more relevant than others, similar to a hierarchy (Hogg et al., 1995; Turner, 2012). This is known as identity salience, which suggested that a particular identity is invoked in certain diverse situations based on need (Hogg et al., 1995; Stryker & Burke, 2000). A salience hierarchy is developed when certain identities are more prevalent than other identities and dependent upon the level of need (Stets & Serpe, 2009; Turner, 2012).

The literature suggested that the salience of a particular identity is determined by the individual's commitment to that identity and role, as well as, a particular social group (Hogg, et al., 1995; Stryker & Burke, 2000; Stets & Serpe, 2009; Turner, 2012). Commitment is defined as the degree to which individuals' relationships to others in their social group are dependent on the significance of the group (Hogg et al., 1995; Stryker & Burke, 2000; Stets & Serpe, 2009; Turner, 2012). The stronger an individual is committed to an identity, the higher the level of identity salience (Hogg et al., 1995). Stryker (2000) identified two types of commitments: 1) interactional commitment, which reflects the number of roles associated with a particular identity and 2) affective commitment, which refers to the importance of the relationship associated with a particular identity (Hogg et al., 1995; Stets & Serpe, 2009).

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Social Identity Theory

The theoretical framework guiding this study was Social Identity Theory (SIT), which originated from the early works of Henri Tajfel and John Turner, who focused on the social factors of perception, the cognitive, and social belief aspects of racism, prejudice, and discrimination (Hogg et al., 1995). Tajfel and Turner (1975, 1979) sought to understand the psychological foundation of intergroup discrimination that caused members to favor their in-groups and criticize or discriminate against out-groups. Therefore, SIT is known as a social psychological theory that sets out to explain group process, behaviors, cognitions, social conflicts, and intergroup relations (Hogg, Terry, & White, 1995; Burke & Stets, 2000; Padilla & Perez, 2003; Trepte, 2006), and seeks to understand how individuals make sense of themselves and others in a social environment (Korte, 2007). It focused on intergroup relations, group process, and the social self, along with how individuals think, feel, and act as members of collective groups, institutions, and cultures (Padilla & Perez, 2003). According to Brown (2000), Tajfel and Turner posited a distinct difference between personal and social identity, which recognizes the difference between interpersonal and group situations. SIT also proposed that individuals strive to achieve and/or maintain positive social identities which boost their self-esteem (Brown, 2000; Trepte, 2006).

Contributions to SIT

Brown (2000) identified four areas in which SIT has contributed the most: in-group bias, status inequality, intragroup homogeneity and stereotyping, and intergroup attitudes. The first contribution of SIT explained in-group bias. An in-group bias perception can be described as how group members think and believe that their own group is superior to other groups, causing an increase in discrimination. In-group members tend to identify and develop a positive

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distinctiveness, strengthening their favoritism and excluding members of an out-group (Brown, 2000; Dovidio et. al, 2005). Realistic Group Conflict Theory (RCT), addressed group conflict, negative prejudices, and discrimination that occur between groups of people who are in competition with one another (Brown, 2000; McLeod, 2008). This particular theory is often used to explain and understand the relationships, as well as conflicts, that occur between in-groups and out-groups, and the effects of positive group identification (Brown, 2000).

The second contribution of SIT is to understand the status inequality of groups. Status inequality focused on the perceptual and judgmental consequences manifested by in-group bias. In-group bias and status inequality are generally observed in higher status groups, and often addresses the diverse reactions between members of dominant and subordinate groups (Brown, 2000). To explain the diverse reactions of group members, more specifically their behaviors and behavioral intentions, research proposed the Relative Deprivation Theory (RDT) establish a link between identity and discontent. RDT is often utilized to explain the driving force behind feelings of discontent and collective action, which is the perception of discrepancies between what groups experience and what they expect (Brown, 2000).

The third contribution of SIT is to change the way social psychology views stereotyping and the perceptions of group homogeneity. According to Brown (2000), Tajfel believes that categorization and stereotyping were more than information processing devices, but they were also tools used to understand particular intergroup relationships and justify behaviors toward out-group members. Research implies that stereotyping is often regarded as, "faulty distortion," but can be viewed as reliable guides that groups used for judgment and action since stereotypes might be more contextually determined and more labile (Brown, 2000, p. 750). Therefore, the categorization process underlying stereotyping shows how group members possess similar

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attributes, which creates a sense of homogeneity. The perception of group homogeneity proposes that out-group members have more similarities to one another than members of in-groups. Research attempts to explain this phenomenon by examining the experiences of out-groups and how their status may enhance group identification, which promotes identity maintenance and protection of the group (Brown, 2000).

The fourth contribution of SIT changed the intergroup attitudes through contact with others, which is performed through three different approaches. The first approach is a decategorization model presented by Brewer and Miller (1984). Decategorization refers to a process of reducing the salience of ingroup–outgroup distinctions. This model proposed that social categorization of groups be made less useful as a psychological tool by personalizing intergroup situations and/or finding additional categorical dimensions that cut across the original ones to reduce bias and discrimination (Brown, 2000).

The second approach sought to redraw the category boundaries so that out-groups become subsumed into new and larger superordinate categories. If this occurs, in-groups and former out-groups are able to identify and share some commonalities that can bring both groups closer together reducing, intergroup discrimination (Brown, 2000). Both of these approaches involved the dissolution of category boundaries and the abandonment of sub-group identities.

The third approach focused on retaining sub-group salience while optimizing contact conditions. This is achieved by implementing the following: stressing the typicality of the out-group members, drawing participants' attention to the respective group memberships, and shifting the setting towards the group pole of the interpersonal-group continuum while ensuring the interaction is between equal-status protagonists and cooperative in nature (Brown, 2000). Although SIT has made some significant contributions for explaining and understanding the

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dynamic nature of intergroup relationship, social groups, and social identity; SIT has also been met with several challenges. These challenges assist with improving the vitality of the theory, and enable researchers to redefine and modify its aspects (Brown, 2000).

Model of Social Identity Theory

There are countless models being utilized to understand the dynamics of the social identity of individuals. These models range from examining social identity change to social identity integration to assimilation. The model being incorporated into this research study is the Model of Multiple Dimensions of Identity (MMDI) (Figure 2.1) developed by Jones and McEwen (2000).

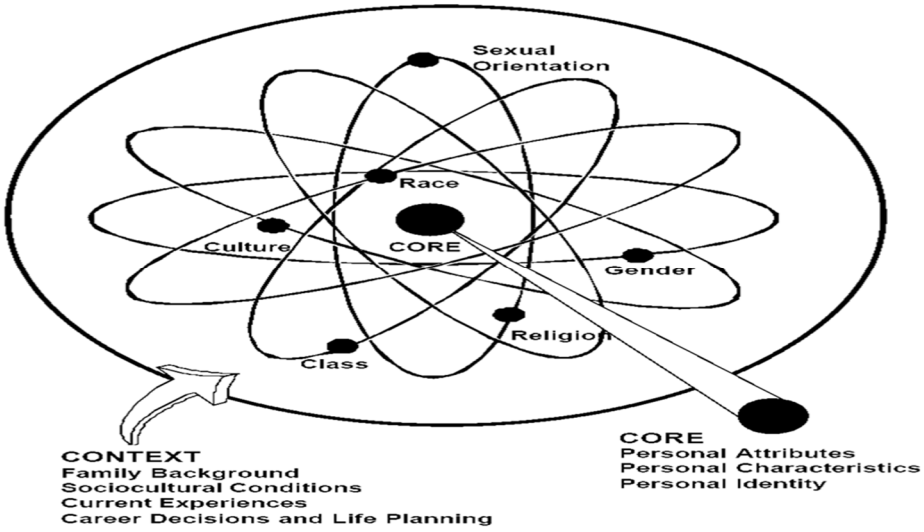

Figure 2.1. Model of Multiple Dimension of Identity

The development of this model originated from the works of Deaux and Reynolds and Pope, and seeks to distinguish a difference between social identities and personal identity (Jones & McEwen, 2000; Abes, Jones, & McEwen, 2007; Torres et al., 2009). The works of Deaux, a social psychologist, conceptualize identity as internal by self and external by others, which provided a foundation for understanding multiple identities. However, the works of Reynolds

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and Pope focuses on multiple oppressions and the ways individuals can negotiate these oppressions (Jones & McEwen, 2000; Abes et al., 2007; Torres et al., 2009; Jones, Kim, & Skendall, 2012). Many of the previous identity and identity development models concentrated on the importance of identity salience and the dynamic relationship between individuals' sense of self, but do not address the intersection of social identities or the influence of intersecting multiple identities (Jones & McEwen, 2000).

The MMDI sought to describe the dynamic construction of identity and the influence changing situations contribute to the salience of multiple identities, which suggests that the more salient a social identity, the closer it is to the core sense of self (Jones & McEwen, 2000; Abes et al., 2007; Torres et al., 2009). The model consisted of intersecting rings around a core portraying one's identity dimensions and signifying how dimensions are interrelated. The center of the model is considered the core sense of self and is comprised of valued personal attributes and characteristics. The core and identity dimensions are surrounded by the personal experiences of individuals (Abes et al., 2007).

The MMDI has been used in various studies that focused on identity and identity development, and used to conceptualize the relationship of socially constructed identities to a core identity while illustrating the relative salience of each identity dimension. Therefore, the more salient the social identity, the closer the identity is located to the core sense of self (Jones & McEwen, 2000; Jones et al., 2012). The model is often viewed as a starting point to further explore the intersecting nature of multiple identities; however, the primary objective of the model is on the self-perceived identities revealed through an individual's narrative.

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Intersectionality

Intersectionality is an innovative and emerging framework that attempts to completely and accurately capture the complexities of everyday life and identity by explicitly linking individual, interpersonal, and social structural domains of experience (Jones et al., 2012). It is defined as a manner in which multiple aspects of identity or social identities are combined and organized in numerous ways to construct and reinforce a social reality (Shields, 2008; Sanchez-Hucles & Davis, 2010). Intersectional is often used to study and understand identity, and includes multiple identities and larger social structures of power and inequality (Jones, 2009; Torres et al., 2009). Intersectionality, when used in identity studies, helps individuals understand the multidimensional ways people experience life, how they see themselves, and how they are treated by other people (Jones, 2009).

Intersectionality was developed by both feminist and critical race theorists to describe the meanings and consequences of multiple identities of social group memberships (Cole, 2008; Shields, 2008; Torres et al., 2009). The term intersectionality was coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw (1994/2005) and encompassed the ideas and practices of numerous Black feminist scholar activists throughout the years (Shields, 2008; Cole, 2008; Torres et al., 2009; Jones et al., 2012). Utilizing the works of feminist and critical race theorists, intersectional scholars identified four characteristics of research and analyses: (a) centers on the lived experiences and struggles of individuals of color and other marginalized groups, (b) explores the complexities of individual and group identities, (c) examines the identity salience influenced by systems of power and privilege, and unveils the power in interconnected structures of inequality, and (d) promotes social justice and social change by linking research and practice (Jones, 2009; Torres et al., 2009; Jones et al., 2012).

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According to Jones (2009), intersectionality defined identity as multiple and layered, existing simultaneously within systems of oppression and privilege. This relationship between oppression and privilege illuminated the significance of intersections which assist with constructing and complicating identities (Jones, 2009). Intersectionality provided a heuristic for examining the relationships between identity categories, individual differences, and larger social systems of inequality to explain the complexities of the lived experiences of individuals (Jones, 2009; Jones et al., 2012). This concept also assisted with revealing how individuals' beliefs and experiences influence their social identities (Shield, 2008). Although this concept is not being utilized as a framework for this research study, it is important to identify this term due to its usage in further defining SIT and explaining how multiple social identities and social groups merge and interact.

Identities of Black Women

Social Identity Theory (SIT) is used to frame this research study; however, it is imperative to examine and understand the historical context surrounding the identity development and experiences of Black women since their experiences are different from Black men, White women, and women of other ethnic groups. Often, the experiences of Black women are overshadowed by those of Black men and/or subsumed under the realities of White women due to their experiences being universalized by race and gender, which does little to affirm the unique existence of Black women (Johnson & Thomas, 2012). These differences have prompted feminist and critical race theorists to develop their own respective theoretical streams that seek to fill the gaps that mainstream theories have neglected to address (Amoah, 1997). In addition, the literature also reminded us that Black women may share collective struggles and common experiences, but their identity signifies a, "myriad of historic and fluid meanings" shaped by,

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"hegemonic structures and forces for social, economic, and political advantages" (Reed & Evans, 2008, p. 489). Black Feminist Thought (BFT) is often used to assist with understanding the intersecting identities of Black women and to explaining ways in which their needs can be effectively addressed. Although BFT is not being employed in this study, this theory is useful in helping to capture, clarify, and understand the unique experiences of Black women living and working in society (Collins, 1986; Harris, 2007; Reynolds, 2010).

Black Feminist Thought

The initial development of BFT is inherently tied to the activist struggles for women's rights (Harris, 2007); and born out of the continued marginalization perpetuated in and by the feminist movement as a way of capturing the intersection of race and gender, while recognizing how the oppressive nature of gender construction and race as social construct directly affect Black women's experiences (Harris, 2007; Jackson, 2011). Throughout history, Black women struggled with White women over numerous political fronts; however, White women were constantly rejecting and alienating Black women on various political issues that were of great concern to Black women. This rejection and alienation spurred Black women to develop and shape a feminist theory that addressed issues unique to them (Taylor, 1998).

Black feminism arose out of the antagonistic and dialectical engagement Black women encountered with White women, and as a way to improve conditions for empowerment on Black women's own terms. According to Cooper (1982, 2005), Black women possessed a unique position as they confront both a woman question and a race problem, and yet they are unknown or an unacknowledged factor in both. Lorde (1984, 2007) stressed the importance of recognizing the differences between the races of women and the implication these differences present in the mobilization to women's joint power.

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BFT suggested that Black women possess a distinctive standpoint or perspective of their experiences and there are certain commonalities of shared perceptions. Even though Black women produced certain commonalities, their diversity of class, regions, ages, and sexual orientation provide different experiences and expressions to these common themes (Collins, 1986). BFT proposed that these share experiences and thoughts about themselves, their communities, and society are based on their gender, race and class (Henry, 2010).

Collins (1986, 1989) identified three key themes in the construction of BFT. The first theme addressed the self-definition and self-valuation of Black women, and is shaped and produced by the experiences Black women encounter within their lives (Collins, 1986, 1989; Taylor, 1998 Howard-Hamilton, 2003; Alexander, 2010). The second theme focused on the interlocking nature of race, gender, and class oppression, and how the various oppressions are linked among one another (Collins, 1986, 1989; Taylor, 1998; Howard-Hamilton, 2003; Alexander, 2010). The third theme concentrated on the efforts to redefine and explain the importance of Black women's culture (Collins, 1986, 1989; Taylor, 1998; Howard-Hamilton, 2003; Alexander, 2010). These three themes of Black feminist thought contributed significantly to the task of formulating, rearticulating, and clarifying the distinctive and self-defined standpoint of and for Black women (Collins, 1989). The experiences of Black women are crucial in the construction of theory, and knowledge production is grounded in the critical analysis of these women's lives (Reynolds, 2002).

Race and Gender Identification

Black women hold a unique position as members of two marginalized, potentially undervalued groups: race and gender impact their identity and appear to bear equal importance (Zamani, 2003; Harris, 2007; Johnson & Thomas, 2012). The issue of race and gender is viewed

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as double jeopardy, which characterizes the dual, sometimes triple discrimination and disadvantage status experienced by Black women (Simien, 2005; *ASHE report*, 2009; Lloyd-Jones, 2009; Johnson & Thomas, 2012). Collins (2000) believed it is impossible for black women to separate the twin identities of race and gender. Collins (2000) and Lloyd-Jones (2009) reported that many Black women perceive numerous commonalities between gender and race, while others report distinct differences.

Patitu and Hinton (2003) interviewed five middle and senior-level Black women administrators and found that for some race was more noticeable when retaining their positions and seeking promotions. Other administrators reported that they had been denied a directorship title due to only having White males in positions of power and authority at their respected institutions (Patitu & Hinton, 2003).

Lloyd-Jones (2009) conducted a qualitative case study of a Black, senior-level administrator and her lived experiences at a predominately White college. The interviewee described biased reactions received based on her race and gender and recalled a situation where, "her subordinates implied that they could never comfortably accept a Black person as their superior" (Lloyd-Jones, 2009, p. 611). At times, her staff would obtain clearance from others on various projects, leaving her out of the loop. Even her male counterparts passed information through her administrative assistant instead of working directly with her. She believed that administration saw her race first and gender second; however, female students and faculty viewed her as a Black female (Lloyd-Jones, 2009).

A study conducted by Lindsay (1999) indicated that a Black woman president (who is a member of several national boards) was asked on numerous occasions, "How did you get on the board of ….?" (p. 193). Many Black women felt they must always be more qualified, meet

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higher demands, and go the extra mile more often than their male counterparts (Bowman, 1998; Lindsay, 1999). Black women reported that being successful often meant playing by the rules of the traditional patriarchy (Lloyd-Jones, 2009; Jones & Taylor, 2013). The positive side of being a minority woman professional was serving as a mentor and role model to students and other professionals. However, a study conducted by Bowman (1998) reported that some Black women felt race was only an issue if they made it a concern.

Simien (2005) conducted a study to demonstrate the relationship between gender and race identification, and examined two competing hypotheses: 1) Black women who identify strongly with their gender will report a higher sense of race identification and 2) Black women who identify stronger with their gender will report a lower sense of race identification (p. 537). The study contained several findings to show how gender identification is strongly related to race identification. In fact, gender identification promotes race identification (Simien, 2005).

The literature contained conflicting views on which is more prevalent, gender or racial discrimination. Byrd (2009) suggested that racism is more salient than sexism, especially in environments/organizations where there is a dominant culture, such as predominately White institutions. Therefore, the literature proposed when race is the focal point, Black women encounter racial discrimination which may include being ignored, isolated, and having their authority and leadership challenged; while the effects of gender discrimination may include the prevalence of a male managerial model that enforces supervisory norms and unequal pay (Lindsay, 1999; *ASHE report*, 2009; Herdlein, Cali, & Dina, 2008). Ballenger (2010) denoted that gender and racial discrimination occur at various developmental processes associated with one's life stages. Zamani (2003) inferred that gender is salient in shaping individual's identities in defining the various facets of their experiences; however, race has an influence that

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differentiates these experiences and opportunities. The subject of race and gender is often silenced and avoided in the discourse of higher educational institutions (Chan, 2010). The conversations and experiences around race and gender vary from person to person, and often focus on the negative stereotypes encountered by Black women, especially in the workplace.

Intersectionality of Multiple Identities

In addition to these two primary identities of race and gender, there are multiple identities that Black women have incorporated into their lives, such as socioeconomic differences (social class), sexual orientation, age, religious and non-religious affiliations, various clubs and organizations, and chronic illness/disabilities (Clair et al., 2005; Reed & Evans, 2008; Johnson & Thomas, 2012). Identities are viewed as being fluid in that they change over time; however, identities can also appear stable which gives an individual a sense of continuity across time and location (Shields, 2008). An individual's self-concept is malleable and multifaceted with different aspects surfacing at various times. The intersecting of identities created both barriers and opportunities (Shields, 2008; Purdie-Vaughns & Eibach, 2008).

People possessed multiple social identities and belong to various groups, that are often organized hierarchically (Dovidio, Gaertnet, Pearson, & Riek, 2005). In fact, the social identities of individuals are not constantly salient, and fluctuate in response to situational cues. As circumstances change, individuals may self-stereotype by adopting the traits and values of the momentarily salient identity in order to adjust and/or be accepted (LeBoueuf, Shafir, & Bayuk, 2009). Learning to balance multiple social identities is often difficult and stressful, but necessary in order to comprehend the identity negotiation process (Harris, 2007). As mentioned earlier, intersectionality seeks to analyze how multiple identities combine and interact with one another.

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In learning to balance multiple social identities, individuals must also address and understand the visible and invisible categorization of identities. Visible identities usually involved characteristics that are seen by others, such as sex, race, age, ethnicity, and physical appearance. Invisible identities included characteristics, such as religion, occupation, illness, and sexual orientation (Clair et al., 2005). Whether an identity is visible or invisible, a particular identity can influence an individual's social interaction with others.

As previously discussed, the social identities of individuals are taken at, "face value" and are often based on cultural norms, in which an assumed membership is associated with a particular identity. These assumptions can become problematic in social interactions and can cause individuals to be stigmatized and/or stereotyped. The notion of being stigmatized and stereotyped can prompt individuals to question whether they should hide or disclose an identity that is invisible (Clair et al., 2005). Either decision will come with certain risks, costs, and benefits. By utilizing SIT, this study sought to explore and understand these various identities that Black women encompass to define and evaluate their life experiences, and how these identities and group memberships interact and intersect.

Career Pathways

The career advancement within higher educational institutions can be a complex phenomenon, which is partly due to the prevalence of its traditional White male-dominated and highly structured culture. Career planning has assisted individuals, particularly Black women, with identifying and developing career goals, and a plan to accomplish them. Effective career planning is viewed as having a positive effect on the career development and advancement of an individual (Lepkowski, 2009). Career paths are considered to be the road taken to reach the desired career level or position within an organization. Career paths in student affairs and/or

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student services generally follow the course of a graduate degree, to an entry-level position, and then to a more advanced position with some progressive responsibilities in management (Biddix, Giddens, Darsey, Fricks, Tucker, and Robertson, 2012). From this point, individuals either decided to remain in their current position, work toward career advancement, or change fields (Biddix, 2013). The middle management or director/dean level of one's career stage is often considered the bottleneck, especially for women, while career advancement to senior-level positions can be even more difficult without a terminal degree (Biddix, 2013).

A national study conducted by Amey and VanDerLinden (2002), sampled 1,700 community college administrators reporting the following percentages of women in chief administrative positions: (a) president (27%), (b) chief academic officer (42%), (c) chief student affairs officer (55%), (d) chief financial officer (30%), (e) chief continuing education administrator (45%), and (f) director of occupational and vocational education (29%). The study also identified the career paths of each administrative position identified, gender and ethnic differences associated with career paths, educational preparation, and professional development. The findings suggested that career paths for the identified administrative positions are constantly changing, as some community colleges are promoting from within and/or hiring individuals with a varied background (Amey & VanDerlinden, 2002).

Unlike their male counterparts, women are still not advancing to senior-level positions, particularly the presidency. The study showed there is a limited representation of women in steppingstone positons that lead to senior-level positions such as the presidency. This same observation applied to racial or ethnic minorities (Amey & VanDerlinden, 2002). The findings around educational preparation and professional development showed that most senior-level administrators possess a doctorate, and all administrators were involved in some type of

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professional development or networking activities (Amey & VanDerlinden, 2002).

Biddix (2013) concluded a similar study, which also looked at the career paths of senior-level administrators. The results indicated four paths a professional could journey when preparing to become a senior-level administrator: (a) director, (b) dean, (c) doctor, and (d) diverger. The findings reported that being a director was the primary path to a senior-level position, while being a dean, doctor, and/or diverger were secondary paths. In addition, the findings also stressed the importance of a terminal degree but individuals also need work experience, specifically in a functional area such as supervisory, planning, and development (Biddix, 2013).

Although the study did not focus primarily on race and gender, it was noted that men and women take relatively similar paths across the four types. However, even though the career paths, educational preparation, work and professional experiences of men and women may be similar, women, largely Black women, encounter various challenges and barriers while navigating the pathways for career advancement.

Barriers to Career Development and Pathways

Work environment/climate. The literature identifies numerous factors that contribute to the positive and negative treatment of Black women working in various environments/organizations, particularly in higher education. According to Granger (1993), women often face hostile work environments, receive less pay, hold lower-level positions, and receive few job promotions.

A hostile work environment includes situations that are "unwelcoming, insensitive, and isolated" (Glenn & Henry, 2009, p. 12; Henry, 2010; Clayborne & Hamrick, 2011). Black women are confronted with various insults in the form of verbal and nonverbal, conscious and

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unconscious slights, and they find themselves competing with colleagues (Bowman, 1998; Glenn & Henry, 2009). According to Henry (2010), Black women believed they were not appreciated by members of the dominant society. Black women frequently encounter minority men, who are only concerned with their own status in the workplace, and they become highly competitive with their female counterparts for promotions and other career opportunities (Bowman, 1998).

Educational institutions regularly view and treat Black women as either visible or invisible. According to Bowman (1998), a visible Black woman is one who has to fulfill the same duties as her White colleagues, be a diverse face in the community, and serve on committees which promote professional growth**.** An invisible Black woman is one who has no voice in the workplace. People may feel that she was hired for her race and gender and not for her talent, and are unwilling to listen to her opinions, views, and suggestions (Bowman, 1998). This idea of being visible and invisible in the workplace can create negative influences on productive and satisfying work experiences, and ultimately the career experience.

When dealing with these numerous issues, Black women lack support, encouragement, and counseling from relatives, friends, coworkers, and superiors. Studies have shown that many African American women can become resilient when needed and continue to push forward to meet their goals (*ASHE report*, 2009; Coyne & Stufft, 2009; Lloyd-Jones, 2009; Alexander, 2010; Patton, 2013).

Organizational and Institutional barriers. Organizational and institutional barriers are often manifested by policies, procedures, and practices influenced by greater social pressures. Black women find themselves occupying positions within educational institutions that do not provide access to effective and appropriate professional networks and lack adequate role models

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and mentors (Tomás et al., 2010). Networks, role models, and mentors aid Black women in receiving professional development and adjusting to the organizational culture (*ASHE report*, 2009; Cook, 2013). Many institutions may be unwilling to develop and implement resources that promote cultural diversity that can enable Black women to feel connected to the institution. Numerous institutions have become accustomed to practices consistent with characteristics traditionally valued by White men (Coachman, 2009). Bureaucratic institutions tend to destroy any prospective organizational benefits for Black women, and consciously hide the fact that solely masculine traits are needed for success (Jackson, 2004; Ballenger, 2010).

Internal barriers. In order for African American women to achieve their full potential as successful leaders, they need to overcome numerous internal barriers. The *ASHE Report* (2009) identified these internal barriers as fear of failure, low self-esteem, role conflict, fear of success, perceived consequences of career advancement, and lack of an advance or terminal degree. Family, church, and community responsibilities are additional internal barriers that effect many Black women from pursuing and accepting leadership positions (Livers & Lewis, 2009; Jones & Taylor, 2013). African American women interested in certain executive level positions need to create a balance between their careers and personal lives (*ASHE report*, 2009; Livers & Lewis, 2009; Campbell et al., 2010). The balance between varied responsibilities provides Black women with creative outlets to renew their energies.

Good Old Boy Network. The good old boy system is viewed as an exclusive, male dominated social network based on the concept that similarities attract similarities. This network is seen as a valued, rights-yielding category constructed by individual actions or conscious policies situated in hegemonic power, producing institutionalized racism, which reinforces a white supremacist capital patriarchy (Harris, 1993; Anders, Bryan, & Norbit, 2005). The

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literature showed that males in leadership positions tend to sponsor and support persons, usually other males, they feel comfortable with and share common interests (Ballenger, 2010; Campbell et al., 2010). This social network allowed racial prejudice to linger and endure, while hindering and prohibiting the career advancement of women, particular Black women (Byrd, 2009; Ballenger, 2010).

Decisions regarding personnel and position advancements are made at meetings that usually occur during lunch and at social outings. Since this group is male dominated, African American leaders are rarely invited, have limited access, and are treated as outsiders within, particularly in predominately White institutions. Members of this group have developed a concrete ceiling which is similar to the glass ceiling, but it is much denser and even more difficult to break (Byrd, 2009; Livers & Lewis, 2009).

The Glass Ceiling. The glass ceiling is one of the most talked about barriers faced by women, especially Black woman, regardless of the work setting. The glass ceiling is defined as an invisible or artificial barrier based on attitudinal or organizational biases. These biases have prevented qualified individuals from advancing upward in their respected organizations into executive level positions (Ely & Meyerson, 2000; Coyne & Stufft, 2009; Ballenger, 2010; Tomás, Lavie, Duran & Guillamon, 2010; Mumby, 2013). Since the 1980s, the federal government has recognized the existence of the glass ceiling and how it prohibits the advancement of women and people of color in the workplace (*ASHE report,* 2009).

The glass ceiling and the good old boy network are two systems that are often associated with White privilege or Whiteness as form of property because these systems are embedded in our legal, political, and social institutions; and historically linked to interpretations of nationality

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and ethnicity (Ladson-Billings, 1999; Decuir & Dixson, 2004; Anders et al., 2005). Both of these systems are a form of racial and gender domination, allowing the dominant group, mainly White men, to maintain power and control over subordinate groups (Harris, 1993; Anders et al., 2005). Black women seeking to function successfully within these two systems must stop playing the victim role and recognize the powers they possess, both internally and externally (Lorde, 1984, 2007; hooks, 2003).

Effects of Barriers Associated with Race and Gender

Stereotypes are a convenient way of processing information about individuals, which includes an unconscious or conscious generalization of a group and/or its members on the basis of their categorization. Stereotypes, affect how we perceive people and influence how we interact with them (Agars, 2004; Reynolds-Dobbs, Thomas, & Harrison, 2008; Sanchez-Hucles & Davis, 2010). The act of stereotyping is not necessarily the result of intent, malice or blatant prejudice, but often an applied and accepted form of cultural, societal, or unconscious beliefs about individuals (Agars, 2004; Cook, 2013). Often individuals who bear a stigma are evaluated negatively, regardless of truth or merit (Clair et al., 2005).

Women are often viewed as nurturing, compassionate, emotional, passive, subjective, and supportive, and they obtain jobs as care givers and teachers (Ballenger, 2010; Dowdy & Hamilton, 2011). Black women have been perceived as having the same characteristics, but have also been portrayed in a negative manner and viewed as rebellious, rude, and domineering (Bryd, 2009; Cook, 2013). Conversely, men are seen as powerful, competent, objective, independent, and driven and they obtain jobs that focus on and reiterate their leadership abilities (Lloyd-Jones, 2009; Coyne & Stufft, 2009). This stereotyping activity often occurs in the initial meeting with someone as an individual contains preconceived expectations and notions of that

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person, whether these ideas are true or false.

Far too often the media has a powerful influence over the perceptions of others, and it can be quite damaging as it frequently reinforces the negative images of Black women (Reynolds-Dobbs et al., 2008; Sanchez-Hucles & Davis, 2010; Cook, 2013). In addition to tackling sexism, racism, and colorism, Black women also struggle with historical images that are associated with race and gender such as Mammy, Jezebel, and Sapphire; along with more modern emerging images of Crazy Black Bitch (CBB) and Superwomen, which may hinder and challenge their performances and interactions in the workplace (Reynolds-Dobbs et al., 2008; Sanchez-Hucles & Davis, 2010). Although these stereotypical images will not be discussed in detail, a brief description of each is listed below.

The image of Mammy refers to a motherly, self-sacrificing Black female servant who is characterized as loyal, faithful and obedient. In modern day, Mammy is still seen as being nurturing, supportive, and all giving. In the workplace, this image/woman is an advocate for other Blacks, competent at her work, but her emotional and nurturing qualities may overshadow her professional strengths (Reynolds-Dobbs et al., 2008). Another prominent image utilized for Black women is Jezebel, who is characterized as a fair skinned shapely seductress who uses her body and sexuality to get her way. In modern day, a woman described as a Jezebel is viewed as overly aggressive and willing to do anything to reach the top. This image views a woman as being someone who sleeps her way to the top, while her competence, talents and business minded personality is often overlooked and ignored (Reynolds-Dobbs et al., 2008). The Sapphire image refers to a Black woman who is talkative, dramatic, and bossy, full of complaints and mistrusts others. In modern day, this image defines a Black woman as a "prototypical Sista with an Attitude" (p. 138), who is often hostile, loud, rude, manipulative, and sometimes lazy

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(Reynolds-Dobbs et al., 2008; Cook, 2013).

Shifting from the historical images of Black women to more modern, emerging images, Reynolds-Dobbs et al. (2008) introduce the concept of CBB and Superwoman. A CBB refers to a Black woman who is angry, vindictive, unstable, overly aggressive, and not trusted by others. She is viewed as lazy, unprofessional, extremely argumentative, and impossible to manage or work with. This image/woman has a difficult time building and maintaining relationships, but she will stop at nothing to achieve success (Reynolds-Dobbs et al., 2008). The Superwoman is an image associated with highly educated, middleclass professional Black women. A Superwoman is viewed as intelligent, articulate, independent, strong, assertive, and extremely talented. She is capable of handling large amounts of distasteful work and does not have the same fears, weaknesses or insecurities as other women (Reynolds-Dobbs et al., 2008). Although these stereotypical images may not impact all Black women, many have suffered positive and negative effects due to the power of these images.

According to Bettez (2011), the creation of informal and formal communities can cultivate a nurturing space that empowers Black women to take actions against oppression at several levels, while striving to initiate institutional and societal changes. Communities also increase social opportunities that help alleviate the negative feelings of solitude and isolation, and give encouragement to those facing the difficulties associated with the intellectual and emotional challenges of being Black women in a repressive, patriarchal power system (Lorde, 1984, 2007; Bettez, 2011). It is beneficial for Black women to develop various support systems, such as critical communities and mentoring relationships. Mentoring and networking are tools that can assist Black women with identifying and understanding the multiple identities they possess, as well as becoming aware of the impact these various identities may have on their life

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journeys.

Mentoring

Mentoring is a process in which a mentor (someone of superior rank, special achievements, and prestige) instructs, counsels, guides, and facilitates the intellectual and/or career development of a mentee (VanDerlinden, 2004; Dunbar & Kinnersley, 2011). Mentors have assisted Black women with coping and effectively handling the barriers and challenges encountered within society, especially the workplace. Mentoring and being mentored are critical career development activities that can aid Black women proceeding up the academic/ administrative ladder (Crawford &Smith, 2005). Mentoring is an invaluable resource in the recruiting of and preparing women for executive level positions, especially that of a college presidency (Brown, 2005; Ballenger, 2010).

Mentoring can also be viewed as a vital strategy that assists women interested in progressing within the higher education system (Lepkowski, 2009). The literature demonstrated that mentoring is a tool used to enhance job satisfaction, produce positive results in assisting Black women with attaining promotions, and breaking the glass ceiling (Ballenger, 2010; Lepkowski, 2009; Crawford & Smith, 2005). Mentoring relationships allow women to clarify goals, improve their identities, recognize and develop steps needed for career advancement, and obtain professional advice from the experiences of women who may have familiarity with similar issues and/or dilemmas while working in higher education. Executive level Black women are encouraged to develop mentoring relationships with low and mid-level women seeking to advance into senior-level executive positions (Bowman, 1998; Coyne & Stufft, 2009; Glenn & Henry, 2009; VanDerLinden, 2004; Dunbar & Kinnersley, 2011).

The mentoring relationship can be professional (career), psychosocial, and/or personal

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(peer), and seeks to ensure that mentees become more knowledgeable of their work settings, institutional practices and policies, and focus on their career paths. Professional (career-related) mentors can provide career advice and encourage mentees to have more exposure and visibility at work and in the community. Psychosocial mentors can encourage self-confidence and provide emotional support. Personal (peer) mentors can offer collegiality, friendship, and emotional support (Ballenger, 2010; Dunbar & Kinnersley, 2011). This relationship has provided positive benefits to the mentor, who receives satisfaction from passing on their wisdom and experience, and cultivating new talent and the mentee; learns essential skills and gains the appropriate knowledge to be successful (Dunbar & Kinnersley, 2011).

In order to develop a trusting, mentoring relationship with open communication, mentees are encouraged to select mentors with similar interests, backgrounds, experiences and characteristics to their own. Black women may seek out mentoring relationships with women already in executive-level positions within the same academic discipline (Herdlein et al., 2008; Dunbar & Kinnersley, 2011). The literature strongly suggests that Black women also seek multiple mentors from various cultural backgrounds and genders as to obtain diverse knowledge and information (Brown, 2005; Henry, 2010; Dunbar & Kinnersley, 2011).

Patitu and Hinton (2003) detailed the important role Black women administrators play in mentoring and significantly influencing the lives of students, particularly at predominately White campuses. The authors identify a positive link between Black women administrators, enrollment, and degree completion rates of African American students. This link is partly due to students observing successful administrators and believing they can succeed and hold professional positions as well.

Additional forms of mentoring utilized by Black women may include connections with

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spirituality and involvement in professional organizations. Spirituality has been perceived by Black women as a coping mechanism to tackle the numerous struggles encountered in their careers and personal lives (Alexander, 2010). According to Henry and Glenn (2009), there is a continued search among Black women to develop an "integrated identity" in a culture that frequently devalues being a female and being Black (p. 10). However, this unique intersection of race and gender can contribute to the developmental and social identities of Black women. Spirituality is used as a connective strategy that assists Black women in addressing issues of isolation, loneliness, and developing personal support systems (Clayborne & Hamrick, 2007; Henry & Glenn, 2009).

The lack of a quality mentoring relationship can be considered a barrier for many Black women as the number of available and suitable mentors can be limited. In situations where Black women are unable to find appropriate mentors, they may look to family members and former school teachers as role models (Henry, 2009; Crawford & Smith, 2005; Clayborne & Hamrick, 2007). These role models have assisted with being supportive as Black women work toward accomplishing their educational and professional goals.

A study conducted by Crawford and Smith (2005) discussed the importance of mentoring Black women as it is related to professional development and career choices. These seven respondents did not have mentors or a relationship with a senior member within their institutions who showed interest in their career development. The respondents had received the formal training and education to perform the duties of their assigned jobs, but lacked being nurtured and guided through challenging situations encountered in their careers. The respondents understood the importance of a mentor and the mentoring relationship due to their strong ties to the community, family, and friends; and they believed this allegiance was a powerful effect on their

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career advancement.

Networking

Networking, which is different for mentoring, can be another method utilized to attain employment and career advancement. This method allowed people to share information, explore creative ideas, empower one another, and receive assistance from persons inside and outside of an institution (Lepkowski, 2009; Gill & Jones, 2013). For many higher education women professionals, networking enabled them to become acquainted with professionals from other educational institutions, attend conferences, meetings, trainings, workshops, and fulfill leadership roles in various organizations and professional groups (Lepkowski, 2009).

Professional organizations have often been utilized to connect Black women with other professionals of similar areas of interest at the local, state, regional, and national level. These connections have allowed Black women to collaborate, network, exchange ideas, learn, and develop additional support systems outside their respected institutions (Henry & Glenn, 2009).

Higher Educational Institutions

There are over 4000 higher educational institutions within the United States (Ballenger, 2010). These institutions of higher learning generally reflect the values and structures that define American society. In fact, higher education and American society have a common interest in working out purposeful, mutual relationships as each shape and, in turn, is shaped by the others. Historically, women have experienced systems of oppression, exclusionary practices, and social inequities, which to a large degree have hindered their ability to experience a fair opportunity to achieve upward mobility within higher education institutions (Ballenger, 2010)

The role of Black women professionals in higher education is significantly important as

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they provide a great deal of influence on the lives of Black students, particularly those attending predominately White campuses. There is also a positive link between Black women professionals, enrollment, and the completion rates of Black students (Patitu & Hinton, 2003). Over the years, women have emerged as powerful leaders in the business and government realms, disproving many of the long-standing distorted perceptions that females are weaker beings. However, in the education realm, certain labels still impede their efforts to be recognized as strong leaders (Coyne & Stufft, 2009).

For over twenty years, women, particularly Black women, are underrepresented in higher education. Even though women have returned to graduate schools in record numbers to earn doctoral degrees, many are still unable to advance from low and mid-level administrator positions into senior-level administrator positions within the educational system. Many women interested in working in higher education have selected community colleges since these institutions are viewed as friendlier, family-oriented, and more prone to hire women than the four year institutions (VanDerLinden, 2004; Twombly, 1993; Jones &Taylor, 2013).

Community Colleges

Community colleges are known as centers that provide educational opportunity to meet the changing needs of the communities being served. Community colleges tend to be inclusive institutions that welcome all who desire to learn, regardless of wealth, heritage, or previous academic experience (Townsend & Twombly, 2007). Over the years, community colleges have been conducive to admitting female students and hiring female workers. The inclusive nature of community college is often extended to women in professional positions. Research reports that community colleges have a higher percentage of female faculty and presidents than any other institutional type. In fact, the presence of women professionals in community college far

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exceeds that in the four-year sector (Townsend & Twombly, 2007).

In 1980, only 2.9 percent of those who women held positions of assistant and/or associate director and dean, vice president, or president at four year colleges and universities were women (Crawford & Smith, 2005). In the Fall of 1999, Black women held only five percent of the 59,888 executive, administrative and managerial staff positions in institutions of higher learning (Patitu & Hinton, 2003; *ASHE report*, 2009). In 2002, research conducted by Holmes (2004) identified that Blacks (males and females) represented 6.2 percent of the total 2,366 presidents as compared to 87.2 percent for White Americans. When the data was separated by gender, the number of women presidents was 21.6 percent of 2,366 (Holmes, 2004; Dunbar & Kinnersley, 2011). In 2006, a survey conducted by the American Council on Education (ACE) indicated that 23 percent of higher educational institution presidents were women (Lepkowski, 2009; Campbell et al., 2010). In 2008, it was projected that the growth of women in the labor force will increase more rapidly than men (Ballenger, 2010). The majority of women in the labor force have worked in management, professional and related occupations, and it was estimated that forty-four percent of women occupy management jobs in various companies; however, top management positions are still dominated by men (Ballenger, 2010).

North Carolina (NC) has fifty-eight community colleges that span over a hundred counties within the state. Even though each college functions separately, one system is responsible for governing the individual colleges. The NC Community College system is the third largest in the nation, based on the number of colleges. The system serves nearly 840,000 students with an estimated 16,000 full time employees comprised of faculty at 44% and staff (professional and paraprofessional) at 56% (NC Community Colleges, 2014-2017). The mission of the North Carolina (NC) Community College System is to "open the door to high-quality,

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accessible educational opportunities that minimize barriers to post-secondary education, maximize student success, develop a globally and multi-culturally competent workforce, and improve the lives and well-being of individuals" (NC Community Colleges, 2014-2017). The employees of the community college system work hard to educate and prepare students entering or re-entering the workforce. Over the years, the student population has increased and become more diverse. In the 2010, 28% of the female students attending community colleges were identified as Black. During this time, the Black female employees consisted of 40% faculty, 58% staff/other, and 1% Senior Administrators (NC Community Colleges, 2014-2017).

Community college personnel are eager to meet the rising demands and challenges of the growing economy. With regard to hiring diverse personnel, it is often observed that faculty and administrators are dispersed unequally, especially in the area of African American women in senior- level executive positions. In 2012, Black females consisted of 40% faculty, 59% female staff/other, and 1% senior administrators employed by NC community colleges were identified as Black. The population of Black female students was 28% (NC Community Colleges, 2014-2017). Through a careful observation of the personnel within the NC Community College system, many Black women possess positions that are low and mid -level such as coordinators, directors, and deans. In 2015, there were twenty identified Black women senior-level administrators, which included vice presidents and presidents. Whereas, there were 118 White females and 144 White male senior-level administrators (NC Community Colleges, 2014-2017).

Chapter Summary

The focus of this literature review was on the social identity of Black women college professionals working in community colleges, along with the challenges and barriers encountered due to their identities associated with race and gender. Much of the literature

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focused on Black women college administrators in four year institutions, with limited research on their employment in two year institutions or more specifically community colleges. Throughout the research investigated, community colleges and universities were often grouped together making it difficult to determine administrators in these settings had different experiences. However, much of the literature provided narratives studies that vividly expressed the thoughts and opinions of the participants employed by colleges and universities, which assisted in providing a clear picture into the experiences of Black women college professionals.

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CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

This chapter outlined the methodology selected to explore the experiences and social identity of Black women professional working in community colleges. This chapter provided a brief discussion of the research design and method, data collection processes, and data analysis and interpretation. Theory served as the framework that laid the foundation for this study and demonstrated how the study advanced knowledge, assessed the research design and instrumentation, and provided a reference point for the interpretation of the findings (Rocco & Plakhotnik, 2009). Theory is necessary for the growth and development of any discipline, and should be infused with a particular group's experiences (Amoah, 1997).

Research Paradigm

An interpretative qualitative research study, utilizing a narrative methodological approach was selected for this study in order to explore how the social identities of Black women community college professionals are shaped throughout their personal and professional experiences. The following research question guided this study: How do Black women college professional describe their social identity as they aspire to be leaders in their professional roles?

The interpretative lens, also described as social constructive, attempts to understand the fundamental nature of the social world at the level of a subjective experience, while allowing individuals to develop the meanings of their experiences (Burrell & Morgan, 1979, Creswell, 2013). This lens assumes there are multiple realities that are experienced and equally valid, and are constructed in the minds of individuals. Utilizing the hermeneutical approach, hidden meanings are revealed through an active dialogue and close interaction between researchers and participants, activating a deep reflection (Ponterotto, 2005).

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A qualitative study aims to gather an in-depth understanding of human behavior and the reasons that govern such behavior (Creswell, 2013). This type of study refers to a broad class of empirical procedures designed to describe and interpret the experiences of research participants in a context-specific setting (Ponterotto, 2005). A qualitative researcher emphasizes the construction or discovery of concepts, while examining the data for common themes and ideas (Polkinghorne, 1995). A narrative approach methodology is a branch or subset of a qualitative study, and is used to describe human actions or how humans experience the world (Polkinghorne, 1995; Moen, 2006). This approach lends itself to a qualitative inquiry in an effort to capture the rich data contained within the stories provided by individuals.

Narrative Research

A narrative approach is inherently multidisciplinary, and is an extension of the interpretative approaches utilized in social sciences (Mitchell & Edugo, 2003). Narratives take as their subject an individual or individuals' experiences and extrapolate illustratively to the broader social location embodied by the individual (McCall, 2005). This approach is well suited for this study which seeks to explore the social identity of Black women college professional through their social, professional, and personal experiences.

This narrative study used interviews to collect the stories of the participants' experiences as they related to the research question and theoretical framework, and then common themes were identified from interviews to demonstrate a close collaboration between the participants (Creswell, 2012).

Narrative researchers collected the stories from individuals about their experiences (Creswell, 2012). The narrative research designed was used in this study to capture the experiences of Black women college professionals and how their social identities are developed.

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The purpose of this research study was to explore how Black women working in community colleges describe their social identity as they aspire to be leaders in their professional roles.

Many scholars believe the origins of narratives are derived from the hermeneutic studies of the Bible, the Talmud, and the Koran. The hermeneutic approach takes the position that both the whole and part of the story must be understood in order to master a narrative. This understanding calls for an iterative analysis that zooms from whole to part and back again, as a method familiar to most qualitative researchers (Czarniawska, 2004). This study explored the numerous dimensions encompassed within the participants' identity and how these dimensions are connected.

As time progressed and more contemporary views of narratives were developed, scholars began placing narratives into two parallel academic movements. The first academic movement is the post-war rise of humanist approaches within western sociology and psychology. These approaches established holistic and person-centered approaches that gave attention to individual case studies, biographies, and life histories. The second academic movement includes approaches that included Russian structuralists and later, French poststructuralists, postmodern, psychoanalytic, and deconstructionists (Andrews, Squire, & Tamboukou, 2013, p. 3). With this progression of narratives over time, it is assumed that multiple individuals are involved in the production and understanding of narratives, rather than singular, agentic storytellers and hearers. Narratives are also preoccupied with the social formations that shape language and individuals themselves (Andrews et al., 2013).

The primary focus of this approach was on how individuals and/or groups make sense of events and actions occurring within their lives (Riessman, 2005). These events and actions are often examined through the stories, along with the linguistic and structural properties associated

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with them (Mitchell & Edugo, 2003). Polkinghorne (1995) suggest that stories express a knowledge that uniquely describes the human experience in which actions and happenings may contribute positively or negatively to a certain goal or purpose. The stories provided are presumed to contain a holistic context that allows individuals to reflect and reconstruct their personal, historical, and cultural experiences (Polkinghorne, 1995).

Narrative approach has many forms, uses a variety of analytic practices, and is rooted in different social and humanities disciplines (Creswell, 2013). This approach is focused on stories that tell a sequence of events that are significant for the participant(s) or their audience, and how participant(s) assign meanings to their experiences through the stories they tell (Moen, 2006; Creswell, 2013). A narrative approach allowed the researcher to collect the stories of participants regarding their experiences and perceptions of their professional and/or personal lives. By focusing on the narratives of individuals, researchers are able to investigate not only the structure of the stories and the ways in which they work, but also who produces them and by what means; the mechanisms in which they are consumed, silenced, contested, or accepted and any effects they have on individuals sharing their stories (Moen, 2006; Andrews et al., 2013).

Research Design

As briefly mentioned in Chapter 1, this study involved interviewing ten Black women college professionals currently working at various community colleges within a southeastern state. This section will discuss the sampling population, participant recruitment, access, data collection, and date analysis.

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Participants

The sampling strategy employed for this research study was a combination of mixed purposeful sampling to include homogeneous and criterion sampling. Homogeneous sampling was used to bring together individuals with similar backgrounds and experiences (Creswell, 2009, 2013; Merriam, 2009). The study participants were similar in racial and gender identity, worked as professionals in a community college setting, and had experienced some form of discrimination due to their identity.

Criterion sampling was used to identify a predetermined group of individuals to obtain rich information on a process or system (Creswell, 2009, 2013; Merriam, 2009). The criterion established for this sampling consists of the following characteristics: age, job title, student service department, number of years in a professional position, and number of years working at a community college. Participants were also selected from several different colleges, ranging in various sizes and geographical location. These sampling strategies assisted with assuring variation, improving triangulation, flexibility, and meeting the multiple interests and needs of the researcher and the study (Creswell, 2009, 2013).

This study consisted of ten Black women college professionals working in Student Services departments and employed by community colleges. The study participants were mid-career professionals who identify with being a Black and/or African American, speak English proficiently, are at least 30 years of age or older, served in a professional position for at least two years, and supervised a staff of two or more people.

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Overview of Site (Campuses)

The community colleges selected for this study are located in a southeastern state of the United States. This particular state has 58 community colleges ranging in three sizes (small, medium, and large), based on the full-time equivalent of students (FTE). FTE is defined as the number of credit hours in which a student is enrolled, but is also used as the funding formula for community colleges. A full-time equivalent student is calculated by the total credit hours enrolled, which is 16 credit hours for 16 weeks, not the actual headcount. Although a student can be enrolled in a minimum of 12 credit hours to be considered full time, funding is only received on students enrolled in 16 credit hours or more. Consequently, two part-time students together can make up a full-time equivalent student. Therefore, small colleges consist of less than 1,000 students, medium colleges contain between 1,000 and 5,000 students, and large colleges have more than 5,000 students (NC Community Colleges, 2014-2017).

The community colleges can be categorized into three main geographical regions (eastern, central, and western). Each area possesses distinct characteristics with regards to location, resources, and population diversity. At least one to two participants will be selected from nine community colleges. By identifying one to two participants from the various sized colleges, the research study will provide a more comprehensive exploration of the lived experiences and stories surrounding the identity development of Black women working as administrators in diverse institutions.

Recruitment and Access

The researcher used a combination or mixed purposeful sampling of homogeneous groups and criterion sampling to recruit participants from nine community colleges located in a

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southeastern state. The number of community colleges and their location assisted the researcher in obtaining a more diverse population of participants. Once the nine colleges were selected, the researcher utilized the colleges' websites to identify and recruit participants, along with professional higher educational organizations, referrals from colleagues, and personal contacts of the researcher. After the potential participants were identified, the researcher contacted each participant by phone and/or email to inquire about their willingness to participate in the study. Over 40 women were contacted via email and/or phone about their interest in the study. The researcher answered any questions that were posed by the potential participants. Out of 40 women contacted, 15 women expressed an interest to join the research study. After addressing more questions about the study and confidentiality concerns, twelve women remained interested in the study. However, only ten women met the criterion that was set forth. Once the criterion was met, participants received an invitation letter via mail and email, followed by a phone call to guarantee the invitation letters had been received and understood. The invitation letter included the purpose and the significance of the study, along with an informed consent and a confidentiality form. In addition, the letter explained that participation was voluntary and they had the right to withdraw from the study at any time for any reason. Minimum risk was involved with participation in the study, and participants were informed that no monies or any other incentives was given as rewards for their participation in the study.

This study met all the requirements of the Northeastern University Institutional Review Board and the protocols for the protection of human subjects. To preserve the participants' and colleges' anonymity, pseudonyms were used. No access was needed from college administrators before conducting the research study with individual staff members on their campus. The

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researcher ensured that the institution's identity and the identity of the participant were protected, and no identifying information was provided in the final report.

Data collection

The most common method for collecting data is capturing the detailed stories or life experiences of participant(s), which is achieved by interviewing and/or conversing with individuals (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990; Polkinghorne, 1995; Riessman, 2005; Clandinin & Huber, 2010; Bamberg, 2011; Creswell, 2013). Interviews allowed individuals to express and share their feelings, thoughts, and perceptions about a particular event or situation that has occurred within their lives; allowing individuals to make sense or meaning from these experiences surrounding these events or situations (Polkinghorne, 1995; Moen, 2006; Creswell, 2013). The interviews can be structured or unstructured, but should encourage individuals to openly share their experiences or interactions with an identified phenomenon (Clandinin & Huber, 2010; Creswell, 2013). The identified phenomenon in this study focused on how their experiences shape the social identities of Black women college professionals. In order to encourage and facilitate an open conversation with participants, interview questions were semi structured, with an open-ended format. Further details regarding the interview structure is discussed below in the following four stages.

Stage I

The data collection for this study occurred in four stages. The first stage involved a pilot study of the interview questions. The purpose of the pilot study was to assess the time required to interview each participant, test the interview questions and equipment, and obtain the general reactions and feedback of the participants. The researcher selected two colleagues to participate

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in the pilot study. The pilot study was conducted in person and interviews were recorded. Throughout each interview the participants were not answering the questions as it related to the research. At the conclusion of each interview, the participants were asked to provide feedback on what they believed the questions were asking. After receiving feedback from both the participants, the researcher redeveloped the interview questions to be in greater alignment with the guiding research question and theoretical framework. The data collected from the pilot interviews was not used in the actual data reported, and the participants were not interviewed as part of the overall study.

Stage 2

The second stage of the data collection involved a screening protocol, which was conducted via phone and /or email, with potential participants. This screening was used to collect demographic information and ensured participants meet the study's criterion. The demographic information included the size and location of the college, how long the participant had been in higher education, number of years at the institution, participant's age, marital status, and position title. After the screening was conducted, participants were provided the opportunity to continue contributing to the research study or decline. For the participants continuing with the study, a date, time, and location was designated to conduct the interviews. This screening allowed the researcher to begin establishing rapport with each participant before proceeding to the formal interview.

Stage 3

The third stage involved formal, private, one on one, semi-structured interviews lasting from 30 to 90 minutes. The interviews were held in quiet, non-disruptive locations with minimal

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to no distractions as agreed upon in advance by the participants and interviewer. During the interviews and directly following, the researcher maintained a journal of notes documenting the participants' statements, body language (verbal and non-verbal cues), and emotional state. All participants were articulate and comfortable sharing their experiences. One participant answered the questions, but provided limited explanations, even after the probing and follow up questions were utilized. Two of the participants wanted to confirm confidentiality measures, as they were talking about sensitive information. The researcher reassured them that confidentiality was taken seriously and pseudonyms would be incorporated.

Interview questions were developed in the SIT perspective, and sought to answer the research question. Minimal probing and follow up questions were incorporated to develop a complete picture and better understand the experiences of the study participants. A narrative approach offers no overall rules, standards, or procedures about suitable materials or modes of investigation, or the best levels to study and analyze personal stories (Polkinghorne, 1995). However, Creswell (2013), along with Polkinghorne (1995), Riessman (2005), and Moen (2006) identify and discuss several strategies used for collecting and analyzing the data within a narrative research approach. Narratives seek to organize the raw materials assembled from human experiences and images, and turn this information into meaningful episodes (Moen, 2006). This study aimed to explore how Black women working in community colleges described their social identity as they aspire to be leaders in their professional roles

The interviews were recorded with a digital recorder and a recording app on the researcher's cell phone and professionally transcribed by Rev.com and Transcriptionpuppy.com. After the interviews were transcribed, the researcher reviewed the transcripts for accuracy before sharing the information with study participants. All the participants were provided a copy of

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their transcribed interview in order for them to reflect, enhance, respond, and validate their narratives. Three of the participants provided corrections and additions to their original interview transcript. Having the participants review their transcripts is known as member-checking and assisted with credibility (Creswell, 2012).

Stage 4

The fourth stage involved the analysis of the data collected during the interviews. Throughout each interviews, the researcher made notes of verbal and nonverbal cues of the participants. After each interview, the researcher reviewed the recordings and notated any information that might have been overlooked, but also to become familiar with the stories of the participants. Utilizing Braun and Clarke's (2006) six step guide for data analysis, the interview transcripts were reviewed individually to clarify, understand, and become familiar with the data presented. During the second reading, the researcher began the pre-coding process by identifying significant key words and phrases that were reoccurring and aligned with the research question. This process was conducted on each individual transcript. A third reading of each transcript ensured that essential key words and phrases did not go unnoticed. The third reading assisted with identifying additional codes, while redefining the current codes established by the researcher. In the final stage, the researcher compared the transcripts to each other in order to group and/or categorize the commonalities and differences. The categories were then developed into themes. A more detailed description of the data analysis and coding technique is discussed in the data analysis section.

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Data Storage

The participants' recordings and transcriptions were stored on the researcher's personal computer, which is password protected. The information will be maintained up to six months after the completion of the study. Transcripts and recordings were only shared with participants to ensure accuracy of the information collected. Only the necessary identifying information, such as titles, age, years of services, and size of institution were shared. Pseudonyms were assigned to participants and their colleges, along with identifying information revealed during the interviews was not used in the study. The anonymity of participants was protected throughout every aspect of the study (Creswell, 2013). Only the researcher had access to the stored data.

Data Analysis Overview

Data analysis is the process that allowed the researcher to make sense of the information collected through interviews and field notes, by consolidating, reducing and interpreting the data received (Merriam, 2009). This process is complex, moving back and forth between concrete bits and abstract concepts of information, utilizing inductive and deductive reasoning, and employing descriptions and interpretations (Thomas, 2006; Merriam, 2009). Researchers suggested a number of tools to aid in the analysis, coding, and interpretation of the extensive qualitative data associated with narrative studies. These included reflective memos, notes in margins of text, spreadsheets, and Computer Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software such as NVivo, MAXQDA, or HyperRESEARCH (Creswell, 2009; Merriam, 2009; Saldana, 2012). This study will incorporate at least two cycles of coding to analysis the stories of the participants.

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Cycles of Data Analysis

Coding is a method that enabled researcher to organize the data in specific groups and categories of similarities and differences (Saldaña, 2012). Braun and Clarke (2006) offered a six, step-by-step guide for analyzing data; 1) becoming familiar with the data, 2) generating initial codes, 3) searching for themes, 4) reviewing themes, 5) defining and naming themes, 6) producing the report. The chart below provides a summary description of each step and is adapted from work of Braun and Clarke (2006).

Table 3.1

Summary of Data Analysis using Braun and Clarke's (2006) approach

Summary of Data Analysis using Braun and Clarke's (2006) approach		
Phase of Analysis	Description	Outcome
Become familiar with the data	First pass – read transcripts to become familiar with the data.	Make preliminary notations of ideas and observations on each transcript
	Second pass – reread transcripts	Highlight and underline significant words and phrases
	Third pass – reread transcripts	Identify additional words and phrases that are significant
Generate initial codes	Review the words and phrases for similarities and differences	Create of list of codes for each transcript
		Compare all the transcript for any similarities and differences
		Develop a list of codes that encompasses all the transcripts
Search for themes	Assemble codes into potential themes	Begin to develop codes into categories
Review themes	Review and Refine themes	Begin to group categories into themes
Define and name themes	Ongoing analysis to refine the specifics of each recognized theme	Generate clear definitions and names for each theme.
Produce the report	Involves the final analysis and the write-up of the report.	Relate the themes to the research question and theoretical framework

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The first cycle of coding began with attribute coding, which provided demographical and characteristic information on the study participants (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Saldaña, 2012). Attributing coding was followed by an initial reading of the participants' transcripts to clarify, understand, and to become familiar with the data presented. During the initial reading of each transcript, the researcher made notations of ideas and observations in the margins. Following the first reading, the research highlighted and underlined significant key words and phrases that aligned with the research question, and "worthy of attention" statements (Saldana, 2012, p. 19). This process is defined by Saldaña (2012) as pre-coding, and allowed the researcher to make note of phrases were frequently repeated by the participants. In addition to highlighting and underlining key words and phrases, the researcher also made notes in the margin of each transcript to summarize the key words and phrases. Merriam (2009) classified this technique as open coding, in which any data that appears to be significant and relevant to the study is coded.

The second reading of the participants' transcripts incorporated In Nivo coding to further analyze the data collected. In Vivo coding focused on the language of the participants, while preserving the participants' meanings of their views and actions (Saldaña, 2012). The highlighting and underlining of significant words and phrases was performed throughout the second reading. The words and phrases detected were categorized into groupings, which was later integrated and organized into coherent codes. Continuing with in vivo coding, a third reading of each transcript was conducted to assist with identifying additional codes that may have been overlooked, as well as redefining established codes.

Following the third reading, the researcher made a list of codes collected from each transcript. The list of codes was compared to the other to observe and document similarities and differences. After the comparison was completed, comprehensive lists of codes encompassing

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all the transcripts were developed in Word and Excel spreadsheets. Utilizing the revised list of codes, the researcher observed any relationships between the codes, establish code frequencies, and determined any underlying meaning across the codes. After this process, a new revised list of codes was developed. This list of codes was then combined and grouped into categories. The categories were reviewed and examined to identify their alignment with the research questions and theoretical framework, and later redefined and merged together to create themes. After the themes were generated, the researcher provided a clear name and definition for each theme to assist with capture the essences and broader overall story of the data presented (Braun & Clarke, 2006). After themes were created, the findings were verified and reported, and the conclusions drawn. This section described the cycles of data analysis used in this study. The next section will consider the trustworthiness of this study.

Trustworthiness

Any study needs to be concerned with its trustworthiness. Creswell (2013) detailed a number of validation strategies that aid in establishing trustworthiness during a study. The trustworthiness of this study was accomplished through member checking, peer review, use of a researcher journal, and analytical memos appropriate instrumentation to minimize threats to internal validity, and clarification of researcher bias.

Member checking. This method of ensuring trustworthiness is an additional appraisal of the research process by another individual (Creswell, 2013). To enhance trustworthiness for this study, transcriptions were emailed to the participants, allowing them an opportunity to validate their narrative. Of the ten participants contacted, only three participants offered additional corrections and changes to their transcripts.

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Peer review. During the initial review of the themes, the researcher enlisted another doctoral student to evaluate the preliminary draft of these themes. Feedback received from the doctoral student assisted the researcher in developing thorough and concrete themes to better represent the experiences of the study participants.

Researcher journal. To capture the nuances of ongoing research, a researcher journal was employed. This contributed to transparency, as the journal offered a source of documentation and review of research processes and practices (Saldaña, 2013). A researcher journal was used during the interviews to facilitate organization, note emerging themes, capture interview context, gain additional detail, and provide further insight.

Analytic memos. To achieve additional credibility and a deeper analysis of the transcribed interviews, the researcher created analytic memos. As noted by Saldaña (2013), the use of analytic memos is useful in the content analysis "because they permit detailed yet selective attention to the elements, nuances, and the complexities . . . and a broader interpretation of the compositional totality of the work" (pp. 53-54). As noted above, during the interview process, a researcher journal was used to document thoughts, facilitate categorization, and note emerging themes, trends, and conclusions, and this information was used during the analysis process.

Researcher's Bias

The purpose of this positionality statement is to obtain a better understanding of how an individual's background and professional experiences may influence and shape their thoughts and perceptions of people and society. It is important to understand how an individual's perspectives and biases have influenced the problem of practice, and how to effectively research the topic in an academic manner. There also needs to be a clear definition of the group being

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studied and researched (Briscoe, 2005). Carlton Parsons (2008) talks about how cultural–historical experiences differ throughout various minority groups in the United States. Due to these historical differences, groups in the United States differ in how they are perceived by others, how they perceive themselves, and in their actual statuses in the social, cultural, political, educational, and economic strata of U.S. society. In contrast to any other minority group in the United States, racial oppression has consistently dominated the cultural historical domain of African Americans (p.1134).

Roberts (2005) discusses the concept of professional images in relation to social identity, impression management, and organizational behavior. Professional images are categorized into two areas: 1) a desired professional image, which is how an individual desire to be seen and 2) a perceived professional image, which is how an individual would like to be perceived by others (Roberts, 2005). These two images (desired and perceived) are intriguing concepts as professional images, particularly in the workplace, can define one's personal and social identity.

In addition to professional images, cultural and historical experiences differ throughout various minority groups in society; therefore, it is important that I periodically examine my own identity, experiences, and biases. My identity is four-fold as I am (a) a doctoral student, (b) a professional, (c) a Black individual, and (d) a woman. Each identity has its own characteristics, advantages, and disadvantages. As a doctoral student and budding scholar-practitioner, I am developing the skills needed to comprehend the broad spectrum of an issue, and also to examine the various perspectives related to the identified issue. This role requires me to approach situations with a critical lens while carefully analyzing the knowledge received. As my experience in academia increases, I am learning the importance of improving cultural diversity, increasing educational and societal equality, and developing effective leadership skills, while

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establishing connections (building bridges) between these categories. As I approach this research study, the professional and personal experiences gained throughout this doctoral program can assist in developing and cultivating the necessary skills and abilities to address and overcome the diverse challenges and barriers Black women will inevitably confront in the field of higher education.

My role as a career counselor and educator allows me to interact with students and colleagues on a continual basis. I provide encouragement to students and explain the significance and value of a quality education, which is the key component for survival and success. I also stress the importance of establishing educational goals and defining a career path of interest. hooks (2003) describes education as a practice of freedom that affirms healthy self-esteem in students and promotes their capacity to be aware and live consciously. I believe it is important for students to become active participants in their educational journey in order to further their self-actualization instead of conforming to the status quo of society (hooks, 2003). I want to ensure students have the necessary tools and resources to be successful in all aspects of their lives. Even though I support all students, I advocate more for my Black students as many of them function off of racial and societal stereotypes portrayed by the media.

With regards to my colleagues, primarily the Black females, I also promote the importance of education as well as, professional development opportunities. I encourage colleagues to attend conferences and workshops in order to advance their knowledge on various issues surrounding student access and success and institutional policies within the educational system, as well as, to improve their personal and professional growth. I stress the importance of taking action against various forms of discrimination and social injustice perpetrated throughout the workplace. I believe it is beneficial for professionals to serve on committees at the local,

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state, regional, and/or national level as these experiences provide networking and mentoring opportunities, as a way of establishing strong support systems between colleagues. The values I possess for education come from my parents, who are college graduates. My parents understand that education is a powerful tool Blacks need in order to bridge the various obstacles that lie ahead. Their encouraging support enables me to pursue and accomplish challenging task, while ignoring negative comments received by others.

As a Black female working in these various roles, I share numerous commonalities among the Black women of each group, but there are also some differences. Many of my colleagues, including me, experience the same challenges and setbacks as our students, especially in the area of education and career advancement. I am told that I need more education and experience in order to progress to administrative roles; however, White individuals (particularly males) receive various promotions with half the education and experience required.

I am constantly judged by the stereotypes associated with my race and gender. I find myself continuously justifying my skills and abilities in order to be taken seriously and gain respect. My research study relates to my personal experiences, as I am a part of this phenomenon due to working in community colleges and having difficulty advancing upward into management level positions. As I move through this research process, it is crucial that I identify my blind spots and biases regarding this topic. I must ensure that study participants are free to express themselves through narratives without any assumptions from me, because even though there may be some similarities, there are also many differences.

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Chapter Summary

This chapter presented the methodology used for this qualitative study. It reported the research question that guided this study and described the research design, participants' descriptions, and the phases of data collection and analysis were reviewed. In addition, the trustworthiness of the study was discussed, along with the researcher's positionality statement. Next, Chapter Four offers a discussion of the findings.

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CHAPTER 4: RESEARCH FINDINGS

The purpose of this research study was to explore how ten Black women college professionals described their social identity while aspiring to be leaders in their professional roles. This study attempted to explain their perspectives on how interactions with others can shape their social identity. The chapter begins with an overview of the participants, a brief vignette for each participant, trends in the data, an overview of the data analysis process, and the overview of researching findings.

Overview of Participants

The participants of this study were situated in various community colleges throughout a southeastern state of the United States. The participants selected for this study represented eight different community colleges within three geographical regions of the state and ranged in various sizes. Four participants worked at a large sized community college, three participants worked at a medium sized community college, and the remaining three worked at a small sized community college.

The selection process for this study was based on the criterion discussed in chapter 3. The ten participants are diverse individuals from distinctive background, having had different life experiences and holding their own particular views. Their stories are their own, yet there are some similarities, they are Black women working in higher education seeking to make an impact on the campus environment, the students and the community. Table 4.1 provided more details about the participants.

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Table 4.1*: Detailed Look at Research Participants*

Name	Age	Family Status	Current Work Role	Years at Present NC Community College	Years in the NC Community College System
Joan	57	Married, 3 children	Vice President of Student Services	20 years	23 years
Sally	56	Divorced, 2 children	Director of Women's Center	23 years	23 years
Reba	54	Married, 3 children	Director of Student Service Operations	22 years	22 years
Betty	52	Married, 3 children	Financial Aid Director	10 years	12 years
Sara	41	Single, no children	Provost/Dean	15 years	15 years
Nancy	40	Married, 2 children	Director of Student Life	13 years	13 years
Mary	38	Single, no children	Director of Counseling	3 years	8 years
Meg	38	Married, no children	Director of Student Success	8 years	8 years
Cary	34	Single, no children	Interim Coordinator of Prison Programs	6 years	6 years
Carla	30	Married, no children	Lead counselor/ Program Director	2 ½ years	2 ½ years

Participant's Vignette

This section reports on the participants' personal and professional characteristics, along with their social interactions within the workplace. The vignettes were developed using the data in an iterative process: reviewing the researcher's field notes during and following each interview, re-listening to the audio recording of each participant's interview, and conducting a broad review of the transcripts with the goal of ascertaining the overall story line of each educator's professional development and social interaction experiences.

JOAN

Joan, age 57, is the Vice President of Student Services for a large community college in the western part of the state. She is a mission focused and mission driven individual with grit,

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which she said she obtained from her mother. "Whatever you want to do, you just put your mind to it and do it." Joan has constant internal dialogues when seeking professional growth and development opportunities. Joan thoroughly enjoys the work she does and continues to seek out ways to help students and women looking to advance. Joan stated that even though she is comfortable where she is now, one should never get too comfortable without having some sense of internal drive. "Being comfortable has never been comfortable for me. There's a strong internal drive for personal achievement."

Joan is strategic when interacting and socializing with coworkers, and has no established social groups at work with whom she associates. She has made a conscious effort to be "comfortable with a lot of people and it's important that people are comfortable with me." She stressed the importance of not getting, "boxed into situations." Joan does limit her contact with individuals that cannot seem to get on board with the mission of the college and the students being served.

During her interview, Joan mentioned being in a group of three to four women from different schools that meet for dinner once a month to network and support each other. "The group started out with two of us." Over time, two more ladies were invited to participate. Even though the group was accidental, it has provided numerous opportunities for encouragement and personal growth. "We talked about stuff at work that you can't talk about with others on your campus. We were really supportive of each other as we were going through stuff." Joan is still contemplating her next move, but is looking at various possibilities to include the Presidency at college and/or some consulting work.

SALLY

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Sally, age 56, is the Director of a Women's Center at a large community college in the western part of the state. She is a change agent, encourager, and motivator. "I am a vessel being used to be a change agent in someone's life." From her parents, Sally learned to be honest, dependable, courageous, humble, feisty, and persistent. She exhibited these traits throughout her work and interactions with others. From her sister, who is an introvert, Sally sought to incorporate her sister's thought process and listening qualities when addressing situations in her life. Sally also recalled the influences of a female high school counselor she met while in college. This counselor awoke Sally's potential and true desire of helping young people overcome the circumstances of their environment. Sally continues to empower people, especially women.

Sally does attempt to socialize with everyone because, "everyone is important." She does enjoy being around people, especially those individuals that are open, friendly, humorous, honest, and real. When interacting with people, particularly other professionals, Sally looks to develop lasting friendships that can facilitate her grow personally and professionally. Even though she does not limit her contact with anyone, Sally does not like individuals that are dishonest and not authentic. At this stage in her life, Sally believes her professional journey is coming to an end, but personally she still aspires to be in the helping field and particularly assisting women.

MARY

Mary, age 38, is the Director of Counseling at a medium-sized community college in the Eastern part of the state. She is a highly motivated, solution focused individual. She would characterize herself as very personal and hard-working, which she learned from her parents.

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Mary is assertive when undertaking tasks and/or accomplishing established goals. "No matter what I need to do, I go the extra mile…because in the end, it's going to pay off." In Mary's view her assertiveness is often perceived by others as aggression, which she frequently contributes to her race and gender. "I don't know if it's because of my race… or because I'm a woman. It may be a combination of both because sometimes, we're deemed as the angry black women if we have an opinion or we voice an opinion that might not be the same as others." Even though Mary is not afraid to voice her views, she does attempt to be tactful when expressing her thoughts and concerns.

Mary keeps her socialization at work to a minimum and described her work environment as a "mini version of high school, very click-ish." Since Mary is not from the city in which she works, in her view, she is believed to be an outsider. Therefore, she is very aware and careful of how she presents herself and what others know about her. "You feel like there is a wall you have to put to guard yourself." At work you present one side of your personality or behavior a certain way just to be taken seriously and hopefully respected. Mary is open to more senior level administrative position, such as Vice President or President at community college or university. She is also open to teaching at the university level.

MEG

Meg, age 38, is the Director of Student Success at a large community college in the central part of the state. She is an honest, reliable, and dependable individual. She tries to be fair and consistent when dealing with situations and people, which are characteristics of being a good leader. "I am the person that people come...because I can be counted on." An important process for Meg is leveraging resources and building cohesive relationships. Meg strives to

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construct a collaborative working environment for students and her colleagues. "Instead of working in silos, it is important for us to pull our resources together." Meg tries not to limit her contact with colleagues, but is drawn to individuals that are also honest, trustworthy, dependable, and good communicators. She does limit her contact with people are inconsistent and untruthful.

Meg can be very vocal at times, which is part of her northern charm, but this characteristic is not often received well by others. "I learned that lesson kind of the hard way." Therefore, Meg is mindful of how she is interpreted by coworkers, especially the individuals she supervises. Meg aspires to be Dean of students one day as she works to figures out the trajectory to obtain this position. She enjoys assisting students and does not want to lose her daily interactions with them.

REBA

Reba, age 54, is the Director of Student Services Operation at a medium-sized community college in the eastern part of the state. She is an individual that possesses integrity, morals, values, and spirituality. Her parents were an inspiration throughout her life, but she believes she took on the personas of her mother and grandmother. From her mom, Reba improved her own spiritual life as she watched her mom pray and interact with others. "I know what prayer can do, I know it works." Her mom changed the lives of people she touched, and stressed Reba to keep pushing for the things she wanted. Reba's grandmother only had a fourth grade education but she was resourceful, powerful, and possessed a strong business sense.

Reba describes herself as a life-long learner. "The journey does not stop until you stop. You can always be growing as a professional." She is always pushing herself to not settle and do not give up. Reba admitted that she is a little stubborn, but if she has an idea that is going to work she

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remains firm until the idea is recognized and/or accepted. Sometimes she becomes mundane which does not help the situation and working change this action. She has such a passion for ideas/strategies that can help students, college, and the community.

Reba described herself as a social butterfly, but she does gravitate toward "sisters" other black females in her work environment. "This is my comfort zone, and I don't like reaching out of my comfort zone, but I would gravitate toward black people."

Even though Reba may gravitate toward people that look like her, she does like people that are honest, trustworthy, ethical and real. "Let's put everything on the table so we can deal with it. If we need to agree to disagree, then that's ok." Reba does limit her interaction with people that are dishonest and closed minded. Reba aspires to be a Vice President or President of a community college and is currently pursuing her doctorate.

BETTY

Betty, age 52, is the Financial Aid Director at a medium-sized community college in the Eastern part of the state. She is an open minded individual that is always up for a challenge. She strives to have a listening ear and be available to people, especially students and her staff. However, Betty viewed her facial expressions and tones as unfavorable characteristics she possesses. "I tend to wear my emotions on my face and my tone tends to match the mood and/or tone of the individual I am communicating with, and whether that person is challenging an issue or decision that I am concerned about."

Betty also mentioned her race as an issue for some individuals. "Sometimes just being an African American female...I feel like I am not approachable." Betty has encountered numerous situations in which students would not approach her with their issues, but went to her supervisor

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or other departments for assistance. She attributed these incidents to the changes in student population and the overall changes in leadership. Many of the new hires are unfair with the overall operations of the college, especially the chain of command.

Betty may not be an "over the top social butterfly", but she does make an effort socialize with coworkers at all levels. She prefers to interact individuals that are honest, good listeners and communicators, and approachable. Betty tends to limit her contact groups that are click-ish and people that are considered a busy body, overly inquisitive about personal matters. She aspires to be an Associate Vice President of Student services.

NANCY

Nancy, age 40, is the Director of Student Life at a large community college in the central part of the state. She is an individual that strives for excellence and accountability in herself and the people she works with. She is a strong believer in relationship building, and wants to ensure that people know they are valued and appreciated. "You should be able to tell how you are impacting somebody else in a positive way." Nancy is not afraid to take advantage of a teachable moment or have a critical conversation, especially if used to enhance a person's growth and development. She would like for people to trust her and know her actions are genuine. "When I'm smiling and telling you, you did a great job, I really mean great."

Nancy believes it is important to be truthful and direct with people, which can be intimidating at times. However, these concepts are essential when trying to understand the needs of others in an effort to promote a spirit of collaboration and build relationships.

Nancy is strategic and intentional about her social interactions at work. Socializing is "for the purpose of getting somewhere and getting things done." Nancy tends to gravitate toward

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positive, influential, and solution focused individuals. She does limit her contact with negative people and tasks that are perceived as non-productive for her. Nancy believes she is meant to start a nonprofit organization and want to use your talents greater than just a job or position.

CARY

Cary, age 34, is the Interim Coordinator of Prison Programs with a small community college central part of the state. She is a determined, optimistic, hardworking individual. She is willing to learn, and go above and beyond the call of duty to change the lives of the people around her. "When working with a diverse population, it is important to an open-minded, out of the box thinker." Cary attributes many of her qualities to a former supervisor, who was like a mother figure to her.

Even though Cary possesses good communication and active listening skills, she admits that at times she allows her biased opinions to shape her impressions of people. In order to address acts of stereotyping, Cary attempts to look past first impression and learn more about her colleagues. Cary tries to socialize with everyone; particularly with people in whom there is a connection and can provide assistance with various aspects of her position. "It is important for people to be open-minded, honest, and good communicator." She does limit her interactions with individuals that are inconsistent and bias against certain types of individuals. Cary aspires to be a full-time instructor as her passion is teaching and instructing students, and knows she may need to obtain her master's degree.

CARLA

Carla, age 30, is the Lead Counselor and Program Director of the minority male success program with a small community college in the eastern part of the state. She is a compassionate

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and unique individual, giving 110% at all times. From her mother and grandmother, Carla learned that education was important and to pursue the things one desires. When it comes to accomplishing tasks or helping students, she believes in being straightforward and right in your face. "Even though I am an introvert, I am very direct. At times, I present as though I have the Black woman syndrome, the attitude, the sass, and the aggressiveness." Carla admitted that her assertiveness is often perceived by others as aggression, which then becomes a disadvantage for her. Therefore, she frequently reassesses how she comes across to people.

Carla worked to build rapport with colleagues through her campus, with the primary goal being the students. "I am a strong advocate for the student." She enjoys interacting with individuals that are authentic, reliable, and have the same mission, helping the students succeed. Carla does limit her contact with people that show favoritism; which comes in the form of acknowledging individuals that have "tenure," and by passing the newer employers. Carla aspires to become the Dean of Student Services with a community college that embraces diversity, innovation and change.

SARA

Sara, age 41, is the Provost/Dean of the college's satellite campus in the central part of the state. She is a confident, detailed – oriented individual who is not afraid to express her viewpoints. She is always willing to learn, network, and mentor others. From her mother, she learned to be strong-willed and determined. "She helped us to be career-oriented and focused on being the best you can be." As a female, Sara is proud of her accomplishments. However, at times, Sara's gender, race and age causes her to second guess herself, and she wonders if others are also questioning her qualifications and credentials. "In meetings, I'm the youngest person at

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the table." Therefore, Sara wants to be helpful and do as much as she can, rarely delegating to others.

Sara tends to interact with her counterparts, other deans, provost, and/or vice presidents. She prefers individuals that are trustworthy, respectable, and good communicators. She does limit her contact with individuals that are disrespectful and subordinates in order to keep the working relationships free of any confusion. Sara can see herself moving in the direction of vice president of student services or vice president of administration, but not the role of president.

This subsection provided a brief description of each participant in the study as part of the descriptive analysis phase. These profiles were developed following an initial reading of the transcript and the creation of a two page summary.

Trends in the Data

In this section, three general trends emerged from Stage II and III of the analysis process. The first trend identified in the data dealt with thoughts of career aspirations. Participants discussed their career pathways as they move throughout the leadership journey. All participants recognized the need to further their education to improve their opportunities for career advancement. There were conversations around becoming Presidents, Vice Presidents, and Deans of Student Services at a community college. One participant wanted to move from student services to a full time instructor, while another participant was considering starting a nonprofit organization. Some participants were examining their personal lives and the possibility of starting a family. However, one person believed her journey was coming to an end and was looking toward retirement.

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The second trend dealt with race and gender in the workplace. Some of the participants viewed their race, and even gender, as a negative. Conversations focused on having to perform or act a certain way in order to be taken seriously and accepted in their positions. Some participants discussed presenting one side of their personality so colleagues would not feel threatened by their mannerism of being assertive, confident, driven, and focused. Participants were frequently asked to sit on committees so there was a, "black" face in order to check the box on diversity and claim an appropriate representation of the campus community. In an effort to be heard and understood, participants often gravitated to colleagues that, "look like them."

The third trend focused on increase the diversity and inclusiveness in the workplace. Participants agreed that their colleges needed to improve their representation of minorities, especially in administrative positions. Various discussions surrounded strategies to become a more diverse and inclusive campus. These strategies included being more calculated about the recruiting process, being open minded about qualified candidates, having a better representation of committee members, and providing clear directions to members of the hiring committee.

Overview of Research Findings

The primary research question guiding this study was, "How do mid-career Black women working in community colleges describe their social identity as they aspire to be leaders in their professional roles?"

The data analysis process employed both inductive and deductive methods highlighted by Saldaña (2013). Data analysis was achieved through a combination of manual coding as well as the use of coding software, NVivo. The researcher analyzed data collected through transcribed participant interviews, interview field notes, and the research journal. The data were aligned with

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the primary research question. The research journal was kept to track progress, as well as note any feelings, reflections, or additional thoughts. Reflective notes and memos were made in the margins of the interview field notes (Creswell, 2005). Per the iterative process, a continual review of data was accomplished, with analytic memos placed at various points during transcript reviews to offer additional reflection and insight (Saldaña, 2013). Data were organized and displayed through the use of Microsoft Word and Excel programs.

Participants' transcripts were reviewed line by line, with possible categories and themes created based on the coding result. The analysis of the ten interviews occurred in three phases. The preliminary inductive analysis was performed manually using in vivo coding and resulted in 500 codes. The second phase of coding was performed with computer software, NVivo, and yielded around 250 individual codes that were grouped into 12 potential themes. Following the second phase of coding, seven themes emerged:

- Theme 1: Social groups are important, but not prescribed
- Theme 2: More than my race and gender
- Theme 3: Addressing the institutional climate and culture
- Theme 4: Working relationships tend to be strategic, intentional and provide a sense of belonging.
- Theme 5: Relationship can promote student success and the college environment
- Theme 6: Making connections to foster professional and personal growth.

Below is a detailed exploration of the emerging themes found during the data analysis. These emerging themes are supported by examples from the personal narratives of the participants.

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Findings from Analysis

For the purpose of this research study; identity is defined as an awareness of self through self-image, self-reflection, and self-esteem (Shields, 2008). Identities are often shaped and developed through personal and professional experiences originating from social environments and interactions with others. Throughout the interview, study participants were asked how they view themselves as professionals, as well as their social interaction with others.

Theme 1: Social groups are important, but not prescribed. Five out of the ten participants mentioned that they have limited interactions with coworkers, and are careful not be seen with a same group of individuals on a regular basis. Joan stated, "If I do go to lunch with somebody, it's very strategic about who that person is. I wouldn't go with the same person on a regular basis. I just don't allow myself to get boxed in that way." Mary also kept her socializing to a minimum, and tended to interact with "people that look like me, who are black, because places I have worked at before are like a mini version of high-school… very clickish." Mary reported that she often feels like an outsider, since she is not from the area where her job is located.

Betty does not exclude herself from interacting with anyone or any group, but is cautious in her dealings with certain individuals on her campus; and avoids being associated with certain groups, especially those groups that are perceived as click-ish and individuals that are overly inquisitive about personal matters. "I am not an over the top social butterfly because I believe in coming to work and getting the job done, but try to interact with individuals at all levels." Betty stated that she tries to talk with and get along with everybody, and does not want to throw herself on anybody or any certain group.

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Nancy minimally socializes at work, and stressed that all her interactions with people are, "strategic and for the purpose of getting somewhere" as she is always focused on outcomes and student success. Nancy stated most of her interactions are with individuals considered to be, "go-getters, positive, innovative, and solution-oriented."

Carla has no set group of people she socializes with on a regular basis and considered herself somewhat of an outsider at her college. Carla noted that since the college is fairly small, and she has been able to build rapport and establish relationships with colleagues. She admitted that she was apprehensive about interacting with some of the individuals on the administrative teams, human resources, and even her direct supervisor.

Three participants considered themselves to be very sociable like, "social butterflies," and tried to interact with everyone on the campus, especially if those interactions benefited students and the advancement of the college. Sally stated her socializing included everyone on the campus, from the custodial staff to the college president. "Everyone is important and needed in order to meet the needs of the student and campus community." Meg emphasized the importance of developing a collaborative work environment to address the needs of the students and their educational goals. Although Cary attempted to socialize with everyone, many of her connections are with individuals that can assist with aspects of her position.

Two participants kept their interactions with colleagues to very specific groups and individuals. Reba interacted mostly with individuals that looked like her, other Black females. Reba enjoyed being around people and does not limit her interaction with others, but tended to gravitate more toward sisters. "It's my comfort zone and I don't like reaching out of my comfort zone." Sara socialized with her counterparts, individuals in administrative leadership roles

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similar to hers. Sara interactions included deans and other vice presidents, and limited her interactions with subordinates in order to, "keep working relationships clean."

Theme 2: More than my race and gender. All study participants proudly discussed their education, and experiences obtained to effectively perform in their current roles. However, participants stated that even though they possessed the skills and qualifications needed to execute their jobs efficiently, some of the participants believed their race and gender often foreshadowed these abilities. The participants wanted to be taken seriously in their respective positions and viewed as competent leaders.

Mary believed that as a Black professional, people do not look at knowledge and experience. "They just see Black; you walk in Black female." She goes on to mention the concept of "shifting," a term from a book she read. The idea of shifting means presenting one side of your personality or behaving a certain way at work, but in other non-work environments your personality and behavior is completely different. "It's like being on stage. You constantly have to perform for them to take you seriously. I've had to do a lot of shifting as a professional. I think that unfortunately is required as a Black professional. To move up, you have to be about to shift." Mary pointed out that, "as a Black female, you have to be very aware and careful of a) how you present yourself and b) what others know about you. Everyone who smiles in your face is not always your friend."

Betty reported being told her tone and facial expressions often make her appear unapproachable, causing students to by-pass her, searching for a Caucasian person for assistance. Betty attributed these comments and actions of students to being an African American woman in a college where leaderships positions held by Black women have declined and there is a lack of

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understanding for the change of command. She also believed, "people tend to relate with their own race, particularly in the area I work in dealing with people's person information such as taxes and income." Betty also recalled a time of being the only African American in a meeting with other administrative leaders and the President of the college stated, "How in the world do we ever expect students to live up to the standards of Department of Education when the majority of our students are currently minorities?" The President then proceeded to inquire from Betty how the problem could be addressed. Being caught off guard by the comment, her professional response was that she needed to look at the statistical information before making any judgment calls.

Sara discussed her thoughts on not being taken seriously at times due to her race, gender, and age. Although Sara is confident and comfortable in what she has achieved, she believed that these three items impact what she does, how others view her, and how she thinks about herself. "You always have to second guess yourself, and wondering whether other people are second guessing you because you're a woman, because you're African American."

Nancy revealed that she is constantly asked to serve on hiring committees because the need to check the box of having a diverse group of individuals. Often when an, "African American person recognizes why they are on the hiring committee, they sometimes do the opposite and feel like they have to more critically scrutinize the minority candidates feeling like that's why they're there. They're so busy trying to prove that they're not, you know, all just for the black." Nancy stressed the importance of having people on committees in which individuals can add value as a member and not to just check the box. "People are not the color of their skin, bottom line."

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Carla mentioned she was the only African American female in her department that served in a leadership role. Carla discussed the frustration experienced especially with presenting new ideas. "I can present an idea, which may go ignored, and when my counterpart says the same thing it's like it needs be ringing in the sky." She also believed that, "tenure" is given to individuals that worked at the college between five and ten years. "If you have worked over 30 years, you are automatically the scholar when it comes to serving students." Carla stated that other African American women on campus rarely speak up. "It's like they are afraid, and have developed a slave mentality." These women will not speak unless someone tells them to speak, and will not open their mouths unless they are addressed.

Theme 3: Addressing the institutional climate and culture. Almost all of the participants stated that their campus still needed to make improvements with regards to diversity and inclusion. Joan stressed the importance of students being able to walk into a department and see somebody that they can identify with. Therefore, when it comes to the hiring practices, Joan stated, "I take the time to be clear about what I need and looking for in a potential candidate. For example: We have a department here on campus and everyone is in the same stage of life and going through the same life experiences. They're between 30 and 40 years old, normally late for work every morning because of children and getting them off to school. Even though we might have hired the best person for the framework we needed, did we ever thing about an older person somebody more seasoned in their life and career." Joan always believed that diversity goes beyond race and gender to include one's ideas and thinking.

Nancy also took a different view of diversity saying, "Diversity is not just about the ethnic background of the person but about an attitude of inclusivity." Therefore, instead of the campus looking a certain way, it would sound a certain way and comments such as; "That person

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sounds unique and different" would be heard frequently allowing people to appreciate the perspectives of others.

Several participants wanted to see an increase of minorities (women and men) in administrative and leadership roles. Mary sought to see an increase in minorities as faculty members and administrators. Betty noted that some changes were taking place on her campus as they currently have an African American male as president. However, in order to see more improvement with diversity, Betty stated, "we would need to get rid of some of our upper leaders who are not necessarily fair, and we would need to do some cleaning form the top to get to where we need to be." Others stated the need to have the employees look more like the student population. Some participants talked about creating more programs on diversity. Sally wanted to see more people with a noticeable physical disability, and a shifting in upper management to include more men.

Conversely, Carla believed her campus was not concerned with improving diversity. She reported that the individuals making decisions tend to select persons that "look like them and possess personality traits similar to their own." Carla stated that when African American women apply for positions, particularly leadership type positions, they are perceived in a negative manner. The response from coworkers was often, "she seemed real rigid, aggressive, bossy, and a know it all." Carla's reply is often, "she appears to be skilled, knowledgeable, and well-rounded." However, Carla is often outnumbered as there is a majority vote. Carla noted that the college does prefer African American males over African American females; and many of the females on the campus are administrative assistants with only a Bachelor's degree, and have been working in the same position for years with little desire for professional growth. Carla

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described her campus community as being very Bible based, viewing the color of one's skin in very different context from other campuses in the state.

Theme 4: Working relationships tend to be strategic, intentional and provide a sense of belonging. Joan, Nancy, and Mary stated that they do not socialize a lot at work, and their interactions with individuals are purposeful and outcome driven. Nancy reported that people are more than their titles and titles are not important to her when establishing working relationships. Nancy tends to build relationships with the go-getters, influencers, and gung-ho persons, but stressed that resistant persons can be beneficial in an effective working relationship allowing one to address all aspects of an issue. "I'm always looking for the people who have the best interest of the students in mine, have great attitudes, very knowledgeable, and willing to use those things to influence, to move things in the right direction."

Joan was also strategic when developing relationship with colleagues. Joan gets along best with those individuals that are committed to the mission of the college, willing to work, and not afraid to challenge themselves and try new things. "I value people that are team players. If you want to be my friend at work, do your job. We'll be great." Sally felt that developing authentic relationships with people assisted with accomplishing common goals. "I want people to be real. I like people that say what they need to say and not hold on to stuff because that clouds the lines of communication."

Betty mentioned a strategy utilized by her department to improve relationships and make connections with individuals around the campus. "We have a monthly eat-a-thon. We will get together, bring food, and invite anybody from the campus." These regular monthly gatherings allowed employees to fellowship and learn more about one another. Her department also

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provided a monthly newsletter to employees to keep them updated about new process and procedures in a means of sharing knowledge and open lines of communication with the campus community. With various activities being employed to build relationship, Betty discussed how changes in leadership, huge turnovers in employment, student dynamics and perceptions have affected relationships between colleagues.

For many of the participants, it was important that they associate with numerous persons and departments throughout the campus. According to Sally, "Everyone is important." In order to foster relationships, you have to be willing to engage and willing to go out. You have to invite them in. We're all in this thing together." This connection permitted everyone to be on the same page, accomplishing the same mission and goals. The participants made a conscious effort to know and interact with people across the campus, and have these individuals feel comfortable around them. Many of the participants attempted to know something professionally and personally about their colleagues, and stressed the need to move beyond working in silos and begin actively engaging with others. Nancy believed that relationships ensure people are valued and they matter. "I want people to know they can trust me, it's not just a fluffy smile. And when I tell them you did a great job, I really mean great. It is important to impact someone else in a positive way."

Theme 5: Relationships can promote student success and the college environment.

Student success and a positive college environment were essential topics for the participants. All participants discussed the importance of colleagues coming together for the betterment of the students and college environment. Throughout each interview, participants mentioned topics of improving customer service, incorporating a servant attitude, knowing and

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learning more about the student population at various levels, and getting the campus community on one accord.

Joan emphasized that community colleges were service organizations and all employees needed a servant attitude, committed to serving students. Joan enjoyed working and helping students, and considered herself a role model for the students, as well as other women employed on the campus. "I have a clear sense bout what needs to be done and how it needs to be done. I am all about continuous improvement."

Carla described herself as a strong student advocate, and worked diligently to set the stage for ways to best serve the students. "No matter what, I put a smile on my face for the students." Carla further discussed the idea coming together and being passionate about building a better future for the students. "This attitude may assist with changing student enrollment, encouraging students to join organizations, and improving student morale."

Meg, Reba, Sally, and Sara stressed the importance of being active on committees and knowledgeable about the college, services, and resources available in order to better assist students. Reba stated, "Everything we do, we are doing to propel/promote the student." Meg's view was similar to Reba and pointed out that activities developed should benefit the students as it is not about their own personal convenience and comfort. "We are here to build up the college and the mission of the college. A lot of times we are bringing in the first generation of students or we're bringing in students who have language barriers or cultural barriers. Since the students are coming from the community, we need to possess a deeper understanding of this community, its resources, and everything it encompasses that can impact students." Sally made an interesting

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observation stating, “If a person can connect with someone at a college, an institution, their success and retention rates are greater,” than those students that do not make a connection.

Theme 6: Making connections to foster professional growth. In additional to building relationships, making the appropriate connections with individuals inside and outside of higher education was also a common topic amongst the participants. Two avenues mentioned were networking and mentoring.

Most of the participants discussed ways networking had contributed to their success and professional growth. Networking was often conducted through meetings, trainings, workshops, and conference; and can occur at formal and informal settings. The participants attempted to network with individuals at the same educational and/or employment level as their own or with individuals in higher positions in an effort to gain additional knowledge.

Sara stated, “networking gives you the ability to build on new ideas to see the world from a different perspective. To see what other people are doing and see what things are working at other places.” Sally talked about how networking has assisted with developing her leadership skills and confidence. “It has opened doors, helped me to develop friendships, lasting, I think everlasting friendships. It has helped me come out of my comfort zone of being concerned only about my institution, but my sister institutions. I have also been able to better assist my students.” Joan, Cary, Carla, and Betty stated that networking had enhanced their skills and experiences, allowing them to know more about themselves, and putting them in tune with other different opportunities to further their growth.

Joan had an informal network of three to four women from different colleges. “We meet for dinner once a month or once every other month and talk about stuff at work that you can’t

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talk about with somebody at your campus. We're really supportive of each other." Nancy viewed networking as connecting and relationship building. When networking with people, Nancy sought out some commonalities in which to make a connection. "It's important to have interactions with individuals that are meaningful, impactful and go somewhere. I need an affirmation and confirmation for me to connect with a person. I'll say it's not about who you know but who knows you."

Mary didn't really network at first, as she did not see the point. She attributed these thoughts to her background, which was outside of higher education. After being in higher education for a number of years, "I see how vital and how important it is. Like the saying goes, it's not about what you know, but about how you know. Education feels very small, and if you don't know somebody." Conversely, Meg viewed networking as something she always heard about, but didn't really know what to do. "I definitely see and understand the value in that. So for me, I may not always see the direct connections, but I don't pass up the opportunity to get connected because you never know."

A networking connection could often progress into a mentoring relationship. Some of the participants had well established mentoring relationships with individuals inside and outside of the working environment. Throughout these relationships, participants were either mentors or mentees. Nancy identified three formal mentors that supported her with life and work challenges. These mentors covered the areas of work (female), spiritual (male), and personal or family (female). "A mentor is somebody who you ask to be your mentor and they've accepted it, the responsibility of that, and you meet regularly and you have very clearly defined – a clearly defined relationship, and over time, that person is able to speak into your life and able to give

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you honest, open feedback." Nancy further explained, "my mentors know my interests and tell me about opportunities."

Mary also had an established mentor, a dean at a community college, with whom she meets with at least once a week. "She's been very instrumental in getting me to understand the dynamics of administration if you want to move up and the politics that comes along with it, and that not every day is going to be a bed of roses. I can come to her for advice, I can vent to her as well, and she's been there. She's done it, you know."

Reba viewed mentors as teachers. "When you contact them, you need feedback. They are telling you the do's and don'ts to a situation." Reba further expressed the importance of finding the right kind of mentor that meets your personal and professional needs. In finding the right mentor, Betty believed that the person should be positive and have positive mind. Someone that enjoys what they are doing, wants to grow in what they are doing, and does not mind sharing what they know. "Someone that wants to see African-American females make it to that next level, and/or succeed in what they're doing."

On the other hand, Joan stated, "It's hard for me to have a mentor because I believe so much in my own thoughts and so forth. It's hard for me to look to somebody else for that. I mean that's probably real shortsighted and conceited, but it is. In order to be a mentee, you have to allow to yourself to be mentored and so I am learning, working with myself in how I can begin to maybe receive more from other people that may be willing to share."

Summary

This study sought to explore how Black women college professionals described their social identity. From the individual narratives, using both deductive and inductive analysis, six

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themes emerged: (a) social groups are important, but not prescribed, (b) more than my race and gender, (c) addressing the institutional climate and culture, (d) working relationships tend to be strategic, intentional, and provide a sense of belonging, (e) relationships can promote student success and the college environment, and (f) making connections to foster professional growth. These six themes sought (1) explore how Black women describe their social identity while aspiring to be leaders in their professional roles; (2) examine strategies for developing and retaining their social identity; and (3) identify strategies to assist with establishing a successful work environment within their respective workplace; and to answer the research question guiding this study: How do mid-career Black women working in community colleges describe their social identity as they aspire to be leaders in their professional roles?

Chapter Five will connect the literature review and theoretical framework and integrate both with the research findings of this particular study. Additionally, implications for future practice and recommendations for new research will be discussed by the researcher.

Chapter 5: CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

This chapter will offer a discussion on the interpretation of the key findings. It also relates the findings to the study's research question, scholarly literature, and theoretical framework. This chapter will highlight the implications for practice, implications for theory, and make suggestions for future research. Finally, a summary will be presented to conclude the chapter and overall research study.

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Overview of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative research study was to explore how ten Black women college professionals described their social identity while aspiring to be leaders in their professional roles. Specifically, this study sought to examine strategies for developing and retaining the social identities of Black women college professionals, identify strategies to assist with establishing successful work environments, and uncover how these professionals' experiences and aspirations are shaped through the social interactions with others within their respective workplace. Guiding this study was the primary research question: "How do mid-career black women working in community colleges describe their social identity as they aspire to be leaders in their professional roles?" This was accomplished by capturing the narratives of ten Black women college professional working in community colleges. The study explored and documented their personal and professional experiences, along with their social interactions with persons in the social environment. Six themes emerged from this study: a) social groups are important, but not prescribed, (b) more than my race and gender, (c) addressing the institutional climate and culture, (d) working relationships tend to be strategic, intentional, and provide a sense of belonging, (e) relationships can promote student success and the college environment, and (f) making connections to foster professional growth.

The narrative research method was selected as the best mode in which to collect the stories of these Black women college professionals. Narratives are a method in which stories, conversations, and life experiences provide a way to understand how people created meaning in their lives. This method allowed for the retrieval of both the professional and personal knowledge of the participants. The findings of this study provided insight into the participants' individual characteristics and experiences. Participants for the study met a certain criterion, as

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discussed in chapter 3. A semi-structured interview protocol was incorporated as interviews were recorded, transcribed, and the data was analyzed manually and electronically using deductive and inductive reasoning. The findings were coded utilizing Braun and Clarke's six step guide for data analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The data analysis produced six themes around identity, social groups, diversity, and relationships. After a further review of the themes in chapter 4, along with the purpose of the study, the researcher concluded the six themes could be grouped into three categories as displayed in table 5.1. The following categories are (a) identity and social interactions, (b) diversity and inclusion, and (c) building relationships and making connections.

Table 5.1

Themes by Category

Categories	**Identity and Social Interactions**	**Diversity and Inclusion**	**Building Relationships and Making Connections**
Themes	• Social groups are important, but not prescribed • More than my race and gender	• Addressing the institutional climate and culture	• Working relationships tend to be strategic, intentional, and provide a sense of belonging • Relationships can promote student success and the college environment • Making connections to foster professional and personal growth

Interpretation of Themes

The primary focus of this research study was to explore the social identity of Black women professionals. As discussed previously, three categories and seven themes emerged from the data analysis of this study. The first category, identity and social interactions had two themes: (a) social groups are important, but not prescribed; (b) more than my race and gender. The second category, diversity and inclusion produced one theme: (a) address the institutional climate and culture. The final category, building relationships and making connections, involved

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four themes: (a) working relationships tend to be strategic and intentional; (b) relationships can provide a sense of belonging; (c) relationships can promote student success and the college environment; (d) making connections to foster professional growth. The categories assist with a smoother discussion for the interpretations of the themes.

Identity and Social Interactions

Many of the participants openly discussed their experiences in higher education and the experiences of being a Black woman college professional. As a Black woman, race and gender is often considered a double jeopardy, which can characterize the dual, sometimes triple discrimination and disadvantage status received (Simien, 2005; *ASHE report*, 2009; Lloyd-Jones, 2009; Johnson & Thomas, 2012). Research reported that often times it was impossible for Black women to separate their twin identities of race and gender. Many Black women perceived numerous commonalities between their gender and race, while others reported distinct differences between the two (Collins, 2000). For the participants, there was a strong desire to be seen beyond their race and gender; and be noticed for their skills, expertise, and job performance. Some of the participants believed that people frequently saw their race and gender over their title. A study conducted by Lloyd-Jones (2009) addressed this same issue in which administrators may view a person's race first and gender second.

With regards to race and gender, Black women may find they need to portray a certain behavior or mannerism in order to be viewed as a successful, qualified person. Mary spoke about "shifting" or acting a certain way in order to be taken serious in her position. The literature reported that Black women often have to play by the rules of a traditional patriarchy (Lloyd-Jones, 2009; Jones & Taylor, 2013), meet higher demands, be more qualified, and go the extra mile more often than their male and even female counterparts (Bowman, 1998; Lindsay,

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1999).

Black women often succumb to the cultural, societal, and/or unconscious beliefs about individuals, especially those negative images reinforce by the media (Agars, 2004; Cook, 2013). Mary discussed how many of her characteristics and qualities were often viewed as a double edge sword. Mary possessed an aggressive nature when pursuing goals or striving for accomplishments. Her desire to achieve and be successful is frequently viewed in a negative manner. This is confusing to Mary, as colleagues of different races who behave in this manner are perceived much different. Mary attributed this action to being a Black woman as she is sometimes stereotyped as the angry Black woman, particularly for voicing an opinion or an opinion that may be different from others (Reyonld-Dobbs et al., 2008). Carla also mentioned that she had the Black woman syndrome; the attitude, sass, the aggressiveness (Reyonld-Dobbs et al., 2008). She has no problem voicing her thoughts and opinions, especially when dealing with inaccuracies and supporting students and coworkers. In order to combat the negative images of Black women, some participants utilized the strategy of social creativity to assist with promoting a positive impression to change the views of their social identity (Ellemers & Haslam, 2012).

Even though Black women are actively striving to meet the challenging demands of the work place, they are frequently overlooked at many levels, especially in terms of job promotions (Granger, 1993; Patitu &Hinton, 2003). Mary discussed her challenges and frustrations when transitioning from a coordinator to a director position. “I applied for a lot of jobs. When I say around the point of when I had like four or five years of experience at that point. I wanted to move up. So I applied for at least three jobs that were within the community college that I was working at, and was turned down for each one. For people who did not have as much

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experiences as I had, who did not have the education that I had, who did not have the education that I had and I'm not saying…trying to sound arrogant or anything but it was very frustrating as a professional to be passed over. Then you would have to go and then basically train those people to do the job that you originally wanted."

Some participants discussed numerous circumstances in which people, particularly students and colleagues, bypassed them in search of answers and assistance from a Caucasian employee (Lloyd-Jones, 2009). This avoidance causes the individual to be left out of the loop regarding a matter that may involve them or their department. Betty spoke of situations in which students would not approach her with their financial aid issues and go over her to the supervisor or another department altogether. Betty attributed these actions by students and colleagues to her race and dealing with the personal information of taxes and income. "I feel that people tend to relate with their own race for certain topics. Plus, with the changes in leadership and population, there is a lack of knowledge regarding the appropriate chain of command." When race is the focal point, Black women encounter racial discrimination which may include being ignored, isolated and having their authority and leadership challenged (Lindsay, 1999, Herdlein et al., 2008).

Many participants believed they had to constantly, "jump through hoops" in order to accomplish various aspects of their jobs. Mary discussed an incident in which she needed to interact with the President of the college on student conduct issues. "People would try to stop my access to the President, even though it was mandated that I actually talk to him. I would have to do things that other folks would not have to do, meaning I would have to explain certain situations…I had to go above and beyond, explain why and give reasons, facts, and documents." Frequently, these obstacles were coming from other Black professionals. The literature reapeatly

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discussed working environments in which Black women are competing with colleagues and confronted with conscious and unconscious slights (Bowman, 1998; Glenn & Henry, 2009).

In addition to the conversation on race and gender, the literature debated the multiple social identities that Black women may incorporate into their lives such as, socioeconomic difference (social class), sexual orientation, age, religious and non-religious affiliates, etc. (Clair et al., 2005; Reed & Evans, 2008; Johnson & Thomas, 2012). The participants in this study focused mainly on race and gender, and a few of the participants included their age and/or spirituality in the conversation. Some of the younger participants were balancing race, gender, and age. Both Sara and Mary referred to their age as part of their identity. Mary believed that age should not determine your knowledge and expertise. Sara believed her age impacted how she interacted with colleagues and how others view her at times. "When I go to meetings, I'm the youngest person at the table. I also supervise people that are at least 10 to 15 years older. That has been the hardest transition for me that I'm looking at people who literally could have been my parents, and in some cases not all cases and you have to do corrective measures." Learning to balance multiple social identities can often be difficult and stressful, but necessary (Harris, 2007).

The slightly older participants discussed the role of spirituality within their identity. The literature reported that spirituality can be perceived by Black women as a coping mechanism to tackle the numerous struggles encountered in their careers and personal lives (Alexander, 2010). Participants utilized prayers when encountering challenging situations and/or people. Joan, Nancy, and Meg mentioned they prayed a lot when faced with difficult matters. Reba stated that her spirituality is the motivation that pushed her to give it her all in everything that she does. "I know what prayer can do. I know it works. I just stay focused, prayerful, and make every

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decision count."

Many participants have learned to balance their identity of being a Black woman professional as they were repeatedly placed in situations because of their race and/or gender. Participants were placed on committees, attended meetings, etc. in order to have a diverse face or representation on the campus. Some individuals may believe that Black women were hired for their race and gender and not for their talent, and are unwilling to listen to her opinions, views, and suggestions (Bowman, 1998). A few participants mentioned being seen as the spokesman for the black population, including students, on the campus. Nancy reported that her college made certain there was at least one Black person and/or a minority serving on every committee, especially the hiring committee. "This is the college's way to check the box on diversity."

As stated earlier, identities can be shaped and developed through personal and professional experiences originating from one's social environments and interactions with others (Padilla & Perez, 2003; Korte, 2007). Social interactions were important to all the participants, as these interactions were needed in order to fulfill the requirements of their jobs, as well as adequately assist students. All the participants discussed their social interactions with colleagues in the workplace, and the need for these interactions to be effective. Most of the participants attempted to socialize with everyone and did not prescribe to a particular social group. In fact, many of the participants took precautions not to be categorized into a specific group. One of the concept of SIT is social categorization, which is the process of determining which group membership one identifies with (Turner, 1975; Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Trepte, 2006; Korte, 2007). Even though the participants belonged to the social identities of being Black women, they regularly incorporated the strategy of individual mobility, which emphasized how the individual self is different from other group members in which they belong (Ellemers & Haslam,

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2012). However, two participants did socialize with very specific group. Reba gravitated to other Black females as this was her comfort zone, and Sara socialized mostly with her counterparts, individuals in leadership positions.

Diversity and Inclusion

The concept of diversity and inclusion were recurring topics throughout the interviews, particularly when discussing committees, representation of faculty and staff, the hiring process, and student population. Many of the participants reported that their college needed additional work relation to being more diversity and inclusive. Throughout the interviews, participants discussed various strategies to address and improve concerns of diversity and inclusion on their campus. Some of the strategies mentioned by participants to improve diversity on their campuses included improving recruitment efforts, increasing salaries, re-examining hiring practices, and establishing an inviting culture on the campus. Many of these strategies would need to be implemented by Human Resources and supported by the college president and other campus personnel.

Improving recruitment efforts meant advertising job announcements in more rural or urban areas, depending on where the college was located. Participants suggested advertisements being placed in publications and on websites conducive to minority populations. Participants stressed the important of writing job descriptions in a manner to ensure diverse candidates would apply. Job announcements needed to be clear, containing the necessary information (job functions, qualifications, etc.) in order to recruit appropriate candidates. Three of the participants emphasized the importance of offering competitive salaries in an effort to recruit and retain qualified candidates.

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Re-examining hiring practices could involve human resources evaluating current policies and procedures to see what improvements can be implemented. When hiring committees are developed, study participants proposed there be a more diverse representation of committee members. This diverse representation of committee members goes beyond race and gender, to comprise faculty, staff, upper management, community patron, maybe even students depending on the job position. As Nancy confirmed in her interview, colleges need to do more than check the box on the diversity requirements. Colleges needed to be intentional. Once hiring committees are established, candidates should be viewed in a robust manner. In order to accomplish this task, committee members need a clear understanding of the job description, the type of candidate the department is seeking, possess knowledge of the department in which the candidate would work, and be acceptable of an assorted slate of candidates.

The participants' discussion around diversity and inclusion also included a conversation about increasing the number of minorities in administrative and leadership positions, as well as a more diverse faculty population. Sally's view of diversity involved an increase of individuals with noticeable physical disabilities. For Nancy, diversity was more than one's ethnic background, but comprised an attitude of inclusivity in which persons would be appreciated for their unique and different perspectives on approaching tasks and ideas.

One participant, Carla, reported that her college had no interest in diversifying their campus. "The individuals that make the decisions on our campus, they like the personality traits of those individuals. And a lot of people that work here, stay in the job for years; because it's comfortable, and they would rather fill those vacancies with individuals that look just like them." When Black women who are highly educated and highly qualified interview for positions; members of the hiring committee deemed these women as real aggressive, bossy, and a know-it-

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all (Reynolds-Dobbs et al., 2008). The literature supported the hostile, unwelcoming, and negative environments encountered by Black women applying and working at institutions of higher education (Granger, 1993, Glenn & Henry, 2009, p. 12; Henry, 2010; Clayborne & Hamrick, 2011). In an effort to address any diversity concerns of the campus, colleges must be willing to develop and implement resources that promote cultural diversity that can enable Black women to feel connected to the institution; however, this is rarely the case. Changes can be difficult to implement as work environments possess certain rituals, symbols, processes, rules, and procedures that dictate how the organization will be governed and organized (Gherardi, 1994). Colleges have become accustomed to practices consistent with the characteristics traditionally valued by White men (Coachman, 2009).

Betty reported that improvements around diversity would not truly been seen on her campus until some of the upper leaders, who are not necessarily fair, are replaced. "There needs to be some cleaning from the top. Many of the minority women at the college are leaving position and pursuing other opportunities inside and outside of higher education." Even though the college had a Black male president, the executive staff is primarily Caucasian individuals and there is little to no advancement of minority women (Ely & Meyerson, 2000; Coyne & Stufft, 2009; Ballenger, 2010; Tomás et al., 2010; Mumby, 2013).

Building Relationships and Making Connections

The concept of building relationships and making connections were recurring throughout each participant's interview. Building effective relationships with colleagues can be viewed as creating informal and formal communities to cultivate a nurturing space for Black women (Bettez, 2011). Many of the participants discussed the importance of establishing effective working relationships with colleagues and stressed the need for these relationships to be strategic

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and intentional. Several participants agreed that strong and lasting relationships are built over time.

When building relationship with others, participants identified various characteristics important to them. These recognized characteristics can assist Black women with organizing and shaping their social identity as common interests are established (Stryer & Burke, 2000). Participants preferred to develop effective relationships with individuals that were good thinkers, honest, trustworthy, open-minded, good communicators, solution and mission focused, and respectful. Participants also connected with people that had backgrounds, experiences, goals, and mindsets similar to their own, which further assisted with creating meaningful relationships (Torres et al., 2009). The numerous attributes mentioned by participants begin to paint a picture of their social identity, as well as the social groups with which they are associated. Once a social identity was defined, participants worked to maintain their positive self-image associated with the identity (Turner, 1975; Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Tajfel, 1982; Trepte, 2006; Cornelissen et. al, 2007).

Certain relationships cultivated by participants were a result of networking, which often occurred at conferences, workshops, trainings, and meetings. Networking was an essential tool that allowed participants to share information, explore creative ideas, and receive assistance from persons inside and outside of their institution (Lepkowski, 2009; Gill & Jones, 2013). Networking can be formal and informal, and assist with developing participants' social identity as these women began associating with various groups. The development of networking groups can be considered social categorization, which permitted individuals to classify and organize their social environment and explain group's behavior (Trepte, 2006).

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Mentoring was another vital tool discussed by participants. These relationships can also be formal and informal. Research suggested that women have an array of mentors to include; professional, psychosocial, spiritual, and personal/peer mentors (Dunbar & Kinnersley, 2011). It is crucial to have a well-established mentor as these persons can assist participants with clarifying goals, improving their social identities, recognizing steeps needed for career advancement, and obtaining professional advice from the experiences of other women (Bowman, 1998; Coyne & Stufft, 2009; Glenn & Henry, 2009; VanDerLinden, 2004; Dunbar & Kinnersley, 2011). Nancy had three clearly defined mentors that had accepted the responsibilities of being her mentor, and addressed areas in her life that were vital to her well-being. Other participants had at least one designated mentor, who mainly addressed their professional concerns but would attend to their personal matters as well; whereas some participants had unofficial mentors, basically individuals they admired or looked up to. Regardless of whether the mentor was formal or informal, participants spoke highly of the concept and process, while encouraging other women to incorporate this tool into their professional development.

Implications for Practice

This study explored how Black women college professionals describe their social identity as they aspire to be leaders in their professional roles. Specifically, it sought to examine strategies for developing and retaining the social identities of Black women college professionals. This study also sought to identify strategies to assist with establishing successful work environments and uncover how these professionals' experiences and aspirations are shaped

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through the social structures and interactions with others within their respective workplace. After analyzing the data of this study, there are a number of implications for practice that could be useful for Black women working in community colleges. These recommendations are aimed at improving how Black women develop and understand their social identity in relations to becoming leaders in their professional roles.

The first significant implication observed ongoing discussions around social interactions and relationships and which was echoed throughout the study. Participants emphasized the need to socialize with various individuals, inside and outside of the college to achieve the mission of the college and meet the needs of the students. Participants noted that being recognized as associating only with certain groups of people was often avoided, as many of the participants wanted to be seen as an individual person instead of being categorized into various groups. In addition to their social interactions with coworkers, effective working relationships with colleagues were utilized to improve job performance, address the needs of the department, and service the needs of students. Participants were cautious about having too many personal relationships in the work environment and diligently strived to separate their professional and personal matters they may arise. At the individual level, it would be beneficial for Black women professionals to establish formal and informal support groups that focus on and address concerns encountered in the workplace such as; understanding the difference between healthy and unhealthy social interactions with colleagues, tackling the negative encounters and responses received from other employees and students, and developing strategies for building valuable working relationships among coworkers. These formal and informal support groups can assist Black women in establishing a safe and reassuring environment to express and discuss apprehensions faced in the workplace, understanding and navigating the politics within the

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higher educational systems, and providing encouragement and motivation while making connections and building professional relationships.

At the local level, colleges can offer more professional development focused on professionalism in the workplace and cultural sensitivity to ensure that employees and even students are educated on appropriate strategies for interacting and understanding individuals that may appear to be different than them. Colleges can also provide opportunities and activities that promote team development and cohesiveness. A department, and even a college, that is functioning as a proficient team will most often exhibit a climate of trust, goodwill, and collaboration in which employees break down barriers and lean to work together to accomplish a common vision and goal.

The second significant implication dealt with identity and more specifically race and gender. Participants expressed their continued frustration with their race and gender foreshadowing their knowledge, skills, and qualifications. Black women are often overlooked for career advancement opposition and frequent victims of stereotyping. At the individual levels Black women can continue educating their peers and associates on the negative effects of labeling people. Black women may also need to explore positioning themselves such that their skills and qualifications are in the forefront as often as possible; this could be accomplished by presenting at workshops and conferences, speaker roles, or other opportunities to project an image that is professionally favorable. Also, Black women can engage in numerous leadership opportunities such as; serving on and chairing local, state, and national committees and organizations (inside and outside of higher education), volunteering for campus events, and other activities that display and enhance their skills, knowledge, and qualifications.

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At the local level, colleges need to reexamine and update existing hiring practices to ensure they are recruiting a plethora of qualified candidates. Colleges interested in recruiting more Blacks women and other minorities should be intentional on how and where they are recruiting these potential candidates. Once these individuals are employed on their campuses, it is beneficial for the campus leaders to develop strategies for retaining these employees. Strong retention efforts can promote a sense of being wanted, valued, and appreciated. Members of the search committee need to be more open-minded, objective, and inclusive when interviewing candidates that may not look or sound like them. To assist with these approaches, search committees should consist of a diverse mixture of employees throughout the campus, provided a clear and concise description of the job announcement and requirements, knowledgeable of the department and its vision, and informed of the expectations of potential candidates.

The third significant implication was a conversation about mentors. Mentors contributed greatly into the support and professional development of the participants. Mentors came from different areas such as family members, supervisors, church members, other colleges and organizations, and friends. At the individual level, Black women need to secure at least one dependable mentor for additional knowledge, guidance, and support. Mentors are viewed as a fundamental component in the professional and personal growth of individuals. In addition to obtaining a mentor, Black women should be willing to be mentors to others, especially those individuals just beginning their professional careers.

At the local level, colleges could implement a mentoring program in which new employees are paired with experienced employees to acclimate these individuals to the campus and the campus culture. New employees can meet with their assigned mentor on a weekly basis for the first thirty days and then moved to a monthly meeting schedule thereafter. This

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mentoring relationship can ensure new hires are adjusting to campus environment, developing their professional identity, making connections, and building relationships to promote the mission and vision of the college. Other approaches colleges could incorporate is professional development opportunities focused on strategies for establishing mentoring and networking relationships.

At the community level, professional organizations could establish mentoring connections among their group members, and also form partnerships with local colleges to provide mentors with interested individuals.

These implications for practice at the individual, local, and community level would significantly increase social identity awareness among Black women and their colleagues. These recommendations for practice should be considered across all student service departments, and the college as a whole, to help increase social identity awareness and understanding among Black women and their interactions with fellow colleagues.

Recommendations for Future Research

There are numerous studies on the experiences of Black women in higher education. However, these studies are focused on their roles and experiences as Presidents, senior-level administrators, and faculty members with minimal recognition on entry and mid-level administrative positions. There is also an abundance of literature on the concept of mentors and mentorships, and how these relationships are essential to the development personal and professional growth, particularly with Black women professionals. Additional studies have even been conducted on the marginalized status of Black women at varying levels within higher education. However, there is limited research on the social identity of Black women and how

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these identities are developed and used throughout their lives. This section will examine and discuss some recommendations for future research.

This study provided an introduction on how social identities affect leadership aspirations. The three primary identities discussed were race, gender and age. Additional research that explored social identities such as class, religion, sexual orientation, ability, and culture could strengthen the level of social identity awareness among Black women college professionals. In addition, more studies related to understanding social identities from the perspective of Black women college professionals and how this population utilizes various social identities to navigate their professional roles and responsibilities to increase their professional success are needed.

This study focused on Black women college professional describing their social identity as they aspire to be leaders in their professional roles. Further research that specifically focused on the identity development of Black women would be beneficial in creating awareness and understanding on the important nature of social identities, particularly in the working environment. This awareness can assist Black women with carefully crafting a positive self-image through professional development opportunities.

This study sampled Black women college professionals at public community colleges with in one state. Additional research could focus on comparative analysis studies such as; comparing the experiences and perceptions of Black women college professionals in different geographic regions with the state and comparing the different sizes of the colleges. Future studies could also incorporate public and private colleges in various states.

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Chapter Summary

The purpose of this study was to explore how Black women college professionals described their social identity while aspiring to be leaders in their professional roles. Specifically, this study sought to examine strategies for developing and retaining the social identities of Black women college professionals, identify strategies to assist with establishing successful work environments, and uncover how these professionals' experiences and aspirations are shaped through the social interactions with others within their respective workplace. This study confirms that social identities are important, and that certain identities can impact how people view themselves and how they are viewed by others.

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Appendix A

Email to Potential Participants

My name is Samantheo Marcellus and I am a doctoral student at Northeastern University, where I am completing the requirements for a Doctor of Education. I would like to invite you to participate in my research study as part of my doctoral thesis. The purpose of this research study is to explore how mid-career Black women working in community colleges describe their social identity as they aspire to leadership roles.

If you are interested in participating in my research study, you will need to complete a screening process to ensure that you meet the study's qualification. The screening should last no longer than 10 minutes and can be conducted by phone. During the screening, you will be asked basic demographic questions, along with your position title, department, and number of years you have worked at a community college.

After the screening, I will request your participant in a formal interview that will last between 30 to 60 minutes. The formal interview will be recorded and transcribed. You will have an opportunity to review the transcription to clarify the information discussed and provide additional feedback as needed.

Please note that participation in the study is voluntary. Real names will not be used and any personal identifying information will remain confidential. Only the researchers will know that you participated in this study. You can withdraw at any time. You will not be paid for your participation in this study, and there are no direct benefits to you for your participation. However, on a positive note, your responses can assist with developing best practices for Black women college professionals that may be struggling with establishing a respected social identity in the workplace.

If you decide to participate or have any questions, please email at xxxxx@xxxx.xxx. I may call you to follow – up, therefore, please email me if you do not wish to receive a follow-up phone call. Otherwise, I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

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Appendix B

UNSIGNED INFORMED CONSENT FORM

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Northeastern University, Department of Education: College of Professional Studies

Name of Investigator(s): Principal Investigator, Dr. Margaret Gorman and Samantheo Marcellus, Doctoral Student

Title of Project: Mapping Professional Working Experiences of Black Women: A Narrative Research Study exploring mid-career Black Women's Social Identity as they aspire to be leaders in their professional roles.

Request to Participate in Research

We would like to invite you to take part in a research project. The purpose of this research is to explore how mid-career Black women working in community colleges describe their social identity as they aspire into leadership roles. Specifically, this study seeks to focus attention on the identity management strategies utilized to uncover how these mid-career professionals' experiences and aspirations are shaped through the social structures and interactions with others within their respective workplace.

You must be at least 18 years old to be in this research project

The study will take place at a location of the participant's choosing and will take about 30 to 60 minutes for one interview session. If you decide to take part in this study, I will ask you to participate in a one-on-one semi-structured interview about your experiences of being a Black women college professional.

Interviews will be conducted either in person, via a teleconferencing medium using video and audio elements (e.g. Skype) or via a standard telephone interview. If we are meeting in person, the interview will take place at a location of your choosing in which your feel comfortable and can speak freely. If you elect a teleconference or phone interview, I ask that you choose a quiet location, where you are comfortable and can speak freely without interruptions during the interview. I will record the interview digitally using an audio recording device and save it to MP3 format for later transcription. Once a text transcript is made of the recorded interview, I will provide a copy to you so you may review for accuracy and add any additional comments.

There are no foreseeable risks or discomforts to you for taking part in this study.

There are no direct benefits to you for participating in the study. However, your answers may help us to learn more about the social identity development of Black women working as college professional in higher education

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Your part in this study will be handled in a confidential manner. Only the researchers will know that you participated in this study. Any reports or publications based on this research will use only group data and will not identify you or any individual as being of this project.

The decision to participate in this research project is up to you. You do not have to participate and you can refuse to answer any question. Even if you begin the study, you may withdraw at any time.

You will not be paid for your participation in this study.

If you have any questions about this study, please feel free to call Samantheo Marcellus, xxxxxx@husky.neu.edu or by phone at 000-000-0000, the person mainly responsible for the research. You can also contact Dr. Margaret Gorman, xxxxxxx@neu.edu, the Principal Investigator.

If you have any questions about your rights in this research, you may contact Nan C. Regina, Director, Human Subject Research Protection, 490 Renaissance Park, Northeastern University, Boston, MA 02115. Tel: 000-000-0000, Email: xxxxxxx@neu.edu. You may call anonymously if you wish.

You may keep this form for yourself.

Thank you.

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Appendix C

Interview Questions

Interview Question	Linked Theoretical Framework	Concept
I would like to begin the interview by asking some background questions about your career journey and pathway.		
1. Tell me about your career path so far? The progress of your career. What are the experiences and opportunity that you have had? a. Where have you been? b. Where are you now? c. Where do you aspire to be?		Career pathway
2. How do you view yourself as a professional? a. Which qualities/characteristics have helped you? b. Which qualities/characteristics may not be as helpful?	Social Identity Theory	Leadership Self-concept / Self-Image
Now let's talk about your social interactions with colleagues in the workplace. 3. At work, which group of individuals do you tend to socialize with more? Why? a. Which group of individuals do you tend to limit your contact with? Why?	Social Identity Theory	Social identification Social categorization Social groups
4. What characteristics are important to you when developing relationships with colleagues? a. Why are these characteristic important to you? b. Which characteristics are least favorable to you?	Social Identity Theory	Social identification Social categorization
5. When putting together a committee or a working team, how do you go about selecting the members of this committee/team? a. What types of individuals are you looking for?	Social Identity Theory	Social groups Social categorization Social comparison
6. As an administrator, you may face challenging situations at work. What challenging situations have your encountered? a. What made these situations challenging? b. Who did you talk with to receive advice and/or support? c. How and why did you select these individuals?	Social Identity Theory	Intergroup conflict In-group / Out-group
7. Tell me about a time when you had a new idea or recommendation about a process or procedure that could improve systems or operations in some manner?	Social Identity Theory	Intergroup conflict In-group / Out-group

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a. What was the idea/recommendation? b. How was your idea/recommendation received by others? c. Why do you think that was the case? d. If not well-received or supported, who did you talk to, whether it was to vent or to receive support? Why did you select these individuals?		
8. If you are able to serve on hiring committees, what would be the practices of the committee that you hope to see to ensure a diverse and robust view of candidates? a. In comparison to some of your colleagues, what do you think their hiring practices would be?	Social Identity Theory	Social identification Social categorization
Now I would like to ask you some questions surrounding your development, mentoring, and networking experiences 9. Throughout your career, how did networking contribute to your success? a. How have you developed your network? b. What types of individuals are in your network? c. How do you feel these compare to some of your work colleagues?	Social Identity Theory	Social identification Social comparison Social categorization In-group / Out-group
10. Who do you perceive as a great role model for you and why? a. How did this relationship develop? b. What were the benefits to you? c. How does your description compare to some of your work colleagues? (Meaning: would they select similar individuals?)	Social Identity Theory	Social identification In-group / Out-group
11. Tell me about your experiences with being a mentor? What about a mentee? a. In what ways were your mentors beneficial to you? b. How do you try to be beneficial to your mentees? c. How does this compare to some of your colleagues mentoring experiences?	Social Identity Theory	Social identification Social comparison In-group / Out-group
Now, let's jump ahead about five to ten years… 12. In five to ten years, what type of career experiences do you aspire to have? a. What does the pathway look like to obtain these experiences? The steps you have taken? b. Who are the individuals that may have assisted on this particular pathway? c. How do you think these experiences compare to some of your colleagues?	Social Identity Theory	Social identification Social comparison In-group / Out-group
13. Looking back over your career journey and the experiences that have shaped you into who you are today, what advice would you give someone who is just starting out?	Social Identity Theory	Social identification Social comparison Social categorization
14. In five to seven years from now, if your community college workplace had a more diverse profile, what would that look like?	Social Identity Theory	Social identification Social comparison

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a. What would be needed to get your community college there?		Social categorization
15. Other than your position or formal role, what experiences in the workplace have helped you become who you are professionally? a. What innovated practices or opportunities in your workplace assist individuals with the option to develop professionally? (serving on a committee, participating in a new idea) b. Do you think that these opportunities have been made available to everyone? If not, who are the individuals that selected and why do you think that is the reason?	Social Identity Theory	Social identification Social comparison Social categorization In-group / Out-group

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Appendix D

Interview Question Matrix

Participants 1-6

Interview Question	Joan	Sally	Mary	Meg	Reba
Career Path	Business world to Higher education	Secondary education to High education	Civil engineer to Higher education	Always been in Higher education in some form	Continuing Education to Student Services
Professional Characteristics	Mission focused Out of the box thinker	Encourager Change Agent	Solution focused Race: must work harder to be taken serious	Reliable Fair / Consistent	Integrity Motivated
Social Interactions	No identified social group Strategic	Sociable	Socialization kept to a minimal	Co-workers, trying to build an collaborative environment	Sisters – other Black females "Social butterfly"
Relationships	Good thinkers team players	Sense of integrity Authentic	Open communicator Very informative	Dependable Honest	Honest Ethical Transparency
Working Committees/ Teams	Diversity Candid attitude Naysayers	Inclusive Trustworthy	Diversity	Strength of individuals "Do they have passion"	Plethora of different persons
Challenging Situations	Leading a new department	Financial and Staffing issues	Situation with a colleague regarding communication style	Work place bullying	Working at the satellite campus
New Ideas / Recommendations	Title III work	Program to recruit and increase student enrollment	New sign in process for students	Benchmark project – developing a co-curricular transcript	Adding curriculum programs and resources to the satellite campus
Hiring committees	Process still needs work, need have clear intentions Diversity	Open-minded, fair, inclusive	Diversity	People knowledgeable about the position	Plethora of qualified and diverse candidates

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Networking	Learn about myself Utilize environment to grow	Develop leadership skills Confidence Friendships	At first, didn't appreciate networking It is vital in higher education	Not sure how to do it Understand the value	Builds and enhances your skills and abilities
Roles Models	Mother Women leaders in politics	Parents Past co-worker	Parents Females in leadership positions	Senior Vice President Family member	Mother and grandmother (spirituality) President Obama
Mentoring	Helping people Sharing knowledge Hard to be a mentee	Supportive Engaged Listener Critical thinker	Assist with understanding the dynamics in higher education	Helping to build people Identify deficiencies	Providing helpful information Supportive
Career Experiences	More in charge of time Consulting, speaking, or teaching in Higher education	Looking at retirement Volunteer Political Aspirations	Moving upward Staying open to opportunities	Position were I'm leading a department Grow professionally	Dean or Vice President Finish terminal degree
Advice to others	Be open to new experiences Be open to feedback Take advantage of opportunities	Don't get discouraged Separate personal from professional	Make sure this is what you want to do/be flexible Understand the politics	Take advantage of opportunities Don't limit yourself	Know what you want Stay focused Don't stop Stay prayerful
More diverse workplace	Diverse race of people in leadership positions	More people of color More people with noticeable physical disabilities	More minorities as faculty and administrators Address culture of the workplace	Be mindful Community Dialogue about different issue	More diverse faculty Develop strategies to recruit more minorities
Professional Development Opportunities	Non-profit boards Leadership roles in church	Serving and chairing committees Taking advantage of opportunities	Willingness to serve/volunteer	Leadership modules Think about the solution to problems	Seeing and addressing a need

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Participants 6-10

Interview Question	Betty	Nancy	Cary	Carla	Sara
Career Path	Retail to Financial Aid (Higher Education)	Secondary Education to Higher Education	Work study student to Higher Education	Secondary Education to Higher Education	Social Services to Higher Education
Professional Characteristics	Empathic Serious Open minded	Expects excellence Accountability	Optimistic Hard working	Unique, Straight-forward Compassionate	Confident Age, Race, Gender
Social Interactions	Try not to exclude Avoid click-ish groups	Strategic and intentional	Connect with individuals that can assist with aspects of the position	Try to build rapport with everyone No set group	Interact with counterparts: Deans, Vice President, etc.
Relationships	Approachable Good listener Confidentiality	"Go-getters" Solution-focused Innovators	Open-minded, honest, good communicators	Authentic Reliable Mission focused	Trust, Respect, and Open communication
Working Committees/ Teams	Diverse Knowledgeable	Focused on outcomes Interact with individuals that have influence	Expertise	Approach people individually and ask for their assistance	Diversity Detail-oriented Out of box thinkers
Challenging Situations	A negative response from the college president about minority students	Incompetent supervisor	Budgeting Issues (Lack of funding for a program)	Lack of communication Transparency	Being a young administrator Tough transition
New Ideas / Recommendations	Implementing degree audit to assist with registration	21st century learning and engagement center	Duty list for employees	Career and college promise program (the creation of advisor or liaisons) and Improving Career Fair	Developing an Early college program
Hiring committees	Need more work and diverse members	Stop checking the boxes Always one black face on the committee	Diversity Open-minded Optimistic, Objective	Diversity Maybe some student involvement	Needs to improvement advertise in diverse locations

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Networking	Contributed greatly	Very intentional Slow and steady Need to make connections and build relationships	Great amount Enhances experiences and put you in tune with different opportunities	Social media to connect Friends from school Conferences	Play a huge role Ability to build new ideas and see the world from a different perspective
Roles Models	Previous supervisor Other professional Black women	Three specific role models Strong values and consistent	Former supervisor (like a mother figure)	Mother and grandmother	Mother
Mentoring	Appreciation of knowledge shared	Accountability Listening Ear Find ways to connect	Receive and give advice on life lessons	Strengthen me emotionally Encourage to develop a tough skin	Sharing and receiving information and resources
Career Experiences	Advance to the next level - Associate Vice President/Dean	Unsure Involved in nonprofit work Political activity	Further education Become a more innovative teacher	Further education Career advancement (Dean, maybe college president)	Further education, and possible career advancement, would like to start a family
Advice to others	Be true to yourself Open-minded Positive attitude	Do a lot of self-discovery	Complete education first Don't limit yourself Be optimistic, open-minded, and objective	Know your role – be a responder at all times Think and speak for those individuals that are afraid or have not desire	Be open to learning Never be afraid to ask questions Take initiative and do your homework
More diverse workplace	More African American in leadership positions Eliminate the upper leaders that are unfair	Diversity is not just about ethnicity Attitude of inclusivity	Campus is pretty diverse Do more hiring on the outside of the college and less promoting from within	I don't see the campus become more diverse Hesitant to hire qualified persons, especially African American women	More women and minorities in administrative roles
Professional Development Opportunities	Admiring professional individuals	Interacting with students	Conferences and professional development activities	Building a trustworthy network Being honest, genuine Knowing your environment	Interacting with students Become more technological

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Appendix E

Coding Samples – NVivo

Node	# of Sources	# of Reference
Race-gender	7	58
Identity	10	91
Social interactions	7	40
Relationships/building relationships	10	75
Diversity - Inclusion	10	90
Mentoring	10	35
Support Systems	9	50
Student focused	10	38
Work place conflicts	10	39
Transparency	10	63
Networking	10	27

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Appendix F

Sample of Codes Grouped by Category

Example of Codes – In Vivo	**Category**
Social with everyone – no social group, socializing is kept minimal, socialize with other Black females (sisters), socialization is strategic	Social Interactions
More diversity of race in leadership position, more diversity in faculty, staff, and students, diverse ideas and ways of thinking, people of color and noticeable disabilities, attitude of inclusivity	Diversity
Mission- driven, solution focused, clear sense of understanding, outside of the box thinker, consistent, reliable, integrity, encourager, motivator, change agent, learner, caring/supportive	Identity
Keep working relationship clean, develop relationships with individuals that possess characteristics/qualities similar to me,	Relationships
Networking: developing leadership skills, confidence, and friendships, move out of comfort zone, be more open minded **Mentoring**: Understanding the dynamics of administration, accountability, provide advice, allowed to vent, guidance	Support systems (mentors/networking)
Being aware and careful of how you present yourself and what other know about you. Not being approachable, tend to gravitate to other black people, Black women syndrome (the attitude, sass, and aggressiveness)	Race/Gender

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