(RE)INVENTING IN THE ‘DARK’:  
AFRICAN AMERICAN WOMEN AND PRESIDENTIAL LEADERSHIP

DISSERTATION

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for  
the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the Graduate  
School of The Ohio State University

By  
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The purpose of this qualitative study is to explore the leadership experiences of four African American women college presidents serving at Historically Black Colleges and Universities and Predominantly White Institutions. Three main inquiries guide the research. First, how do African American women college presidents “make sense” of presidential leadership? In the same manner, how does being a “woman” and “of color” influence and/or inform their crafting of a presidential identity? Further, what are the strategies or mechanisms they employ or display, which enable them to “perform” the presidency?

A triangulated, interdisciplinary framework, consisting of Black Feminist Thought, an invention of ethos and “performance” as theory, provides the study with its theoretical backbone. Methodologically, it borrows elements from traditional and critical ethnography, while relying on the techniques of interviewing and participant-observation. Both methods are used to solicit the personal and professional narratives and testaments of each woman.

Initial findings from this study suggest that the four African American women “make sense” of presidential leadership by recalling familial expectations; being aware of their raced and gendered realities; entering into personal and professional role model- and mentorships; relying on faith; and, developing value systems. Despite the (mis)
conceptions and perceptions documented generally in the research on Black women professionals, these women invent presidential identities and ethoi by identifying as *change agents* and committing to their vocational purpose. In the same manner, while they “perform” the presidency in the most “traditional” sense (i.e., writing and giving speeches), they also *become* their “performances” by employing numerous rhetorical strategies and mechanisms that have been historically linked to the African American female experience.
This work is dedicated to the early African American women school mothers, headmistresses, and principals upon whose shoulders previous, current and future Black women institutional leaders stand.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

But hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what he already has? But if we hope for what we do not have, we wait for it patiently.

(Romans 8: 24-25, New International Version)

I don’t feel no ways tired.
I’ve come to far from where I started from.
Nobody told me that the road would be easy.
I don’t believe he brought me this far to leave me.

(Cleveland, 1990)

I make no apologies for the length of this acknowledgments section. While I can take some of the credit for my personal and professional successes thus far, I am greatly indebted to numerous individuals who have guided, nurtured and encouraged me along the way. First, I must acknowledge my maker. Throughout my thirty-two years of life, I have been the recipient of his amazing grace. His goodness and mercy have been with me—especially over the last seven years while I pursued my master’s and doctoral degrees. I know this because at various points during this process, when I tried to boldly inform him of my intentions, he in all his goodness, just laughed. It was in these moments, through some encounter or occasion that he would quickly remind me that it was he and not I, who was in control. I thank him for keeping me on his treadmill and for suggesting the right pace.

I also have the incredible responsibility of thanking the numerous individuals whom he has placed in my life—many who have offered significant amounts of positive encouragement and feedback. Thank you to the three individuals who constituted my
dissertation committee. They have been with me a majority of the way. To the woman that I want to mimic when I grow up and become a university professor and administrator, Professor Jacqueline Jones Royster, thank you for your educational and professional advice and service. When I first engaged with you during an informal interview and then later sat in your Rhetoric, Race and Gender course on a weekly basis, I was mesmerized and literally blown away by your passion for the rhetorical contributions of African American women orators and writers. Your scholarship reminds me that women of color have voices and narratives to tell that are not only meant for immediate audiences, but external ones as well.

There is another sister-friend who I must thank. She has shaped my theoretical and epistemological ways of seeing the world and is a budding scholar in her own right, Assistant Professor Adrienne Dixson. You have been a teacher and mentor; and, confirmed for me that there are critical theories and standpoints that are credible and speak to the lived experiences of people of color. Who knew that a brief conversation in the bottom of Ramseyer Hall would develop into what I hope will continue to be a lifelong friendship. You truly exemplify the characteristic of fortitude; and, have taught me what it means to “lean on the shield.”

Certainly, I would not be where I am today, personally and professionally, without the guidance and assistance of Associate Professor Ada Demb. Over seven years, you and I have collaborated on and produced meaningful coursework, a decent thesis, this body of work and most importantly, a wonderful relationship. Not only have you been there during the challenging moments, but also on the other side, when the “doors have opened” to welcome me through. Further, your ability to dissect and edit a sentence
is a writing task that I work towards every day. I cannot thank you enough for your advisor- and mentorship—especially on those days when I was tired and on the verge of tears and even now as I prepare to depart OSU as one of your many protégés.

Throughout my graduate journey, I have entered spaces and encountered numerous individuals whom have shaped and nurtured me. They too deserve a significant amount of applause, including my former higher education professors: Leonard L. Baird; Philip T.K. Daniel; Kandace Hinton; and, Robert Rodgers. Other professors, who have made a difference in my academic life and influenced my scholarship, are Peter Demerath; Korie Edwards; Beverly Gordon; Helen Marks; Antoinette Miranda; Tatiana Suspitsyna; and, William E. Nelson. Even though Susan Jones departed OSU a few years ago, she too has been with me throughout this entire graduate process. Had I not had the opportunity to experience her warm demeanor in 2001 or understand her appreciation for diversity, the initial step that I took when I entered Ramseyer Hall on Graduate Student Orientation Day might have not occurred.

Some of what follows in this research study came to fruition as a result of the individuals who work every day in the “trenches” of higher education. A special thank you is extended to some of my professors’ administrative assistants: Karen Fontanini; Dawn Nolen; and, Nadine Denton. Whenever I needed assistance, they always accommodated my requests or were diligent in passing along phone and e-mail messages. Likewise, I cannot forget the untiring efforts of Deborah Zabloudil. I have often referred to her as a magician, because in an instance, she can make things happen! Thank you for all of your magical assistance over the years.
Planning and implementing this research study was not a “free” task. Thus, I would like to extend a special thank you to the School of Educational Policy and Leadership, as well as the Higher Education and Student Affairs program, for awarding me a Porterfield-Dickens Graduate Research Award and the Do Hai Chun Graduate Fellowship. Likewise, I am eternally grateful for the financial recognition and support that I received from OSU’s Department of Women’s Studies through a Coca Cola Critical Difference for Women Grant for Research on Women, Gender and Gender Equity. Collectively, all of these monetary resources permitted me to dedicate serious time to travel; and, the processes of data collection, transcription and writing.

“I am” because of a group of supportive individuals, many who are already members of the “community of scholars.” I want to thank the five other African American women who entered this doctoral endeavor with me and two in particular: Kim Stokes and Dwan Robinson. Dwan has been a like a “big sister;” and, has not only offered words of reassurance, but nourished me with her delicious jerk turkey and peach cobbler. Words cannot express the gratitude that I have for Kim Stokes (and Will). Not only has she been a sister-friend and a fervent supporter, but also an other-mother to my son, Kenneth, Jr. I am truly indebted to her (and Will) for taking my son on school holidays and weekends so I could finish this task. She truly represents the best of what the South has to offer!

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For the most part, my professional home has been at Capital University. I would like to thank all of the students who would come into my office, steal five minutes of my time and then leave me with a few words of encouragement. Many were calling me “Dr.” even before it became a reality. I have to thank my (former) immediate supervisor, Gay Steele; and, her supervisor as well, Betty M. Lovelace. Gay knows that she maintains a special place in my heart. As early as 2002, she saw gifts in me and was instrumental in nurturing them. What she does not know is that on those days when she would offer me something, whether it was time to write, meditate or fellowship, it was just what I needed. I am eternally grateful for her, and her delicious slices of key lime cheese and pound cake! The same can be said about Dr. Lovelace. I aspire to be just like her—a woman of color who is not only “bad” and “fierce,” but “calm, cool and collected.” Thank you for your example and belief in me.

I would also like to thank the children, tutors, families and board (especially Reverend Ann Palmerton) affiliated with the After School Academic Program at Broad Street Presbyterian Church. For a year-and-a-half, all of these individuals became a part of my life. They taught me the true meaning of service-learning, and reinforced my belief in education—as a profession and area of study. Likewise, I cannot forget the congregants at Advent United Church of Christ who always provided words of inspiration. Thank you to Reverend Susan K. Smith, Cynthia Tyson and Judy Alston, all
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God had a Ph.D. suit just for me waiting in the right department store. It was not made for anyone else. While others on the rack were colorful and nice fits, there was only one made for me.

Reverend Battle, I want you to know that I have found my suit and am ready to put it on!

While I have dwelled in Columbus, Ohio for the past seven years, I am a North Carolinian at heart. So many people, both in Charlotte and Raleigh, have been praying for and lifting me up. Thank you to my fellow alumnae from Johnson C. Smith University, Tavia Tubbs and Heather Stowe. They have provided words of encouragement throughout this entire process. My sorority sisters, Dannerlyn Crosland and Krista Terrell, have not only been there to hold my hand; but, even to “get me told” when it was necessary! There are several former Smith professors and administrators who have played an important role in my getting to this point, including Debra Frasier; Ronald Hunady; and, Rufus Pettis. Likewise, I cannot forget all of the young and mature women of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Incorporated (Charlotte Alumnae, Gamma Lambda and Raleigh Alumnae Chapters) who have touched my life and vice versa.

My acknowledgments section would be incomplete if I did not recognize or thank the people in my life who have taught me about determination and discipline: my family. To my maternal grandparents, “Pookie” and “MaMa,” thank you for being an amazing inspiration and real example of Black love. “Pookie,” I never understood why you always stressed the importance of “doing my lesson, and not half-stepping,” but I do now. Then,
you were teaching me about dedication and the importance of routine. “MaMa,” you know how you would get on my nerves whenever we studied together; and, I misspelled or mispronounced a word. Instead of picking up where we had left off, you would start all over at the beginning of the lesson. You were teaching me about patience and the importance of following through. Both of you have been God-sends!

While I am the oldest, my two younger siblings have also taught me about setting a good example and the value of living. DaVon, thank you for showing me that you can live a fulfilled life even when you “march to the beat of your own drum.” And to D’Weston, another scholar-in-training, can I have the privilege of writing with you in the near future—Haywood and Haywood, (200?) will yield some powerful discourse!

There are other family members whom I cannot forget—thank you to my paternal family members, Granddaddy Haywood; Aunts Denise and Marielle (and families); Great Aunt Audrey and Great Uncle Sonny. And to the woman, who always insisted that I pick up a book and read, thank you to my Grandma Haywood for introducing me to the value of education and demonstrating that all children matter! Likewise, numerous kudos are extended to Great Aunt Anna, Cousin Shawnda, Great Aunt Jean, Larie Culbreth (and family) and other cousins and family friends. Your unwavering support and prayers have not gone unnoticed!

I would also like to send a huge shout-out to the neighbors, teachers and mentors whose paths I crossed while as a student at Fuller Elementary, Carnage Middle and Enloe High Schools. In particular, thank you to Mr. William Jordan for teaching me to be proud of my “dark testament.” In the same manner, I cannot forget all of the women and men who nurtured and shaped me through various civic and social organizations, including
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My introduction to and matriculation through graduate school, and now graduation, has been a long time coming. There are a few more individuals who deserve incredible praise. Thank you to the four African American women college presidents who participated in this study. While I cannot list your given names here, please know that you have been “solidified” in a piece of work—one that I hope will contribute to and strengthen the literature on Black women institutional leaders. Your kindness and hospitality will not be forgotten.

To my father, who is deceased, thank you for just “being you” and teaching me, like your female reincarnation DaVon, that in life you do have to “stop and smell the roses.” You have never left my side. Two men began this graduate school journey with me seven years ago; and, they are still here: Kenneth, Sr. and Kenneth, Jr. To the first, thanks for being a friend and partner. Your “tell it like it is” attitude has always balanced me—even when I did not want to hear it. Our life arrangement has not always been ideal; but, through it all we made it! To the latter, Kenneth, Jr., who means everything to me, you will understand one day why “Mommy always had to sit in front of the computer.” Even at this age, you have sacrificed so much so that I could accomplish my dreams. Now, I owe you. You possess tremendous promise and I look forward to going through this same process with you, eighteen years down the road when I attend your master’s and then doctoral commencement.
I have often shared with others that *Webster’s Dictionary* still has not created the words which accurately describe my mother, Dante B. Haywood. As a child, I would hear her tell people that the role of a mother was “to go to the ends of the earth” for her children. When I say this woman has traveled by foot, air and water to ensure the best for me (and my siblings), she has! I aspire to be half the woman and mother she is! I love her because God made it possible to do so. She has always been my biggest cheerleader.

Thus, I give her permission, at this point in my life, to cheer as loud as she wants!

Thanks, Ma!
VITA

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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

…the history of the Black woman’s contribution to education in general remains to be written…

(Guy-Sheftall, 1982, p. 279)

The authentic historian of Black women, therefore, cannot reside in the ivory tower or its shadows trying to see Black women through her master’s telescope. From way up there, all the observer will see is a shadow. She will not be able to hear Black women moan and sing.

(Omolade, 1994, p. 107)

1.1 A Contextual Offering…

I cannot recall a time in my life when I have not been surrounded by strong and determined African American women. As a child, I observed my mother, maternal and paternal grandmothers, and a host of female aunts and cousins, pour, not only love and discipline into their children; but, also serve as models of positive, self-identity. Similar behaviors were exhibited by the other-mothers in my Southeast Raleigh community (James, 1993). From church pews to beauty salons, civic organizations and social clubs, I carefully watched their personal and professional “performances.” All of these women knew “who they were,” honored their “Blackness” and “woman-ness” and stood tall—at least in the eyes of a young African American girl.

As I grew and matured, another cadre of Black women intrigued me. They were the women who stood in front of classrooms; led school assemblies; and, greeted
individuals when they entered the principal’s office. My first introduction to an African American woman “in charge” was my paternal grandmother, Norma W. Haywood. She was a teacher and master principal for more than thirty years. When I was younger, I watched her effectively guide and inspire school teachers and staff members. While her professional demeanor could come across as stern and serious, she made every child that walked through her school’s doors the focus of her attention. I continued to encounter other Black women like her as I progressed through my elementary and secondary schools. Figuratively-speaking, I somewhat hit the educational administrative “jackpot” when I enrolled at my undergraduate institution, Johnson C. Smith University.

Women of color not only served as directors, deans and vice-presidents, but as the president too. Dorothy C. Yancy, an alumna of Smith, was the institution’s first female president. I was fortunate to have the opportunity to interact with Dr. Yancy in two different capacities. The first was when I was elected to serve as a student representative on Smith’s board of trustees. At our quarterly meetings, I watched in “awe,” as she addressed the institution’s academic and financial statuses, as well as formed and negotiated corporate and alumni partnerships.

The second opportunity was when she hired me to serve as an admissions counselor (and later as the assistant director of Admissions). Once again, I had the opportunity to see her facilitate and manage the day-to-day operations and inner workings of Smith. Her presidential tasks were numerous. For example, she would lead an executive cabinet meeting in the morning; chat with students over lunch in the cafeteria; walk the college grounds by late-afternoon; and, then entertain members of student government in her office before leaving campus late into the evening. She was also
known for “checking in and up” on various university offices. I do not think a week went by when she did not peek her head into the Admissions Office to inquire about the staff and the “numbers.”

When I departed Smith, I ended up working under the presidential tutelage of another African American woman institutional leader, Algeania W. Freeman, of Livingstone College. Similar to my experiences with Dr. Yancy, I also found myself carefully monitoring and observing Dr. Freeman’s every move. I was amazed at how she “navigated” the presidential maze at a college that had never experienced institutional leadership under a woman. I was equally impressed with how she handled the daily operations of historically-Black Livingstone and provided direction to its faculty, staff and student bodies, while also answering to, but working with a board of trustees numerically dominated by men of color. A number of the men who served on Livingstone’s board were pastoral leaders and Bishops in the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church.

Since returning to graduate school seven years ago, and studying student affairs, educational administration and higher education, I have often reflected on my time spent with these two women. Likewise, I have thought about what I might ask or say about their presidential tenures if given the chance to be in their presence once again. To some extent, the research study that follows provides the opportunity to commence this long-awaited discussion about Black women and presidential leadership. While it does not directly depict conversations with or observations of Drs. Yancy or Freeman, it does “bring to life” the presidential narratives of four of their fellow African American female peers.
1.2 Research Purpose and Inquiries

The purpose of this study is to explore the leadership experiences of African American women college presidents serving at Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) and Predominantly White Institutions (PWI). Three main inquiries guide the research. First, how do African American women college presidents “make sense” of presidential leadership? In the same manner, how does being a “woman” and “of color” influence and/or inform their crafting of a presidential identity? Further, what are the strategies or mechanisms they employ or display, which enable them to “perform” the presidency?

1.3 Historical Overview and Research Dilemma

The institutional presidency is one of the most prestigious positions within higher education; and, educational scholars remain interested in and fascinated by the individuals who occupy the executive role. Over the last thirty years, institutional leaders have been examined demographically (American Council on Education, 2007; Corrigan, 2002; Greene, 1988); educationally and occupationally (Birnbaum and Umbach, 2001; Boggs, 1988; Wessel and Keim, 1994); and once in office, professionally (Kerr, 1984).

A segment of the literature has also been dedicated to the exploration of presidential leadership. Building heavily on the historical and conceptual foundations of leadership, scholars have researched the traits, behaviors, contexts and styles of college and university chief executive officers (Bensimon, Neumann and Birnbaum, 2000). For instance, Cohen and March (1974) characterize presidents by situating them within eight different categories. Others suggest preferred skill sets (Kerr and Gade, 1986); or from
presidential experiences of their own, offer an array of leadership “dos and don’ts”
(Carbone, 1981; Guthrie, 2001). In a like manner, Bornstein (2003) and Tierney (2000)
sieve leadership through stylistic, cultural and symbolic filters.

While these studies provide a basic understanding of presidential leadership, other
scholars whose research agendas are committed to examining the presidential experiences
of women, suggest that traditional leadership concepts, definitions and theories reflect a
these concepts, definitions and theories have “been derived from the description and
analysis of male leaders reported by male researchers” (p. 15). Researchers like Jablonski
(1993) argue that exploring women’s leadership from a “male” perspective does little
justice because their modes and styles may not “fall precisely into traditional organization
models” (p. 244). Bensimon (1989) contends that if colleges and universities, as well as
higher education in general, desire to understand the ways in which women define and
perform presidential leadership, then they must do so from a gender-informed
perspective.

Feminist-tinged research has examined women (in general and as institutional
leaders) and their cognitive processes (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger and Tarule, 1997);
stylistic preferences (Guido-DiBrito, Noteboom, Nathan and Fenty, 1996; Nidiffer, 2001;
Sagara and Johnsrud, 1988); leadership and the culture of gender (Klenke, 1995); self-
and others’ perceptions (Jablonski, 1993; Manzo, 2001); and, their work/life balance
(Jacobson, 2002). Collectively, these perspectives advance the notion that women
encounter, think about and exhibit leadership differently than their male presidential
counterparts.
However, it should also be noted that some of the aforementioned studies’ findings derive largely from the presidential leadership experiences of Euro-American women. On the research surface, they counter the Eurocentric maleness of presidential leadership, but also in many instances, still privilege Eurocentric femaleness. Broadly-speaking, they do not describe or indicate how the dualities of race and gender enter into and contribute to the presidential leadership conversation.

Women of color have served in executive leadership roles since the founding of the Institute for Colored Youth in 1837; but, rarely have their conceptions, perceptions and leadership experiences been at the center of higher education research (Guy-Sheftall, 1982; Jones, 1992). African American feminist-minded scholars, like Parker and olgivie (1996) have long argued that the literature pertaining to Black women institutional leaders should be explored from “their cultural point of view” and not those of others (p. 190). The research of Collier-Thomas (1982) concurs and suggests that the lives of Black women be explored apart from other racialized and gendered bodies—primarily because their constructions of reality “have been in very specific ways different from that of Black males and White females” (p. 174).

This study takes into consideration the points of Collier-Thomas (1982) and Parker and olgivie (1996). It is mainly concerned with the leadership experiences of four African American women and how they conceive of and craft a presidential identity, as well as “perform” the institutional role. I center their personal and professional lives and argue that they “make sense” of and rearticulate presidential leadership, by borrowing from the research of Royster (2000) and Collins (2000). Royster, in her work on nineteenth century African American women writers, steps out of the traditional fold and
suggests that Black women just do not conceive of thoughts or ideas. They sense-make or
“…make obvious, visible, and flexible what has been hidden and assumed” (p. 49). In
other words, African American women:

…make sense of lives and conditions that to them do not make sense. They reveal continuities and discontinuities and set up contrasts between what is there and not there and what should or could be there instead. Further, the desired effects of their sense-making cluster around their interests in making the world a better place for those who are not permitted to operate with power and authority in American society and who are systematically impacted upon so negatively by social, political and economic forces (p. 49).

By doing so, Black women not only improve upon and enhance their personal and professional lots, but also “stimulate a new consciousness” that honors their “everyday, taken-for-granted knowledge” (Collins, 2000, p. 32).

1.4 Description of the Research Study

The current study is qualitative in nature (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000) and incorporates elements of traditional ethnography (Glesne, 1999). The guiding principles of qualitative research, interpretivism and subjectivity, are at the study’s core. Research that is gleaned from an interpretivist perspective suggests that “human action is meaningful” (Schwandt, 2000, p. 191). In the same manner, the concept of subjectivity allows for an individual’s inner most thoughts and beliefs to be heard.

The four women who participated in this study are treated as the primary sources of knowledge. In keeping with this logic, interviewing and participant-observation are used to extract and filter their presidential narratives. Great care is taken to honor the language and expressions of each research participant, since African American women tend to use self-narration as a means to disrupt and reconfigure identities and perceptions
that exist about them (Collins, 1998). Because race and gender serve as constant undercurrents in the study, I also rely on the concept of critical ethnography. It permits me the research space to confront directly the power, privilege and politics that have often defined presidential leadership in higher education (Zinn and Dill, 1996).

Reflecting the multiplicities of their lives, the theoretical framework for the current research does not depend on a single epistemological stance, but three. It is triangulated and interdisciplinary; and, consists of Black Feminist Thought (Collins, 2000), invented ethos (Crowley, 1994) and performance theory (Jones, 1997). As an epistemological standpoint, Black Feminist Thought concentrates almost entirely on the lived realities of Black women (Collins, 2000). Black Feminist Thought not only addresses the “dialectical relationship” that occurs between African American women and various forms of oppression, but it also alludes to the ways in which women of color validate knowledge and affect social change (p. 22).

Evolving out of the philosophical and rhetorical traditions, invented ethos refers to the intentional process that an individual undertakes in order to demonstrate that “they are well informed” and “project an appearance of good moral character” (Crowley, 1994, p. 89). Unlike other racialized and gendered groups, who have operated somewhat from a situated ethos and been “in a position to influence” essentially “what is said and heard,” Black women have not (p. 110). Instead, out of a sense of survival, they have had to invent “self” and craft personal and professional identities—even under the constant barrage of “portrayals” and “caricatures” (i.e., mammies, Sapphires, welfare queens) that have been created for and placed upon them (Washington, 1987).
The final angle of my interdisciplinary framework is performance theory (Jones, 1997). On the research surface, when I suggest the term “performance,” I am referring to communicative acts like debating, storytelling and speech-giving (Briggs, 1998 as cited in Durante, 1997). These specific acts, in many ways, can undergird and define an institutional leader’s presidential tenure and legacy. But, I also align myself with Jones (1997), who in supporting, but also countering traditional views of “performance,” contends that the exhibitions of Black women, not only reflect “a particular philosophy,” but also take into account their “worldview…resistance…and politics” (p. 55). Essentially, their counter “performances” are the theory. According to several Black women scholars, the communicative “performances” of women of color encompass, among others, conversational signifying (Mitchell-Kernan, 2001); body and facial expressions (Richardson, 2003); survival stories (Etter-Lewis, 1996); and, truth-telling (Bell-Scott and Johnson-Bailey, 1988).

A combination of the aforementioned techniques, methodologies and epistemological standpoints, along with a twenty-six question interview protocol, yielded ten major themes. The resulting themes guide the research discussions in Chapters 4, 5 and 6.

1.5 Significance of the Research Study

This study is significant because it offers an alternative way to view presidential leadership. Unlike the often-cited research that is associated with “traditional” institutional leadership, this study centers and focuses on the lived realities of women who are constantly shifting and negotiating between their personal (“Blackness” and
“woman-ness”) and professional (the presidency) identities. While the purpose of the study is not to suggest that African American women chief executive officers do not share similarities and commonalities with their Euro-American male and female, and even African American male peers, it does contend that they “make sense” of the college presidency by bringing a dualistic perspective to it; inventing a presidential “self;” and, displaying “performance” strategies and mechanisms that are unique to the African American female experience. Thus, they participate in the presidency by employing processes of (re)invention. I hope that by situating Black women at the core and examining their presidential experiences triangularly, I can begin to carve out a racially- and womanly-informed “yardstick” by which African American women college presidents and their institutional leadership styles can be defined and interpreted—free of and apart from others’ measurements.

1.6 Applicability of the Findings

The findings from this study provide another conceptual and theoretical lens for exploring Black women, presidential leadership and how both are discussed in the higher education literature. The findings also “frame” and inform a more nuanced and textured conversation around institutional leadership—not only for colleges and universities and their boards of trustees, but also for women of color who aspire to the presidency. Institutional constituents, both internal and external, who are involved with the presidential hiring process, can utilize the findings from this study as a guide—particularly as they seek out and explore the leadership and presidential qualifications of Black women candidates at various institutional types. In the same manner, the four
Black women who participated in this study offer personal and professional advice that can serve as a useful tool for other African American women who are either contemplating the presidency; or, already progressing through the presidential pipeline.

1.7 Definition of Terms

I utilize several terms, some interchangeably, throughout this research study. Thus, they warrant definition here:

1. Black women college presidents: This designation refers to the population at the core of this study. It should be noted that I vary presidential descriptors throughout the research. In some instances, I refer to the population as women of color, women of African descent, Black women or African American women college presidents. While some might argue that there is a key distinction between being called Black (a race or social construct) or African American (an ethnic type), I utilize both in accordance with Cross (1991). Cross contends that some individuals of both African and American descent refer to themselves as either “Black, Black American or African American” (p. vii). In reference to their professional titles, these women are referred to as institutional leaders, chancellors, college and university presidents and chief executive officers. These titles are in accordance with those found in the research of Touchton, Shavlik and Davis (1993).

2. Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs): Although the historical aspects of these special mission institutions are discussed further in Chapter 2, for the sake of definition, HBCUs are institutions that were “founded primarily for the education
of African Americans, although their charters were not exclusionary” (see http://www.doi.gov/hrm/black.html). In the research study, I also describe them as traditionally, historically or predominantly-Black institutions of higher education.

3. Predominantly White Institutions (PWIs): Colleges and universities whose student populations are considerably Euro-American are often referred to as PWIs. Unlike students of color who constitute the majority population at most HBCUs, Hispanic-serving institutions (HSIs) and tribal-colleges, students of color who attend PWIs undertake their education as members of underrepresented student groups. Similar to the numerous classifications of HBCUs in this study, PWIs are also called traditionally, historically or predominantly-White institutions of higher education.

4. Private, Traditionally-Black Institutions of Higher Education: Throughout this study, I am careful to make clear distinctions between public and private HBCUs. While all HBCUs share common institutional histories and missions, their institutional memberships and primary sources of funding differ. For the purposes of this research study, the identification of private HBCUs was secured from an institutional roster maintained by the United Negro College Fund (UNCF).
CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

To incorporate the experiences of minority women in new thinking about leadership, we must address their role as ethnic culture bearers, their isolation and their struggles with self-identity.

(Hughes, 1988, p. 71)

2.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I attempt to achieve two tasks. The first is obvious—to review the research on presidential leadership. I start by providing a historical overview of leadership and exploring its numerous definitions. In the next section, I examine the concept of presidential leadership using a theory format similar to that of Bensimon, Neumann and Birnbaum (2000). I then turn my attention towards the leadership research that has been sieved through a feminist screen. The cognitive processes and leadership models that are generally associated with women are brought to the forefront and discussed. Likewise, several personal and professional concerns of women institutional leaders are highlighted as well.

This discussion provides the foundation for the chapter’s second task. In section 2.5, Race-ing and Gender-izing Institutional Leadership, I purposefully concentrate on and review the literature that discusses the administrative, executive and presidential experiences of Black women. Next, I thread together pieces of the literature which offer
insight into how Black women have discussed leadership. I also focus on several studies that summarize their leadership styles and professional experiences at two institutional types: PWIs and HBCUs. Prior to concluding the chapter, I cite the relevant gaps and make an argument for the study at hand.

### 2.2 A Conceptual Look at Leadership

**Historical Overview**

Before we define the word leadership, it is important for us to understand the historical periods, and in some instances, resulting theories and models, that are associated with its development. At the beginning of the twentieth century, early ideas and notions about leadership embodied what Komives, Lucas and McMahon (1998) have referred to as the Great Male perspective. This perspective generally posited that leadership was genetic (Klenke, 1995); and, used to describe a powerful male who “controlled” or “induced” others to “follow his commands” (Komives, Lucas and McMahon, p. 35).

As the concept of leadership continued to flourish, researchers became less concerned with the genetic lineage of individuals, and more fascinated with their personal traits. Researchers like Stogdill (1948) desired to quantify leadership by studying the weight, height and intelligence of leaders (Bass, 1990; Klenke, 1995). According to Hoy and Miskel (2005), Stogdill culled and analyzed one-hundred and twenty-four studies pertaining to leaders’ personal traits and determined five characteristical groupings:
a. the first was capacity and referenced leaders’ cognitive abilities;

b. leaders’ academic and co-curricular accomplishments constituted the second grouping, achievement;

c. the leadership concepts of self-initiative and persistence were labeled as the third, responsibility;

d. participation was the fourth component and concerned leaders’ abilities to interact and engage with others; and,

e. The economic rank of leaders made up the final grouping, status.

Further investigation of the trait perspective performed by Stogdill (1948) revealed numerous shortcomings. The most salient realization was that depending on the contextual or environmental circumstances, the performance of leadership varied. In time, Stogdill (1948) amended his five groupings by adding a sixth characteristic, situational (Hoy and Miskel, 2005).

The leadership trait perspective eventually gave way to a behavioral one. Informed heavily by the academic discipline of psychology, the main premise behind behavioral leadership was that leaders “were not born.” Instead, it was assumed that leadership could be “learned by acquiring a set of behaviors or leadership style necessary for effective leadership” (Klenke, 1995, p. 64). Studies performed at two research universities, The Ohio State University and University of Michigan, are the most often-cited in regard to behavioral leadership (Yukl, 1994). However, similar to the trait perspective, behavioral research failed to consider leadership across different, situational contexts. It was just a matter of time before scholars turned their research attention towards the contextual aspects of leadership.
Situational leadership (also referred to as contingent leadership) was based on the notion that leaders could “vary their approach or their behaviors based on the context or situation” (Komives, Lucas and McMahon, 1998, p. 40). Researchers whose interests were piqued by this new form of leadership, desired to isolate certain variables; and, tests whether they were “situational determinants” (Hoy and Miskel, 2005, p. 384). For example, they took into consideration the size and reporting hierarchies of organizations; demographics and professional credentials of employees; cultures, mores and norms practiced in the work environment; and, external and societal factors.

With these variables in mind, two predominant theories of situational leadership surfaced: The Least Preferred Co-Worker Model and the Path-Goal Theory (Komives, Lucas and McMahon, 1998). Developed by Fiedler (1967), the Least Preferred Co-Worker Model consisted of three parts. Leadership was the model’s first component and used to describe the most ideal (and not so ideal) leader-employee relationship. An organization’s situational condition composed the second part. It was primarily concerned with a leader’s position within a work group, the assignment of tasks and group relations. The final element, effectiveness, was determined and measured by the attainment of organizational goals and tasks. Essentially, individuals who answered inquiries in the positive about their least-preferred co-workers were more likely to be “people oriented” versus “task-oriented” leaders (Stanford, Oates and Flores, 1995, p. 12).

Under the research auspices of House (1971), the Path-Goal Theory suggested that leaders’ behaviors fell into four primary categories: 1) direct leadership (expressed through commands and directions); 2) supportive leadership (people-oriented); 3)
participant leadership (inclusive); and, 4) achieved leadership (creating and achieving team goals). Likewise, two additional variables, followers’ personal qualities and their work environment, mattered. These two variables, according to Klenke (1995), often “moderated the effects of the four leader behaviors on follower motivation” and determined “follower satisfaction and performance” (p. 73).

In addition to his contribution of the Path-Goal Theory, House was also credited with formally developing and theorizing a power and influential style of leadership called charismatic leadership (Komives, Lucas and McMahon, 1998; Yukl, 1994). However, he was not the first to mention charisma as a leadership type. That honor belonged to Max Weber (Starratt, 1993). Historically, charismatic leadership was associated with leaders who had “risen above the masses;” and been powerful and symbolic personas in various social, civic and cultural movements.

As Komives, Lucas and McMahon (1998) note, charismatic leadership is usually “attributed to leaders by their followers” (p. 41). Prominent figures like Susan B. Anthony, Malcolm X, Jim Jones and even Adolf Hitler are often cited as charismatic leaders (Klenke, 1995). Starratt (1993) reasons that despite whatever side of history these individuals might fall, they are deemed as charismatic leaders because they could see “the big picture” and the “relationships between the whole and its parts” (p. 45).

However, as our national landscape has changed and shifted, so have the current perspectives on leadership. Leadership, in its present state, does not mirror what Rost (1991) has referred to as the Industrial Paradigm Model. Rather, these perspectives shun distinct hierarchies, bureaucratic methods and direct management line; and, embrace elements of reciprocity, transformation and even inclusion. For instance, Greenleaf
(1970) proposes that service and servanthood be at the core of leadership. Individuals who practice servant leadership are more interested in leading and making a difference by serving others first.

Along the same service continuum fall the concepts of stewardship (Block, 1993) and followership (Kelley, 1992). According to Block (1993), all members of an organization are stewards. Collectively, leaders and followers are responsible for the organizational maintenance, upkeep and success of the group. Kelley (1992) re-considers the relationships between leaders and followers; and, argues that an individual cannot lead others without having first followed.

Other alternative perspectives include transactional and transformational leadership (Burns, 1978). Transactional leadership borrows from its root, transaction, and is just that—a form of bartering or exchange between a leader and his or her followers. Further, there is an intentional “give and take” between the two entities. On the contrary, a sense of morality, ethics and a commitment to change undergird transformational leadership. In a transformational setting, a leader and his or her followers acknowledge their relationships to and with each other. Because of this mutual and inclusive understanding, as each carries out and fulfills their respective duties, they simultaneously “raise each other to higher ethical aspirations and conduct” (Komives, Lucas and McMahon, 1998, p. 43).

Although other perspectives on leadership, with regard to race and gender, are explored later in this chapter, it is important to note the existence of critical leadership. Using transformational leadership as a platform, Foster (1986) pushes the symbolic parameters of leaders’ “voices;” and, the use of those voices to advocate on the behalf of
individuals who remain voiceless. Starratt (1993) even proposes that leadership be viewed through a postmodern lens. He argues that leadership should be “grounded in a new anthropology, an understanding of the human condition as both feminine and masculine, as multicultural, as both crazy, heroic, violent and saintly” (p. 136).

**Defining Leadership**

Educational researchers have yet to settle on a precise definition of leadership (Pfeffer, 2000). Birnbaum (1988), for example, contends that leadership is “something identifiable, tangible, measurable and efficacious” (p. 22). Hoy and Miskel (2005) describe it as a “social process in which a member or members of a group or organization influence the interpretation of internal and external events, the choice of goals or desired outcomes, organization of work activities, individual motivation and abilities, power relations and shared orientations” (p. 377).

Woodard, Love and Komives (2000) also view leadership through a socially-constructed lens. The researchers suggest that leadership relies on the “collective efficacy of the people in an organization,” is “adaptive” and meets the “challenges faced by the organization” (p. 82). A sense of collective work also resonates in the research of Heifetz and Laurie (1997). They suggest that leadership honors the “collective intelligence” of organizations (p. 132).

Approaching the term from a more personal perspective, Allio (2005) defines effective leadership as the development and practicing of three central values: “character, creativity and compassion” (p. 1073). In a similar vein, Bolman and Deal (2001) contend
that leadership is innately connected to an individual’s soul and spirit. According to both, leadership is “an inward journey”—a personal trek that allows an individual to “discover” his or her “spiritual center” (p. 30).

Other definitions of leadership emphasize its relational and reciprocal aspects. For instance, Rost (1991) conceives of leadership as a relationship between individuals who not only desire change; but, also support each other’s mutual endeavors. Komives, Lucas and McMahon (1998) also declare that leadership is “relational” (p. 31). Simply put, the process of relational leadership occurs when five main elements are addressed: 1) inclusion; 2) empowerment; 3) purpose; 4) ethics; and, 5) process.

The concept of leadership reciprocity is cited in a definition penned by Tierney (1999). He writes:

Leadership is a comparative, reciprocal process. We define leadership in context. We cannot have leaders without followers. Leadership is not simply the end result, but the processes we use, and the routes we take, to get where we are going. It takes two to tango, and the same can be said about leadership (p. 50).

In addition to these definitions are others that consider leadership through metaphorical lenses. For instance, Vaill (1991) likens leadership to the development of a piece of artwork. The individual and collective intricacies of jazz music have been used by De Pree (1992). Tichy and Devana (1986) utilize the scenes of a theatre production to analyze their findings about transformational leadership. Klenke (1996) even categorizes those who practice leadership into four, distinct groups:

Leaders are spellbinders and dreamers, pathfinders and trailblazers: they are champions such as Isabella of Spain and Napoleon, saviors such as Florence Nightingale and Moses, servants such as Mother Teresa and
Mahatma Gandhi, visionaries such as Joan of Arc and Martin Luther King, and revolutionaries such as Rosa Luxemburg and Fidel Castro who are imbued with superhuman qualities (p. 8).

Although the definitional summary above is not meant to be exhaustive, it does provide a “frame” from which we can work in order to understand presidential leadership. Moving forward, I am in agreement with Starratt (1993) and some of his considerations of leadership. Starratt suggests that the process of leadership is a complicated matter. Attempting to separate the process out from its historical or social connection or environment, or viewing a leader apart from his or her followers, does little to advance the concept. In essence, leadership is “messy” and requires an individual who is keen and can maneuver the “messiness.” Similarly, leadership is a collective endeavor. Its consequences and ramifications have the potential to not only affect the immediate and internal organization, but external ones as well.

It is also a moral activity. Citing the transformational leadership research conducted by Burns (1978), Starratt (1993) contends that leadership encourages individuals to “function collectively at a higher moral level” (p. 8). Ultimately, it is about moving past an individual’s desires, and focusing on others and the collective good. In the same manner, Starratt posits that leaders “articulate the vision, mission, and the myth of the organization” (p. 14). They tell and narrate its direction.

In his final premise, Starratt argues that “leadership is essential for modern democratic institutions and societies” (p. 14). Colleges and universities (and their chief executive officers) fall within this “broad spectrum of institutions” (p. 14). Thus, institutions of higher education play a significant role in preparing the minds of individuals, while fostering meaningful educational, social and cultural change.
2.3 Leadership that is “Presidential”

While the aforementioned definitions provide a starting place for understanding the concept of leadership, there is still the matter of defining it when prefaced with the term, presidential. In their review of leadership theory and its relevance to higher education, Bensimon, Neumann and Birnbaum (2000) conceptualize presidential leadership using several of the theoretical bodies mentioned in the previous section. The organization of their research findings, which provides guidance for the following discussion, places an emphasis on two traditional perspectives, trait and power and influence; and, an emerging one, cultural and symbolic.

Trait Theory

Since presidential leadership became a serious area of study, educational scholars have used trait theory to identify the qualities and characteristics unique to college and university presidents. Based on their presidential research, Cohen and March (1974) suggests that institutional leaders can be situated within eight, distinct categories. Leaders, who are entrepreneurially-focused, are referred to as competitive market presidents, while administrative presidents tend to be more operationally-focused. The third type, collective bargaining, is an institutional leader prone to diffusing and mediating situations. Democratic college and university leaders stress coalition-building. Similarly, consensus presidents faithfully seek out others’ opinions.

Presidents who adhere to anarchy acquire “influence by understanding the operation of the system and by inventing viable solutions” (p. 39). The independent judiciary moniker is applied to those who believe in representative leadership. The final
trait category is *plebiscitary autocracy*. A president who identifies as such views himself (or herself) as the only decision-maker. While Cohen and March do not preference one leadership category over another, they do suggest that successful presidential leadership appears to be a blending of “bureaucratic administration, collective bargaining, consensus formation and democratic politics” (p. 40).

Other researchers have comprised trait listings and skill sets that institutional leaders should bring to and exhibit in the college presidency. For example, Fisher (1984) notes that effective institutional leaders possess and demonstrate “vigor,” “persistence” and “humor,” as well as “fairness,” “self-confidence” and a “sense of identity” (as cited in Bensimon, Neumann and Birnbaum, 2000, p. 215).

According to Kerr and Gade (1986), well-thought out goals and objectives, that can be delivered through good customer service and clear communications, are the markings of a solid institutional leader. Thus, presidential aspirants should know how to “work upward with a board” and “administer a staff through a good choice of subordinates” (p. 60). In the same manner, he or she should understand the importance of faculty collaboration and negotiation; and, try to maintain a “mass appeal to…students or alumni or the public at large” (p. 60).

Occupational advice has also been offered by Carbone (1981), Fain (2006), Guthrie (2001) and Kerr (1984). Carbone (1981) recommends that presidential aspirants be mindful of the job and what it entails. He also suggests that individuals locate and
select a mentor “who may be observed and whose endorsements may be solicited” (p. 72). In the same manner, he advises presidential aspirants to follow an administrative route; and, acquire professional experience in business administration, law and human resources.

Reflecting on her years spent in the presidency, Guthrie (2001) contends that individuals coming into the presidency should: 1) respect and practice the ideals of shared governance; 2) “study power, leadership and presidential memoirs;” 3) know the difference between “directing” and “guiding” the institution; and, 4) possess political and fundraising savvy-ness (p. 249). In reference to the latter, Kerr (1984) and Fain (2006) concur. Both researchers note the importance of presidential hopefuls obtaining a firm understanding in the areas of institutional budgeting and financial planning.

**Power and Influence Theory**

Additional aspects of presidential leadership are still measured by the type of “influence” leaders have “over followers,” and whether their engagement is “unilateral” or “reciprocal” (Birnbaum, 1988, p. 23). Within higher education, the basic tenets associated with power and influence theory have oftentimes manifested themselves through charismatic; and, transactional or transformational leadership. In the aforementioned research section, it was noted that charismatic leadership is usually displayed by an individual who is considered inspirational and motivating. They can see, as Starratt (1993) asserts, the “big picture” (p. 45). However, this form of leadership can also prove to be a slippery slope. Noting its dualities, Bass (1985) suggests that
charismatic leadership can either be seen as an “endowment of spiritual grace from God” or “endowment of an extremely high degree of esteem, value, popularity and/or celebrity-status attributed by others” (as cited in Bornstein, 2003, p. 89).

Intrigued by the latter or “dark side” of charismatic leadership, Bornstein (2003) coins her own phrase and aptly refers to it as presidential grandiosity. From her presidential experience, observations and survey data, Bornstein contends that over time, grandiose presidents “begin to rely on their own interpretations and judgments” (p. 54). As a result, a sense of “arrogance” becomes the norm and there is a “failure to listen”—especially when his or her arrogance is reaffirmed by their “empire building” (p. 55).

In her research on the legitimacy of the college presidency, Bornstein (2003) also opines about transactional and transformational leadership. She notes that individuals, who adhere to a transformational model, are “most effective in a new organization, an institution in crisis or one in need of significant change” (p. 89). Further, transformational presidents have the potential to thrive at institutions that are “struggling to define a distinctive niche and enhance its reputation” (p. 91). On the contrary, transactional leaders:

…may be appropriate at established, successful, well-regarded institutions— institutions that need to be better at what they do, improve their quality through incremental change and secure greater resources. A transactional leader may be far more effective in strengthening a good institution than a leader trying to effect an unwanted transformation (p. 93).

**Cultural and Symbolic**

Cultural and symbolic leadership has emerged as another theoretical frame for interpreting the leadership styles of college and university presidents (Bensimon,
Neumann and Birnbaum, 2000; Tierney, 2000). Cultural and symbolic leadership is usually exhibited through a specific “act, event, language, dress, structural role, ceremonies or even spatial positions” (Tierney, 2000, p. 224). Its primary purpose is to influence and even inspire an institution’s culture and constituents.

Relying on data gathered from interviews with thirty-two college and university presidents, Tierney devises six “symbol” categories associated with cultural and symbolic leadership. They are:

1) *Metaphorical Symbols:* Metaphorical symbols are used by presidents who speak through metaphors and catch phrases. For example, some of the participants in Tierney’s study likened their presidential leadership to athletic coaching; or, viewed themselves as “providing the glue” for their respective institutions (p. 226);

2) *Physical Symbols:* Other presidents identify with and connect their leadership through physical symbols like campus artifacts, buildings and statues. These institutional leaders have a fondness for physical imagery because it sends a strong message about presidential leadership, mission and vision;

3) *Communicative Symbols:* A number of other presidents appreciate the communicative aspects of the presidency. This type of leadership is usually executed by “talking with students “on their turf;” entertaining faculty; or, strolling around campus or walking into offices” (p. 227);

4) *Structural Symbols:* Some of the chief executive officers in Tierney’s study ascribed to structural symbols and made their leadership mark organizationally.
Usually young in executive years, they signal their presidential arrival to campus by tinkering with reporting lines; or, adding or phasing out administrative and executive positions;

5) **Personification**: Presidents who utilize personified symbols are intent on sending specific messages about shared leadership and inclusion to their internal and external constituents. Individuals who are presidential “firsts” often fall into this category; and,

6) **Ideational**: Individuals who identify with ideational symbols also convey a message, but around a central idea, mission or vision. According to Tierney, however, this type of leadership is the most “difficult…for constituents to interpret if the symbol is divorced from tangible contexts” (p. 228).

**Dilemmas with Traditional Leadership Theories**

While the previously discussed sections provide us with greater historical, definitional and theoretical insights about leadership and presidential leadership, they also describe and reflect a “masculine adversary style of discourse” (Rich, 1993, p. 6). In her text, *Women and leadership: A contextual perspective*, Klenke (1995) reminds us that “virtually all theories of leadership, past and present, have been developed by men” or “been derived from the description and analysis of male leaders reported by male researchers” (p. 15).

For example, Stoke (1959) makes no apologies for using the male pronouns, “he” or “his,” and arguing such points as “the college president as the *Man of Learning* has been giving way to the *Man of Management*” in his presidential research (p. 3). Further,
while he singles out the many accomplishments of Euro-American “male” presidential giants like Nicholas Butler (Columbia); James B. Conant (Harvard); William R. Harper (University of Chicago) and Woodrow Wilson (Princeton), he fails to mention the growing cadre of women who had been serving in similar executive leadership capacities since 1821. Similar “gender” oversights are also present in the research of March and Cohen (1974), Muller (1994) and Dennison (2001).

Prior to the publication of Touchton, Shavlik and Davis’ (1993) descriptive study on the female college presidency, a minimal amount of literature focused specifically on the leadership experiences of women. Recently however, a number of women scholars have begun to question as well as challenge the “maleness” of presidential leadership. In particular, many take issue with the valuing of masculine qualities like “independence, rationality and competitiveness” in the literature, over those usually associated with women, including “dependence, emotionality and cooperation” (Hoy and Miskel, 2005, p. 96).

Some women scholars advance the notion that women experience leadership differently than their male peers; and, that their modes of leadership do not “fall precisely into traditional organization models” (Jablonski, 1993, p. 244). Bensimon (1989) believes that if we are to understand fully how women college institutional leaders define and perform leadership, then we must view their presidential experiences through a womanly-informed lens.
2.4 Leadership Viewed through Gendered Lenses

Women’s Ways of Knowing…

It is important to acknowledge the groundbreaking research of Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger and Tarule (1997), because their findings about the ways in which women produce knowledge may assist us in understanding how they might also conceive of leadership. Utilizing the epistemological and methodological techniques of case study and interviewing, the multiple researchers ascertained that at various life moments, one-hundred and thirty-five women “made sense” of their worlds through:

1) Silence: Often associated with youth, women who produced knowledge in this manner “worried that they would be punished just for using words” (p. 24). Likewise, they viewed authoritative figures, usually demonstrated through a male presence, as all-knowing. Further, their conceptions of self were dictated by their present circumstances, the here and now, and not what they could potentially become;

2) Received Knowledge: Women who were the recipients of knowledge, absorbed knowledge by listening. According to the researchers, these women were dualistic in nature, and believed that “truth came from others” (p. 37). In the same manner, conceptions of self were heavily dependent on the perceptions of others. Simply put, “women of received knowledge listened carefully and tried hard to live up to the images that others have held up to them” (p. 49);

3) Subjective Knowledge: Described as the most liberating of the ways, the researchers depicted individuals in the subjective knowledge way as women who
had reached a point of maturity, where the voices of others became less significant. Instead, there was an increasing interest in their voice. Critical in this way was a lessened dependence on male authority, and a greater appreciation for maternal and womanly instincts. Unlike women in the received knowledge way, who attempted to live up to others expectations, subjective knowledge women shunned their past identities, as well as the relationships that hindered them personally and professionally;

4) *Procedural Knowledge*: Citing a portion of their participant sample, the researchers categorized women in the procedural knowledge way as “privileged, bright, white and young” (p. 87). Typically, these women pushed back against dualism and subjectivism, and declared that “truth” resided “beneath the surface;” and, they were responsible for unearthing it (p. 94). Likewise, they utilized this type of knowledge to “pay attention to objects in the external world” (p. 98). Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger and Tarule (1997) referred to this learning process as *connected* and *separate knowing*, in which women feverishly questioned, reasoned and analyzed critically the occurrences surrounding them, while also relying on personal experience for additional insight; and,

5) *Constructed Knowledge*: The researchers found that women who identified with a constructed knowledge way were committed to the equal blending of self- and othered-knowing. These women had located a “core self;” and were content with knowing that “answers to all questions varied depending on the context in which they were asked and on the frame of reference of the person doing the asking” (p. 138). Likewise, their self-assuredness assisted them in reaching out and serving
others. According to the researchers, women who followed the constructed knowledge way desired to “address the burning issues of the day and to contribute as best they can” (p. 152).

**Women’s Modes of Leadership**

From the literature reviewed in the previous section, we have a better understanding of how women conceive of knowledge. But, how do they incorporate and utilize these various “ways of knowing” as they “perform” leadership? Two distinct arguments occupy the literature. The first argument contends that minimal, stylistic differences exist between male and female leaders. Billing and Alvesson (2000) argue that a feminization of leadership not only “reinforces gender stereotypes;” but prevents women from fully functioning and operating at their personal and professional best (p. 155). However, others reason that while women on the surface might adhere to and exhibit some of the traits and behaviors associated with traditional leadership theories and styles, they also modify them. In the words of Klenke (1995), they view leadership in “black and white,” but also see it simultaneously through an “interconnected prism” (p. 14).

As a result, they tend to stay away from such characteristics as individualism, aggression, power and courage, and concentrate on being more “empowering, connective, communicative and authentic” (Nidiffer, 2001, p. 111). Likewise, women are more likely to practice consensus and collaboration; develop “mutual trust and respect;” and, possess a team-orientation (Stanford, Oates and Flores, 1995, p. 15). Probably one of the strongest arguments about women and their leadership styles is offered by Johnetta B.
Cole, the former president of Spelman and Bennett Colleges. Speaking openly about leadership differences between the genders, Cole, in a candid interview with Hamilton (2004), comments that women leaders are usually committed to “building consensus and collaboration” and “…manifesting power “through” people rather than “over” them” (p. 64). While she notes that there will always be exceptions, like “men who practice inclusiveness” and “women who are into command and control,” for the most part, she is “convinced that the leadership style most associated with women” will continue to “have the greatest advantages in the future” (p. 64).

This “style” has been described as transformational (Bass, 1990) and emergent (Guido-DiBrito, Noteboom, Nathan and Fenty, 1996). Similarly, Sagaria and Johnsrud (1988) have called it generative. While Sagaria and Johnsrud declare that generative leadership is not gender-specific, both suggest that it does favor women because it “emphasizes” a “commitment to fostering productivity, creativity and a sense of self-esteem in others” (p. 16). Further, it encourages “mutual empowerment among leaders and participants” and places an emphasis on “collaboration as a means of identifying and accomplishing goals” (p. 16).

As women continue to enter into and thrive in administrative, executive and presidential spaces, others have called on researchers to re-consider and re-evaluate how they interpret women’s leadership styles by relying on their informants’ “insider” perspectives—and, not those of others. In her examination of the four organizational models historically associated with male leadership (bureaucratic, collegial, political and symbolic), Bensimon (1989) re-conceptualizes how she interprets a male and female
college presidents’ definitions of institutional leadership. Instead of analyzing the
woman’s response solely through the aforementioned organizational frameworks, she
utilizes a feminist perspective to frame her words:

A feminist perspective on leadership focuses on the influence of gender
(rather than the abstract conceptions of organizational frames) on
interpretations of leadership. Feminist analysis assumes that the
characteristic experiences of men, as more privileged beings, and of
women, as the “second sex,” results in different conceptions of good
leadership, and seeks to understand leadership from the point of view
of women (p. 149).

Women’s Self-Perceptions

Few presidential studies have discussed how women chief executive officers
perceive their leadership styles and presidential performances. Jablonski (1993),
however, attempts to tread down this unknown research path. She conducts interviews
with seven women and asks specifically about their self-perceptions regarding the
presidency and their modes of leadership. She finds that the women view themselves
through Sagaria and Johnsrud’s (1988) generative leadership model. In accordance with
the model, they intentionally empower others by “involving people in the process, asking
for their feedback and building a consensus” (Jablonski, 1993, p. 245). Likewise, they
value collaboration and communication with internal and external constituents, and strive
to “decentralize” the decision-making process (p. 246).

Jablonski’s (1993) research also provides an appropriate context for
understanding feminist research. In her study, she affords the seven women the freedom
to tell their lived narratives. While some of the women share that they were a part of the feminist movement, others mention that they participate actively in formal networking circles and feminist scholarship endeavors.

Although the women in Jablonski’s (1993) research study perceive themselves in a positive and uplifting manner, other women in executive leadership roles have expressed feelings of “fakeness.” Clance and Imes (1978) refer to this “fakeness” as the Impostor Syndrome (IS). According to the researchers:

…women who experience the impostor phenomenon maintain a strong belief that they are not intelligent; in fact they are convinced that they have fooled anyone who thinks otherwise (p. 1).

Clinical symptoms include “generalized anxiety, lack of self-confidence, depression, and frustration related to inability to meet self-imposed standards of achievement” (p. 2). Rothblum (1988), among others, partially attribute the impostor phenomenon as one of the contributing factors in the voluntary resignations of women from the faculty, administrative and executive ranks of higher education.

Perceptions of Others

“Fitting” into the perceptions of others is a fine line that women across multiple professional fields walk on a daily basis, and female college presidents are no exception. When Drew G. Faust was recently appointed president at Harvard University, Pluviose
(2007) quotes a faculty member who suggests that her appointment, “...bears all the hallmarks of a penitential act” (p. 20). The male faculty member continues:

Dr. Faust comes to the presidency of the world’s most distinguished university out of a career whose foremost characteristic has been its strong feminist bent, rather than executive experience (p. 20).

Further, this same faculty member argues that “her accomplishments” do not “measure up to past Harvard presidents”—all who noticeably have been men.

The notion of “gender” as “culture” has been a focus of study for Klenke (1995). She contends that women have lived, but also thrived in a culture that is replete with gender stereotypes, generalizations and characterizations. On one hand, women are praised for their “motherly” attributes. On the other, they are criticized for exuding man-like qualities and seen as being counter-stereotypic.

These sentiments were true for three of the women presidents in Jablonski’s (1993) research. They were described by faculty members as being “gender neutral or acting in a stereotypical male approach” (p. 249). Other faculty members noted that they exhibited male qualities like “being direct,” “looking one in the eye” and “speaking in a deep tone of voice” (p. 249). Some referred to their women college presidents using familiar, womanly labels: “the heroine,” “the matriarch” and “the nun” (p. 249). Even the physical appearance of one woman college president was noted. She was described as a “soft woman who ‘does nice things with her hair and is proud of her figure’ ” (p. 249).

Similar notions are mentioned in Manzo’s (2001) review of the American Council on Education’s publication, *From where we sit: Women's perspectives on the presidency*. Manzo (2001) observes the following reality: “For women presidents, even those things
that might be considered irrelevant or insignificant to leadership ability for men are apt to become important factors in others’ perceptions of their effectiveness” (p. 12).

Highlighting some of those perceptions, she states:

...trustees preferred women candidates to be married,… community members, students and staff gauged them by their appearance, and that they were more likely to be viewed as failures if their tenure ended prematurely (p.12).

Other troubling or challenging aspects of the administrative and executive role have been examined using Kanter’s (2003) concept of tokenism (Davies-Netzley, 1998; Turner, 2002). According to Kanter (2003), women become tokens when they are “few in number among male peers” (p. 382). The women appear to be “outsiders looking in” because they do not fit within the dominant group. As a result, some may essentially lose or sacrifice themselves (their personal and professional identities) to assume some of the qualities associated with the majority group (men) who surround them. There are unhealthy side effects to tokenism. Among them, is the risk of adopting masculine tendencies; or, as a participant in Davies-Netzley’s (1998) research commented in preparation for a board meeting, “I pull my hair back, wear a suit, don’t act giggly…because you need to fit in” (p. 349).

While these barriers and the perceptions of others might deter some women from assuming positions of power, Helgesen (1990) suggests that women’s perceived weaknesses (as told by others), really are their strengths. In her pioneering text, The female advantage: Women’s ways of leadership, Helgesen observed that the four women
leaders in her “diary studies” practiced and exuded effective leadership because they embraced and worked within the confines of male leadership, but also leaned heavily on their female-ness. For example, she writes:

Increasingly, motherhood is being recognized as an excellent school for managers, demanding many of the same skills: organization, pacing, the balancing of conflicting claims, teaching, guiding, leading, monitoring, handling disturbances and imparting information (pp. 31-32).

*Women’s Personal and Professional Realities*

The evolution of women as presidential leaders has not come without serious sacrifice, especially on the behalf of women themselves (Guthrie, 2001). Numerous studies have been devoted to understanding the delicate balance that some women perform in reference to their personal and professional lives—from gender disparities and isolation in the administrative and executive ranks, to possible (or impossible) motherhood (Wilson, 2003; Valdatta, 2006).

Jacobson (2002), in an interview with former institutional leaders, discusses the work/family balance with Nancy Hensel (former president of the University of Maine-Presque Isle). President Hensel comments that a number of unspoken stigmas are attached to being a woman college president, particularly if she is unmarried or married with young children. For instance, Hensel cites an episode during a campus celebration when an administrative assistant desires to know who will handle the floral arrangements. In the past, the request would have been taken care of by the president’s spouse, usually a woman.
Jacobson’s research also explores the “been there, done that attitude” that a number of institutions exhibit when a current woman president decides to leave and a new female applicant applies. The likelihood that the institution will seek out another female leader, at least according to Claire Van Ummersen (former vice president and director of the American Council on Education) is quite slim. Van Ummersen contends that because trustee boards consist primarily of men, some believe that once a woman has served, then “It’s somebody else’s turn now” (p. 1). Acknowledging these types of challenges and obstacles begs the question, “Can women in academe have it all?”

According to Gentile (2002), the response is an emphatic “No!” Gentile suggests that the media’s hype of “girl presidential power” on American college and university campuses overshadows the incredible disparities that exist between men and women institutional leaders. However, to ease the presidential transition, Gentile, along with Cornish and Fernadez-Valmayor (2007), suggests that women establish relationships with and rely on a mentor, or an individual who has their “best interests at heart” and can assist them in remaining “centered, renewed and balanced” (Komives, Lucas and McMahon, 1998, p. 310). In her research on women institutional leaders, Brown (2005) finds that mentoring is an “invaluable resource” for some of her participants’ attraction to and retention within the chief executive role (p. 659).

**Shortcomings of Feminized Leadership Perspectives**

Perspectives that have been feminized, conceptually and theoretically, have been largely associated with the gendered realities of Euro-American women (Guy-Sheftall, 1995). Likewise, they have not always “integrated race into” their “analysis of women’s
subordination” (Hurtado, 1996, p. 6). Unlike Euro-American women, Black women’s lives have been marked by an interlocking (Smith, Smith and Frazier, 1977) and intersecting (Crenshaw, 1995) triumvirate of race, gender and class. As a result, they “view” and “experience” the world significantly different from their White female and even Black male peers (hooks, 1984).

Further, these differences have not always been captured accurately in the literature—particularly within the higher education research. Black women have not always been the predominant foci of studies (Guy-Sheftall, 1982). Too often, their lived experiences have either been “lumped” together with respect to other women; or “umbrella-ed” in under a distinct racial (Black) group. In general, there has been minimal research understanding of how one identity informs the other (Evans, Forney and Guido-DiBrito, 1998).

In the likeness of their feminists counterparts, who argued that the “voices” of women were excluded from traditional leadership theories, women of color researchers have “flipped the script,” and moved the leadership and presidential experiences of Black women from the margins, to the center (see Figure 2.1, Black women at the intersections of presidential leadership, on p. 59). By doing so, these Black feminists scholars have acknowledged the multiple memberships of African American women, while also creating a separate space or their own “statistical cell” to research them (Smith, 1982, p. 190). Parker and olgivie (1996) contend that “researchers should make a systematic study of leadership by African-American women from their cultural point of view” (p. 190). The next section of this literature review purports to do so.
2.5 Race-ing and Gender-izing Institutional Leadership

While there still remains a paucity of research on the presidential experiences of African American women (Jones, 1992; Parker and ogilvie, 1996), researchers have heeded the advice of Mosley (1980), who proclaimed almost thirty years ago, that “Black women needed Black women to write about Black women” (p. 309). Black female (as well as feminist-minded male) scholars have attempted to fill in the gaps. For instance, Barr and Calvert (1981), Evans-Herring (1993) and Jenness (1936) research and chronicle the presidential experiences of Mary E. Branch, the first Black woman chief executive officer in the state of Texas. Guy-Sheftall (1982) surveys the pioneering life of Willa B. Player, Bennett College’s first African American female president; and, the first Black woman to lead an accredited four-year, liberal arts institution.

Smith (1982) highlights the pioneering achievements of eleven African American women in academe and the value of mentorships. Among her research participants, are a total of three Black women college presidents and one future chief executive officer. Although Martin (2002) does not openly identify the African American woman president among her research participants (but alluded to the fact that she leads a small, Southeastern HBCU), she uses rhetorical performance and ethnography to explore how college presidents negotiate power structures within their respective institutional systems. She is primarily concerned with how these relationships inform their ethoi, identities and authorities.

Collectively, all of these studies advance our understanding of Black women in the college presidency. However, there is still more to learn about African American women’s conceptions of presidential leadership, how they craft an executive identity and
perform the institutional role. The seven thematic areas, which are discussed below, offer some initial insight.

**Black Women’s Conceptions of Leadership**

Research studies conducted by Adam (1996), Hite (1996) and Jones (1997) suggest that the early leadership conceptions of Black women are informed greatly by familial expectations—especially around the issues of education, race and personal motivation. In an interview with Adam (1996), Marvalene Hughes, former president of California State University at Stanislaus (and now president of historically-Black Dillard), comments that members of her family had always stressed the importance of being “competent, ethical and competitive” (p. 4). As a child, Eleanor Smith, a former chancellor at the University of Wisconsin-Parkside, recalls that family expectations were “high” (p. 2). Likewise, securing a good “education was first and foremost;” and although racism was ever-present, it was not to be used as “an excuse” (p. 2).

Chancellor Smith’s comments about racism echo similarly in the research of Hite (1996). Among the seventeen women managers and administrators of color who participated in her study, several were told by immediate and extended family members not to concentrate “on race as the motive for behavior or as the key issue in every interaction” (pp. 13-14). Instead, they were expected to think and behave in such a manner that conveyed a sense of excellence and purpose. One participant in particular shared:

Within our household, our parents always instilled in us that we were important, that we were somebody. That we could do whatever anybody else could do. That all we had to do was put forth the effort (p. 14).
Familial sentiments of positive reinforcement are also heard in the research of Jones (1997). Utilizing two survey instruments, the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ) and Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI), Jones ascertains that during the child- and young adulthoods of seventeen Black women college presidents, many were showered with words of wisdom such as “be unwilling to settle for less” or “set the standard, don’t follow the crowd” (p. 202). These inspirational offerings also informed the women’s personal value systems. For some, “setting the standard” meant that they were committing themselves to a life of service (Jones, 1997).

**Role Models and Professional Mentors**

Several research studies mention the presence and importance of role models and professional mentors in the lives of Black women executives and college presidents. Of note are the clear distinctions that research participants make between the types of individuals who serve in either a personal/professional role model or mentor capacity. The seventeen women in Hite’s (1996) study commented that as youth, both men and women of color, who were of “professional achievement,” served as personal role models (p. 13). Hite writes:

> One participant in particular noted that at a time when Black communities were more intact, Black men and women in professional roles were readily accessible. Now, they are not as visible on a daily basis, making the need for mentors and role models in the workplace critically important for the individuals from typically under-represented groups. “You can’t be what you can’t see” (p. 13).

In her research, Jones (1997) points out that women family members and community servants had served as role models for the Black women institutional leaders in her study. The groups of women were particularly useful when the Black women
college presidents needed some “emotional centering” or could benefit from a “reality check” (p. 203). Likewise, these women had remained reliable allies as the Black women institutional leaders advanced professionally.

On the other hand, locating female professional mentors in the workplace had proven difficult for some of the women. Whereas several found and worked with professional role models that were women, their professional mentors “were mostly male” (Jones, 1997, p. 204). At the same time though, they were quick to note that their male mentors were instrumental in equipping them with the necessary tools in order to be successful in the academy. According to Jones:

These persons (by example or instruction) provided orientation to political skills, structured opportunities for the women’s work to be seen, nominated them for new ventures and were the gauge they used to measure their accomplishment or guide their behavior in unfamiliar situations (p. 204).

The professional mentorship tales shared in Jones’ (1997) research are consistent with those told to Holmes (2004). Her study primarily examines the presidential realities of six Black institutional leaders (three males and three females) and the impact of race (if any) on their presidential responsibilities. She also inquires about the individuals who had served as role models and professional mentors throughout their careers. While all of the presidents “credited mentors with assisting them in their overall personal and professional development,” the women in particular shared that a majority of their professional mentors had been men (p. 10).

One of Holmes’ (2004) female presidential participants, who had worked with the same mentor for twenty years, commented: “He’s been instrumental in my career and played a significant role in my getting the first presidency” (p. 10). Likewise, the other
women presidents stated that their “primary mentors in higher education were White males” (p. 10). This sentiment is not surprising. Hughes (1988), in her research on administrative leadership and women of color, notes that given the “dominance of White men in higher education,” it is likely that as Black women progress through the career pipeline, they will encounter and engage with Euro-American males (p. 65).

As a point of comparison, this mentor “choice” or “option” was somewhat different for the Black men institutional leaders in Holmes’ (2004) study. Professional White and Black men, both internal and external to the academy, had served as these presidents’ primary mentors. One Black male president alluded to the fact that he preferred interacting “with other men” because it was “less complicated” (p. 10). Another contended that while he appreciated the relationships he had been able to forge with other academic and executive women, he deemed that the “nature of the relationship would be more like a support system than mentor/mentee relationship” (p. 10).

**Faith**

There was some difficulty in locating even a minimal amount of research that addressed the role of faith in the lives of Black women institutional leaders. However, Garner’s (2004) study on the spiritual leadership of Black women administrators in the academy provides some insight. Desiring to know how spirituality is “interwoven” into the leadership examples of three associate deans, Garner employs a two-part interview process. She inquires specifically about the women’s connectedness to spirituality and its influence on their chosen career paths; leadership styles; and, support systems.
In sum, her findings reveal that central to the women’s leadership success is spirituality which acts “as an empowering form of resistance” whenever they are “confronted with adversity in various situations” (p. 97). Garner notes that this notion of “resistance” is “present in the way they articulate their situated identity in the academy and how they have chosen to deal with their role and responsibilities as deans” (p. 97). As a result, the women are able to view “their experiences in the academy, not from a victim’s standpoint but from a standpoint of liberation” (p. 97).

Spirituality, as a tool of resistance, is teased out further by Garner who highlights four major themes. Garner suggests that because of their spiritual grounded-ness, the three women ascribe to a servant leadership model. She writes:

…the way these women talk about their leadership and how they work with other individuals has less to do with their own self-interests and focuses more on serving others…their purpose in life has a greater meaning far beyond themselves (p. 64).

Likewise, their spiritual awareness assists each one in fostering an ethic of care (Collins, 2000). For instance, the women cite numerous instances where it was important to mentor and guide others—especially their female students of color. One of the women, Adjuoa, reminisces about the positive and productive relationship that she had with her doctoral advisor; and, how it framed how she engages with her students:

My dissertation advisor is the personification of a mentor. I might have been the only African American he ever knew, and he didn’t know my subjects…He didn’t know a lot about culture, but he cared about race. He didn’t know a lot about being a [woman], but he cared about me… And, when I think about how I advise my doc students, how I teach, how I try to support them once they leave me…I think about his model (p. 69).
Garner’s third and fourth thematic findings revolve around the themes of social justice and a notion of “giving back.” All three of the women were able to recall occupational incidents where they were pressed to “right a wrong;” practice integrity; adhere to their personal value systems; or, push back by taking risks. In the same manner, each of the three women, outside of their professional pursuits, had made it a priority to serve their external communities in some manner—whether the service was through presentations at local/regional/national gatherings or serving politically in their surrounding communities.

**Leadership Styles**

Two research studies and two publication articles were located which discuss specifically the leadership styles of Black women. For instance, when Marie V. McDemmond assumed the helm of Norfolk State University (NSU), she made it clear to the campus and surrounding communities that she would rectify the institution’s financial dilemmas by employing a participatory management style and including “many people in the decision-making process” (Fields, 1988, p. 3). The seventeen Black women who participated in Jones’ (1997) study also described their leadership styles as participatory, and embraced such leadership practices as “empowerment, team-building, vision creation and hands-on supervision” (p. 207).

A similar refrain is heard in a piece by Stewart (2002) entitled, *Responding to the voice of Black women*. Stewart interacted and engaged with several Black women institutional leaders and gleaned several key perspectives on presidential leadership. Women of color not only practice transformational leadership, as suggested by Yvonne
Moses (former president of City University in New York), but are willing, according to Elnora Daniel (former president of Chicago State University), to take risks. Stewart surmised that a degree of spirituality and a natural sense of intuitiveness marked the presidencies of Black women. Likewise, principles associated with an African worldview were also reflected in their leadership styles as well.

Parker and ogilvie (1996) propose that we examine Black women and how they “make sense” of executive leadership from a culturally-informed perspective. Both researchers posit that African American women’s conceptions of leadership are rooted in how they have been reared as women of color and their “social location within dominant culture organizations” (p. 190). In an extensive review of the leadership and gender literature, the researchers contend that Black women are bicultural (Bell, 1990) and navigate an existence between a dominant, Euro-American and non-dominant, African American world. Likewise, depending on the leadership situation, they 1) avoid or confront an issue; 2) display creativity; or, 3) take risks. The researchers also suggest that Black women executives, unlike other demographic groups, have the capacity to cross multiple and cultural boundaries.

**Perceptions of Black Women**

In relation to the current study, there is some value in understanding the roles of race and gender in the lives of Black women institutional leaders; and, how both inform self- and others’ perceptions. Historically, women of color have always acknowledged their double *handicaps* (Jones, 1942) and *double jeopardies* (Beale, 1970). As Chancellor
Hilda Richards proclaimed in her conversation with Adam (1996), “I always knew that I was Black. People made sure I knew it” (p. 3). Others have made similar declarations, about “who Black women are;” but, not always in the most positive light.

In their research on Black women professionals, Jones and Welch (1980), highlight the labels that have been easily associated with women of color: “hard, overly aggressive and superstrong” (p. 90). Likewise, Fleming (1983) references the stereotypic image of Black women as being “assertive and dominant” (as cited in Howard-Vital, 1989, p. 182), while Hughes (1988) mentions the “Black matriarchy” moniker (p. 67).

Even as Black women have progressed academically and professionally, they have not been able to shake these descriptors. Castell Bryant, the former interim president of Florida A & M University, addresses similar descriptors in a conversational piece by Maxwell (2007). When asked about her supposed abrasive style of management, she responds:

Quite frequently, when comments are made about professionals at almost every level, men with certain characteristics are considered strong and focused. Women with some of the same characteristics are called abrasive. Men with a vision and determination are great administrators, and women are referred to as being hard to work with, hard to report to and are intolerable (Maxwell, 2007, p. 2).

While some African American women contemplate and deal with these perceptions, others have dismissed them altogether; and, navigated successful paths. According to Epstein (1973), the positive, professional perceptions of the thirty-one Black women in her study, could be attributed to a positive, maternal influence; membership in the Black middle class; and, their access to higher education.
Other Black women acknowledge the racial and gender barriers which confront them, but meet them head on. One of the three Black women presidents in Holmes’ (2004) research study notes:

> From the time we are born until the day we die, our lives are engulfed in what I like to call the “dichotomies of the existence.” Dichotomies, such as Black/White, rich/poor, male/female, oppressed/oppressor, powerful/powerless, mainstream/other, us/Them, for the most part, have constructed out personal and professional identities. I decided a long time ago to not allow these dichotomies to define my existence. I am a college president who happens to be an African American female. Am I qualified for the position? Yes. Have I been effective in what I do? Yes. Have I made mistakes? Yes. Were any of the mistakes I’ve made a result of my race or gender? No (p. 12).

In a similar vein, Shirley A. Jackson, in response to some of the faculty members’ comments, suggests to June (2007) that she is too busy being a “change agent” and “visionary” to be concerned about what others think about her and her presidential performance (p. 3).

**Institutional Types**

When I turned my literature search towards understanding the experiences of Black women presidents at different institutional types, namely PWIs and HBCUs, a number of studies suggested that there were some differences—mainly cultural and environmental. Patitu and Hinton’s (2003) research addresses the experiences of Black women faculty and administrators serving at PWIs. Through in-depth interviews, the researchers learn that even in positions of limited power, women of color still have to discern whether personal and professional issues that arise (i.e. promotion and tenure; teaching, research and service expectations) are due in part to racism, sexism or a combination of both.
In an interview with Joyce F. Brown, the president of the Fashion Institute of Technology, Evelyn (2001) inquires about the challenges of leading a PWI as a woman of color. President Brown responds:

I guess there’s always a pressure, if you will, to be the best and better than, because slips are not really tolerated—which is not necessarily to say that they are tolerated otherwise, but we can be sure they are not tolerated in these instances...But, I think there is always an additional responsibility to listen differently, to listen better, to be sensitive to access issues, to be sensitive to the importance of a multicultural dimension in both your statements and in your opportunities that you create (p. 3).

This sense of forward-thinking optimism about what Black women bring to the college presidency at PWIs is also mentioned and noted by M. Colleen Jones in a piece by Stewart (2002). Jones contends that in the near future, more women of color will be hired as chief executive officers at PWIs—not just because of their expertise and credentials, but because there may be still some unease and “discomfort with Black male leadership” (p. 26).

Men of color, unlike their female counterparts, have not had difficulties in making their leadership mark at HBCUs. Historical evidence suggests that the institutional presidency at HBCUs has been overwhelmingly occupied by African American men; and, gender disparities have yet to be fully addressed (Carroll, 1982; Gasman, 2007). In an editorial examining the impact of Black women on education, Collier-Thomas (1982) comments:

Unlike White women, Black women had no real status in the teaching profession until the late nineteenth century. With so few opportunities available to Black men, the areas of teaching and preaching came to be dominated by Black males...Some Black females operated private schools and a few taught in co-educational institutions; however, the majority of Black schools were kept by males (p. 175).
The “keeping” of these traditionally-Black institutions also meant establishing and supporting a history of Black male leadership. Kerr and Gade (1986) assert that “presidents of historically Black colleges were, in earlier times, often bishops of the church or leading ministers” (p. 118). M. Colleen Jones, cited in the research of Stewart (2002), suggests that Black men’s leadership posturing within the African American community has oftentimes come at the expense of qualified African American women: “The club of African American male presidents is like other Black institutions--the Civil Rights Movement, the Black church--they run on the work of Black women but have not allowed them to lead” (p.26).

Some would argue that HBCUs, like other traditionally-Black civic, faith and social organizations, have displayed an unspoken but very visible “tension” between Black men and women (Bonner, 2001). Hare (1979) suggests that much of this tension can be attributed to “slavery and racial oppression” which “have led to distrust, envy and disloyalty” among the two demographic groups (as cited in Porter and Bronzaft, 1995, p.163). Mosely (1980) refers to this tension as the “Black-to-Black dilemma:”

There is a conflict between Black women and men—and Black female administrators feel deserted by Black men...It is a sad state to witness this Black-to-Black dilemma, especially when the need for a concerted effort of both Black men and Black women is needed to combat racism (pp. 305-306).

Similar sentiments are also explored in the research of Cazenave (1983), Porter and Bronzaft (1995) and Collins (1990). Collins (1990) contends that mutual respect between Black men and women, particularly in and outside of professional settings, oftentimes does not exist because of the prevailing “dominant constructions of Black male and female sexuality” (p. 151).
Others have observed this gender tension as well. Nearly thirty-five years ago, Epstein (1973) argued that even before entering predominantly African American professional settings, the “competence and career” involvement of Black women was generally questioned (p. 932). Further, if African American women were employed, it was usually in positions with few opportunities to exercise meaningful change. According to Smith (1982), there has always been the assumption that African American women were most effective in positions such as “coordinators, assistants or assistants to the major decision maker” (p. 320). Even when one examines the presidential leadership at the two HBCUs designated solely for the educational training of African American women, “Black women college presidents…have been extraordinarily rare, which is a reflection of the persistent male control of Black institutions (Guy-Sheftall, 1982, p. 281).

The latter assessment is reflected in the research of Williams (1986), who utilizes descriptive and comparative statistics to explore the career continuum and professional experiences of thirty-six African American chief academic officers (CAOs) at public and private HBCUs. She found that the pathway to the senior-executive level for the six Black women who participated in the study took much longer and was marked with serious personal and professional commitments. For example, although her female participants were more likely to be tenured (83 percent) and hold full professorships (83 percent), some remained unmarried as they ascended from the deanship to the provost role. Three also experienced slight inequities in salary when compared to their male CAO counterparts, especially at public HBCUs.

While some regard the provost or vice president of academic affairs as the individual who “really runs the campus…and is the leader in academic decision-making”
(Kerr and Gade, 1986, p. 17), similar reflections were not true for the African American women who participated in Williams’ (1986) research. When asked to consider their three most significant employment responsibilities, the women spent significant periods of time developing curriculum policies and institutional planning; working with faculty advancement; and, recruitment. This differed significantly for their male CAO peers who performed more functional tasks, which included monitoring faculty, coordinating academic programs and more importantly, serving as the chief executive officer (CEO) when necessary. Williams noted that the women in her study were never presented with the opportunity to serve as CEO in their presidents’ absences. Further, this lack of opportunity informed their personal perceptions about the college presidency. Not one of the women who participated in Williams’ research study “listed the presidency as the next professional position which she would ideally like to attain” (p. 449).

**Black Women and Work/Life Balance**

A significant part of this literature review has focused on Black women and their personal and professional lives within the academy. They also dwell outside of the four walls of their institutions. According to the American Council on Education (2007), 63 percent of all women college presidents are married, and 68 percent are mothers. These percentages are significantly higher for African American presidential leaders. Almost 78 percent of Black men and women college presidents are married, and 90 percent have children. Overall, the statistics suggest that presidents of color have been able to manage the personal with the professional; however, the data also fail to indicate whether or not Black women, as a lone demographic group, have been able to do the same.
“Do babies matter when charting an academic career?” was an inquiry that Hamilton (2002) examined in regard to Black women administrators navigating both the career and home domain (p. 21). The author explored these inquiries with three African American women who served in senior-level capacities at public and private HBCUs. The two provosts and vice chancellors of academic affairs, and single college president, talked candidly about how they were fulfilling “the offer they could not refuse;” but, also honoring and managing effectively their parental commitments (p. 21). For instance, one of the women assumed a provost position that “put approximately 260 miles between her and her family” (p. 20). However, with the support of her husband and son, she was encouraged by both to seize the advancement opportunity. Spousal and familial support was a constant refrain shared between these Black women administrators. All three were married to individuals who understood the incredible demands of an institutional environment since their husbands were employed in higher education as either a professor, dean or senior-level administrator.

Other commonalities were also shared in how the three women incorporated motherhood into their professional pursuits. Maintaining a constant presence in their children’s lives, like participating in co- and extra-curricular activities, was a top priority. However, the call to the presidency for one of the interviewees, and having to explain this new opportunity to her children, was not a simple task. The lone college president shared that when she was considered for an institutional presidency (prior to the one she now occupied), it was her son and his desire to finish out high school that led her to postpone her presidential career.
In the same manner, one of the provost shared that the physical move to another city worried her daughter because she too wanted to complete her senior year with her childhood friends. After soothing some initial worries and inquiries, and confirming that her daughter would not have to relocate, the provost was relieved when her daughter agreed that this was a rare career opportunity that she should pursue. Probing an interviewee further, Hamilton (2002) garnered the following response concerning career and motherhood:

…Clearly (that) your children would rather have you with them…But if they understand the (academic) career path at all, it also makes it much more likely that they can be understanding of their parent’s choices (p. 22).

According to the Black women senior-level administrators, women ascending through the professorial and administrative ranks can “have it all” if they adhere to and practice several lessons. First, a sense of creativity and keeping the faith works well in terms of their spousal and familial partnerships. For one interviewee, her family grew over the years—not biologically, but by inviting college students to live with them in order to assist with daily tasks and childcare. Second, solid communication, and cooperation with and coordination in family members’ schedules are important components in the balancing act. Technology, in the form of cell phones, e-mails and text messaging have aided in this process. For instance, the college president relied on e-mail to stay in contact with her son’s instructors, as well as to make last minute homework
suggestions and corrections. Third, balance, coupled with sanity is key; or, as one provost commented:

It’s important for the dynamics of the family as well as in terms of ensuring solid development for kids. You’ve got to take advantage of every extra minute and make every interaction count (p. 25).

**Black Women and Communication**

Two research studies were located which noted the communicative styles of Black women. In her study on Black women executives, Parker (2001) mentions Black women’s *directness* and suggests that in some predominantly White environments, it is usually casted in a negative light:

When White, middle class cultural forms and values are the norm to which organizational members are expected to adapt, African American women’s leadership communication may be socially constructed as deviant and negative (p. 45).

Martin (2002) also associates this characteristic of directness with the sole female participant in her research study on the ethoi, identities and authorities of three Black college presidents. However, the Black woman in her sample did not view her directness as a negative. Rather, she confided that there were specific instances where being direct with internal and external constituents was necessary—especially in the geographical region where her institution was located. It was the only HBCU in a growing, Southern metropolitan-like city. Likewise, in fulfilling her presidential obligations, she was not afraid to “emphasize her gender” nor hesitant to “feminize phrases” in order to explicate institutional matters (pp. 90-91). Further, Martin observed that she had an incredible knack for detail, both immediate and not-so-immediate, and could “read people” even before she commenced conversation with them (p. 97).
2.6 Missing Elements in the Research

From the literature reviewed and presented in this chapter, we have a better conceptual understanding of leadership and more specifically, presidential leadership. Presidential leadership was sieved through traditional and feminist filters. In the same manner, the dualities of race and gender were incorporated into the research conversation; and, used to examine the presidential experiences of Black women. Past research studies on Black women college presidents have explored their biographical and presidential profiles. Others contain elements that address how they create, develop and exhibit leadership. These studies enhance our knowledge about Black women in the college presidency, but also offer a rich foundation on which additional research can be built.

For instance, we know that the early leadership conceptions of Black women are framed by familial expectations—especially around the issues of education and race (Adam, 1996; Hite, 1996; Jones, 1997). But, I desire to know if these types of issues have also assisted them in how they “make sense” of presidential leadership. Likewise, I want to understand the ways in which other factors, including faith and value systems, have influenced their presidential sense-making.

The current literature also hints at some of the historical and stereotypical (mis)conceptions and perceptions about women of color (Fleming, 1993; Jones and Welch, 1980). These labels and monikers have also been applied to African American women institutional leaders (June, 2007; Maxwell, 2007). While I think it is important to note the perceptions of others, similar to Jablonski (1993), I am more interested in how
Black women perceive themselves. In the spirit of Bensimon (1998), I contend that there is some research value in understanding how women of color see themselves in the presidential role. Instead of giving full credence and validation to the thoughts of others, perhaps our attention needs to be attuned to theirs; and, the coping strategies and mechanisms they employ to refute them.

Finally, we have some understanding of the communicative strategies that Black women employ to “perform” the college presidency; but, are there others (Martin, 2002; Parker, 2001)? If the response is in the affirmative, do they use them consistently as they carry out their presidential duties; or, are they situational? By acknowledging the aforementioned inquiries and concerns, I not only highlight some of the “missing links” in the research regarding Black women institutional leaders, but also in the presidential literature as a whole. In the remaining chapters, I attempt to address these gaps, while hopefully contributing new and fresh perspectives on the leadership experiences of African American women chief executive officers.
Figure 2.1 Black women at the intersections of presidential leadership
CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

Let’s face it. I am a marked woman, but not everybody knows my name… “Sapphire”…or “Black Woman at the Podium…”: I describe a locus of confounded identities, a meeting ground of investments and privations in the national treasury of rhetorical wealth. My country needs me, and if I were not here, I would have to be invented.

(Hortense Spillers as cited in Lubiano, 1992, p. 323)

3.1 Introduction

In Chapters 1 and 2, I offered an introduction to the current study and described its context, as well as reviewed the pertinent literature. In Chapter 3, I move us closer to understanding how African American women “make sense” of the institutional presidency by determining and building an appropriate research design and methodology.

At the core of this research study are three main inquiries. First, how do African American women college presidents conceive of presidential leadership? In the same manner, how does being a “woman” and “of color” influence and/or inform their crafting of a presidential identity? Further, what are the strategies or mechanisms that Black women employ or display, which enable them to “perform” the presidency?
In this chapter, I present an inter-disciplinary framework that is triangulated and explores the **intersectionalities** of race and gender (Crenshaw, 1995). Then, attention is given to defining qualitative research and critical ethnography, as well as the methodological purposes of interviewing and participant-observation. The next three sections address the research study’s logistics, including the search for participants; interview and participant-observation process; and, data collection and analysis. The final section considers the soundness of the study. I review the critical issues of validity and credibility, researcher bias, generalizability and confidentiality.

### 3.2 “Theorizing” Race and Gender

Historically, there has been a “scholarly disinterest” in the personal and professional experiences of Black women in higher education (Howard-Vital, 1989). On numerous occasions, scholars have utilized widely-accepted theoretical and epistemological stances and then applied them to the lived experiences of Black women. In the end, they have either encountered little success or secured limited findings; and, suggested that Black women, as a demographic group, warrant further consideration (for example, see Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger and Tarule, 1986; Chickering and Reisser, 1992).

I am not the first to contend that “mainstream” theories and “ways of seeing” are culturally insensitive and irrelevant. Others, in their research endeavors, have also called into question “traditional” theories and epistemologies and their use in describing the
day-to-day realities of people of color (Howard-Hamilton, 1997; Hughes, 2005; Parks, Carter and Gushue, 1996; Woodard and Sims, 2000). Thus, if we cannot “fit” Black women within often-cited theoretical groundings or epistemological perspectives which were not originally created or meant for them, how then do we “frame” and understand how they “make sense” of the world? In this research study, I do not seek a single solution to this inquiry, because the lives of Black women are too complex and their multiple identities work in tandem. Instead, I theoretically situate their lived experiences within a triangular-like, interdisciplinary framework informed by the following perspectives: Black Feminist Thought (Collins, 2000); invented ethos (Crowley, 1994); and, performance theory (Jones, 1997) (see Figure 3.1, Interdisciplinary framework, on p. 96).

**Angle One: Black Feminist Thought**

Collins’ (2000) critical social theory, commonly referred to as Black Feminist Thought, constitutes the first angle of my interdisciplinary framework. Six, key elements are essential to understanding Black Feminist Thought. First, it is an epistemological standpoint that focuses almost entirely on African American womanhood. Further, it frames the lives of Black women by acknowledging the “dialectical relationship” that exists between their desires for self-definition and multiple forms of oppression (i.e. race, gender, class, occupation) (p. 22).
Second, *Black Feminist Thought* interrogates and teases out “systems” or “organized bodies” of oppression; and, creates a space where Black women can “make sense” of their individual and collective struggles. For instance, when we mention the descriptors, “occupational worth” and “women of color” in the same breath, African American women (since their arrival as slaves and then as forced laborers and domestics), are well aware that both have been intricately tied together. This second element contributes to *Black Feminist Thought’s* third feature, which suggests that African American women’s varied encounters with multiple oppressions also create and nurture their “activism” (Collins, 2000, p. 30). Simply put, the “how” and “why” of an unjust situation, particularly as it relates to women of color, equally informs the manner in which they rectify and resolve the matter.

Fourth and salient to the current study is *Black Feminist Thought’s* ability to communicate a “blackened” and “feminized” activist narrative or stream of thought that runs counter to and challenges the type of “knowledge validation” that is often associated with and found in intellectual communities—like institutions of higher education. It is in these academic spaces where Black women, regardless of their staff, faculty or administrative appointments, operate and function within a Western, Euro-centric and heterosexual male standpoint (Collins, 2000). A similar assertion can be made about Black women attempting to survive, personally and professionally, at HBCUs where a sense of African American patriarchy has been the historical norm (Collier-Thomas, 1982; Guy-Sheftall, 1982; Smith, 1982).
The final two components of *Black Feminist Thought* concern its thematic and even global use as a type of social and action-oriented theory/perspective. Undergirding its core is a sense of activism, change and social justice. The themes of human empowerment and universal care are significant as well (Collins, 2000). Thus, Black women understand that the “work” that they undertake, especially in “intellectual circles,” is a “human” collective and far-reaching endeavor. Collins notes:

…many African American women intellectuals embrace this perspective regardless of particular political solutions we propose, our educational backgrounds, our field of study or our historical periods. Whether we advocate working through autonomous Black women’s organizations, becoming part of women’s organizations, running for political office or supporting Black community institutions, African American women intellectuals repeatedly identify political actions such as these as a means for human empowerment rather than ends in and of themselves (pp. 41-42).

Positioning *Black Feminist Thought*, as the first angle in my interdisciplinary framework, provides a ripe epistemological landscape for exploring how Black women college presidents conceive of and “make sense” of presidential leadership. For instance, who are the individuals, places and events that have shaped their conceptions about leadership? How has race and/or gender informed or influenced their definitions of leadership? Likewise, how do they define presidential leadership? By engaging in ‘sister’ speak or knowledge-producing dialogue in which Black women give “voice” to their realities, I will be able to explore how Black women college presidents rearticulate or “stimulate a new consciousness” about presidential leadership (Collins, 2000, p. 32).
Angle Two: Invented Ethos and Identity

The concept of invented ethos, as posited by Crowley (1994), anchors the second angle of my interdisciplinary framework. Ethos is a term usually found in the philosophical and rhetorical traditions. It references a person’s ability to appear credible and of sound character in a public setting (Enos and Borrowmen, 2001). Individuals who “are in a position to influence the ideology of participants in a rhetorical situation” or “can suppress or divulge information that is crucial to the understanding or deciding of an issue” exhibit a situated ethos (Crowley, 1994, p. 110). Further, those who maintain individual positions of authority and power; or, hold membership in groups that exemplify both, possess a situated ethos. Those who are not privy to such positions must invent ethos. Essentially, these individuals have to “construct characters that seem intelligent by demonstrating that they are well informed…project an appearance of good moral character…and project good will toward an audience” (p. 89).

While the conceptual ideas advanced by Crowley (1994) are not easily associated with higher education research, I think they can inform the current study’s discussion about African American women and their attempts to craft a presidential identity. If we consider the aforementioned definitions of situated and invented ethos, and apply both to the historical experiences of Black women in America, we could argue that this demographic group has operated from a limited, situated perspective. Particularly in higher education, very few women of color, although highly educated and credentialed, have been afforded unquestionable power in the classroom, let alone the executive
boardroom (Parker and ogilvie, 1996). Likewise, Black women, in reference to their physical race and gender, have not been members of a dominant or privileged group.

Moreover on numerous historical occasions, their identities, as well as characters and credibilities, have been defined for them. Audiences, receptive or not, have gone to great lengths to “bolster or compromise” (Crowley, 1994, p. 109) “who Black women” are. Their “portrayals” and “caricatures” have run the gamut. Women of African descent have been described as: 1) well-endowed and smiling mammies; 2) sassy, emasculating and bitchy Sapphires and Caldonias; 3) tragic and fair-skinned Jezebels and Delilahs; 4) money-hungry, impeccably dressed and cash-obsessed gold diggers; 5) welfare queens; and/or, 6) Clair Huxtables and Black Women Overachievers (Collins, 2000; Foster, 1973; Jewell, 1993; Lubiano, 1992; Morgan, 2002; Richardson, 2003; Villez, 2003). These categorizations are further compounded when descriptors like passing (race-less, void of color and assimilated) or androgynous-like (gender-less) are included in the mix.

I contend that African American women college and university presidents are fully aware that these descriptors exist; but like a rhetor, who invents ethos out of a sense of exclusion and in order to attract the minds and ears of immediate and external audiences, they craft and invent their presidential identities. The concept of invention and its use in the lives of Black women is nothing new. As Washington (1987) suggests, the very being and survival of Black women have depended on their ability to invent when necessary. When their raced, gendered and classed dignities have been stripped from
them, they have had no other option but to practice it (Giddings, 1984). Royster (1994), in describing the rhetorical strategies of Black women writers, speaks of invention in this manner:

African American women are called upon to define themselves against stereotypes and other negative expectations, and thereby shift the ground of rhetorical engagement by means of their abilities to invent themselves and create their own sense of character, agency, authority, and power (p. 65).

In a similar manner, how African American women achieve this feat is significant to the current study:

…once they have crafted “identities” for themselves …and for their audiences in space and time, they can proceed to make their cases, whatever those cases might be and however they might be made, in ingenious and often eloquent ways…They assume a stance and craft relationships between themselves and others, and they take their chances in public discourse, typically as uninvited participants who boldly and courageously engage in rhetorical struggle to overcome disregard and dispropriation (p. 65).

Given these inventive practices, I am compelled to inquire about how these women have crafted presidential identities, even when their definitions and styles of leadership may have run counter to or been incongruent with others’ beliefs about presidential leadership. Further, have occasions presented themselves where their credibility or qualifications to serve, including their educational and occupational credentials, been questioned? Have others opined about their character or “moral” being;
and, categorized them according to the descriptors mentioned above? The aforementioned perspectives on invention may bring us closer to knowing the answers to these inquiries.

**Angle Three: “Performing” Leadership**

While *Black Feminist Thought* might frame the way African American women college presidents conceive of presidential leadership, and if we suggest that they invent presidential leadership, there is still the matter of “performing” the presidency. When I suggest the term “performance,” on the surface, I am referring to “…debates, story tellings, singing and other speech activities in which what speakers say is evaluated according to aesthetic cannons…for the beauty of their phrasing or delivery, or according to the effect it has on an audience (Briggs, 1988 as cited in Duranti, 1997, pp. 15-16). In the presidential role, Black women participate in cabinet, board and faculty meetings, as well as campus and community-wide events, where issues or concerns are “resolved meaningfully through the uses of speech and writing” (Hauser, 1991, p. 34). Instinctively, they perform the presidency by responding, communicatively, in the most appropriate manner.

Often, Black women name, claim and own their raced and gendered identities through verbal discourse. This is evident in their use of *conversational signifying*. Conversational signifying is a type of “verbal dueling” or a way of encoding messages or meanings in natural conversations which involves, in most cases, an element of
indirection” (Mitchell-Kernan, 2001, p. 152). Indirection is an underlying factor because it “forces the hearer to take additional steps” in order to understand the speaker’s intent; and, incorporates messages that are so encoded that “dictionary entries…are not always sufficient for interpreting meanings” (p. 153).

Some demonstrate the Black Woman’s Laughter or “a critique on situations where injustice and the exercise of power define Black women’s roles in the event at hand” (Morgan, 2002, p. 101). Black women’s narration also takes into account body language, facial expressions and physical movement (Richardson, 2003). Their narratives have the capacity to “…capture and hold the attention of the listener…to make words come alive, to use ear-filling phrases that stir the imagination with heavy reliance on tonal rhymes, symbolism, figures of speech and personification (White and Parham, 1991, p. 57).

For others, narration is symbolic of the innate wisdom and spiritual-connectedness that Black women have been known to possess. For instance, Etter-Lewis (1996) suggests that when Black women tell their survival stories, their lives become synonymous with the term, “endurance” (p. 170). Bell-Scott and Johnson-Bailey (1988) maintain that when African American women participate in narration, they truth-tell. Simply put, they share flat-footed truths, or a “story or statement that is straightforward, unshakeable, and unembellished” (p. xix). This sentiment is similar to that of Austin (1995) who contends that Black women often testify or “present the facts” about their
own lives. Omolade (1994) takes this notion one step further and professes that Black women not only testify, but sing “whenever and wherever” they can uplift their “ideas, philosophies and experiences” (p. xiv.)

The theoretical positions and performance techniques discussed here offer unique lenses to observe the presidential performances of Black women college presidents. For example, what are these women attempting to perform and convey when they write and present strategic plans to boards of trustees, solicit capital campaign donations or give a commencement address? What messages do they want people to hear and see? Likewise, what strategies and mechanisms do they employ to get their messages across?

As alluded to in the previous section, Black women enter into institutional and public spheres where situated identities generally precede them. Thus, in the process of inventing their presidential selves, they are also demonstrating a type of performance that does not fit within the natural confines of presidential leadership. Instead, their performance of presidential leadership becomes the theory (Jones, 1997). Jones maintains that their performances “need not be written about in order for its theory to be present” (p. 55). Collectively, they are “reflective of a particular philosophy and set of theories about performance and the African Diaspora’s existence” and mirror “its worldview, its resistance, its politics” (p. 55).

A similar refrain about Black women and their ability to “perform” is echoed in the work of Christian (1987), who posits that “…people of color have always theorized—but in forms quite different from the Western form of abstract logic” (p. 399). Christian
suggests further that theorizing, in the African American tradition, usually occurs in “…narrative forms, in the stories we create, in riddles and proverbs, in the play with language, because dynamic rather than fixed ideas seem more to our liking” (p. 399).

3.3 Research Design

*Qualitative Inquiry*

Prior to crafting my research design, two requisites were taken into serious consideration. First, I wanted to work with a style of research that valued the concepts of interrogation and interpretation. Likewise, methods associated with the research style needed to possess some give or research flexibility, so that I might “hear” the “voiced” narrative of each research participant (Jones, 2002). Once these two requirements were established, it became apparent that a quantitative study, consisting mostly of numbers and statistics, would not do justice. Rather, my study’s design and methods would need to be grounded in and informed by qualitative research.

Qualitative inquiry provides a research space where an individual, in his or her surrounding environment, can be studied and explored (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000). In the broadest sense, qualitative research is a “situated activity that locates the observer in the world” and “consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible” (p. 3). Researchers who identify with qualitative inquiry tend to “study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or to interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them” (p. 3).
Undergirding the foundation of qualitative research are two main concepts: interpretivism and subjectivity. Research sieved through an interpretivist screen recognizes that “human action is meaningful” and “possesses a certain intentional content” (Schwandt, 2000, p. 191). At the center of this intentional content, is the subjective view or “inner feelings and belief systems” of the person being studied (Sunstein and Chiseri-Strater, 2007, p. 9).

Extrapolating on these definitions, I contend that there is significant value in how Black women institutional leaders evoke their five senses, especially voice and sight, to “make sense” of presidential leadership, identities and performances. Thus, my research task is to understand the subjective experiences of women who fit this moniker, by entering into their cognitive spaces; and, viewing “what they are up to in terms of motives, beliefs, desires and thoughts” (Schwandt, 2000, p. 192). Assuming such a task also requires that I search for and extract rich descriptions and details about their lived experiences, weave them together and, present them thematically in an appropriate format (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000; Glesne, 1999).

I achieve the latter by selecting a methodology or data-gathering technique that allows for the acquisition, analysis and interpretation of new knowledge. Jones (2002) posits that the selection of a methodology relies heavily on the “phenomenon under investigation” (p. 467). Qualitative studies have been actualized and expressed through “ethnographic prose, historical narratives, first-person accounts, still photographs, life histories, fictionalized “facts,” as well as “biographical and autobiographical materials”
(Denzin and Lincoln, 2000, p. 10). For the purposes of this study, I utilize an ethnographic-tinged approach seen through a critical lens, as well as two, complementary methodological techniques: interviewing and participant-observation.

**Ethnography “Seen” through a “Critical” Lens**

Because I am interested in how African American women college presidents “experience” the college presidency, my research design incorporates bits and pieces of research elements associated with ethnography. The research style of ethnography is dualistic. Tedlock (2000) reasons that ethnography is both a “process and product” (p. 455). Process-wise, ethnographers make an “on-going attempt to place specific encounters, events and understandings into a fuller, more meaningful context” (p. 455). Likewise, they typically immerse themselves in a field of study or research space, gathering and producing findings, which have been secured through interviewing and participant-observation (Glesne, 1999).

Throughout the current study, I blend these “traditional” aspects of ethnography, with those that constitute “critical” perspectives, namely race and gender. By doing so, I am able to wrestle with, contextualize and challenge concepts like power, privilege and politics (Anderson, 1989; Kincheloe and McLaren, 2000). The underlying objective of ethnography that has been *blackened* and/or *feminized* is to foster a “change in attitudes, beliefs, and/or social context for research participants and others” (Glesne, 1999, p. 12). Critical ethnography not only identifies the inaccuracies and dilemmas associated with
systems of power, privilege and politics. It also encourages and motivates us to uncover, personalize and make known the “unexamined assumptions” of those who have not, historically, been welcomed participants in powerful, privileged, political and in this research instance, presidential systems.

Ethnographic Techniques: Interviewing and Participant-Observation

In qualitative inquiry, it is not uncommon for researchers to use multiple techniques like interviewing and participant-observation to gather their findings (Janesick, 2000). As a research process, interviewing goes beyond just seeking “answers to questions” or to “test a hypothesis” (Seidman, 1998, p. 3). Its purpose is to learn about how another individual experiences and connects to the world (Seidman, 1998). Fontana and Frey (2000), citing the work of multiple researchers, offer a similar logic: “… interviews are not neutral tools of data gathering but active interactions between two (or more) people leading to negotiated, contextually-based results” (p. 646).

These contextually-based results are generally acquired through the use of an interview protocol. A protocol lists sample inquiries that can be posed in a structured, unstructured or focus group format. This study is primarily concerned with the first, two types. In a structured interview setting, researchers “ask all respondents the same series of pre-established questions” and refrain from “interjecting his or her opinion” (Fontana and Frey, 2000, pp. 649-650). On the other hand, unstructured interviewing offers “a greater breadth of data” because the researcher is encouraged to embrace the personal and
“understand the complex behavior of members of society without imposing any a priori categorization that might limit the field of inquiry” (Fontana and Frey, 2000, p. 653).

Both types are appreciated in this research study. This choice is closely aligned with the views of Sunstein and Chiseri-Strater (2007), who contend that there is research value when both are simultaneously considered and employed:

Interviewing involves an ironic contradiction: you must be both structured and flexible at the same time. While it’s critical to prepare for an interview with a list of planned questions to guide your talk, it is equally important to follow your informant’s lead…The energy that drives a good interview—for both you and your informant—comes from expecting the unexpected (p. 238).

Particularly in qualitative research, “good interviewing” has the capacity to “…contribute a wide range of cultural information” while conjuring up “folktales, historical narratives, songs…and descriptions of encounters” in and between members of diverse communities (Saville-Troike, 2003, p. 99). I am most interested in narrative inquiry. Simply defined, narrative inquiry is the solicitation of stories (Ellis and Bochner, 2000). Further, it provides a blank canvas for:

showing characters embedded in the complexities of lived moments of struggle, resisting the intrusions of chaos, disconnection, fragmentation, marginalization, and incoherence, trying to preserve or restore the continuity and coherence of life’s unity in the face of unexpected blows of fate that call one’s meanings and values into question (p. 744).

When we consider the multiplicities of Black women, self-narration assumes a more critical role as oftentimes, their lived narratives, are told from a raced and gendered viewpoint (Etter-Lewis and Foster; 1996; Omolade, 1994; Vaz, 1997). African American women, who narrate their own existence not only counter, protest, resist and appeal
others’ definitions, classifications and interpretations; but, their narrations assume a riskier mode since they are doing so on behalf of their “Blackness” and “womanness” (Collins, 1998, Richardson, 2003). African American women “talk back” and “break it down;” and, challenge presumed knowledge about who they are as individuals and group (Collins, 1998). In other words, what Black women have to say, or their message’s content, is just as significant as its delivery, or how the message is told. They take risk, “push the envelope,” and more importantly, do not apologize for doing so.

**Participant-Observation**

Additional research value is located in physically observing how Black women “experience” presidential leadership. Similar to interviewing, observing an individual in his or her world is a process. Oftentimes, researchers will “carefully observe, systematically experience and consciously record” what occurs in the research setting (Glesne, 1999, p. 46). Observations are then documented in a field notebook or journal. According to Richardson (2000), recorded field notes should offer “fairly accurate renditions” of what has been seen, heard and felt (p. 941). Not only should the researcher depart the setting with supplemental data, but he or she should have a more nuanced understanding of their research participants (Glesne, 1999).

Reciprocity is also an important component associated with participant-observation. While the task of the researcher is to study “others,” he or she is also being researched. Collectively, there is some visual and spatial give and take. The research
participants’ language, descriptions and events in the setting “talk back” to the researcher, and vice-versa. Thus, a sense of co-collaboration is produced. Angrosino and Mays de Perez (2000) recognize this research back-and-forth, and suggest that when researchers enter in an observation space:

No longer can it be taken for granted that ethnographers operate at a distance from their subjects…Rather, there is said to be a dialogue between researchers and those who cultures/societies are to be described…we now function in a context of “collaborative” research (p. 675).

3.4 Search for Participants

Researching a specific “intent” is at the core of qualitative inquiry. According to Patton (1990), qualitative inquiry is “purposeful” (p. 169). Those who employ it should “select information-rich cases whose study will illuminate the questions under study” (Patton, 1990, p. 169). Because I desired to tap into the knowledge communities of Black women college presidents, I first had to get a sense of their numerical representation and institutional locations. To assist with this task, I undertook a thorough analysis utilizing two main websites: the United Negro College Fund/The College Fund (http://www.uncf.org) and the National Association for Equal Opportunity in Education (http://www.nafeo.org). Martin (2002) utilizes a similar web-reference technique in her research on Black college presidents.

The websites maintained by both organizations assisted greatly in identifying the nineteen Black women who currently lead four-year, public and private HBCUs. Once an institution and its female leader were identified, her name, postal mailing and e-mail
addresses, and telephone number were recorded and entered into a presidential database. Likewise, if noted, the same information for special or executive assistants to the president were retrieved and documented as well.

In my attempts to identify the number of African American women serving at four-year, public and private PWIs, I was unable to locate a single, current listing. Instead, I used and cross-referenced presidential listings published by *The Crisis* (2001) and *Black Issues in Higher Education* (2002). Unlike discovering the identities of those leading at HBCUs, confirming the names of those at PWIs was more like that of a scavenger hunt. The process was quite tedious since one search would end immediately, while another would continue until all institutional possibilities had been exhausted.

Search by search, I pieced together a presidential database that consisted of thirty-two women. Nineteen of the women were presidents of four-year, public and private HBCUs or institutions that served primarily African American students. The remaining thirteen women were institutional chiefs leading four-year, public and private PWIs.

**Institutional Review Board**

Prior to distributing letters of interest to thirty-two African American women college presidents and inviting them to participate in my study, I submitted a formal application in March 2008 to the Institutional Review Board (IRB) on the campus of The Ohio State University (see Table 3.1, Research timeline, on p. 95). The application was reviewed and approved, and I was granted a research exemption during the same month.
Letters of Interest were mailed during the middle of April 2008 (see Appendix B, Formal Letter of Invitation, on p. 220).

Two declinations were received by the first of May; and eight more by the end of the same month. The reasons for these declinations varied. I am eternally grateful to those women (and special assistants) who called or sent personal e-mails and correspondence citing time constraints, other presidential obligations and their previous participation in related studies. Several commended me on my research topic, its approach and the void it might fill in the literature on presidential leadership. Their decisions to not participate were noted. I then focused my attention on those women who had not yet responded.

On May 27, 2008, I sent twenty-two e-mails to presidents (and special/executive assistants when provided) reminding them about the study and its purposes. This endeavor yielded two more declinations— one due to retirement and another because of her decision to pursue other opportunities in higher education. I had limited connections with or never heard from fourteen others. At this point of the study, I was becoming a bit discouraged. However, over the course of June 2008, I participated in on-going telephone and e-mail communications with six women. After determining dates, and in some instances re-scheduling initial visits, three presidential visits were immediately confirmed. A fourth visit was put on hold due to a pending retirement. A fifth opportunity was initially confirmed, but was later canceled as a result of some political turmoil occurring on that president’s respective campus. A final presidential visit was confirmed at the end of June 2008. By July 1, 2008, I had secured four research participants.
Campus visits, interviews and participants-observations were scheduled and occurred during the following time periods: July 7-8; July 22; August 4; and, August 7-8, 2008.

**Research Sample**

During the summer months of July and August, I had the opportunity to “speak with,” “hear” and “see” four, Black women college presidents in action. Although these women spoke in singular spaces, their collective “voices” were “thoughtful, informative and articulate” (Gay and Airasian, 2003, p. 116). While we get a better understanding of “who these women are” in Chapter 4, it is important to highlight some salient presidential and institutional characteristics about the sample.

**A. Institutional Type/Carnegie Classification**

Three of the four research participants served at four-year, private HBCUs (including one single-sex institution). The fourth participant led a four-year, private PWI. According to the institutional classifications maintained by the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, all three HBCUs are considered “undergraduate instructional” colleges, with no graduate instruction available (http://www.carnegiefoundation.org). Degree programs are geared more towards the arts and sciences. These characteristics are slightly different for the single PWI. The same governing body declares it a “profession-focused” college, with some post-baccalaureate and professional opportunities at the master’s level.
B. Geographical Location

Although their presidential presence has been felt throughout multiple states of the Union, historically and geographically-speaking, Black women tend to serve at four-year, public and private institutions located in the Mid-Atlantic and Southern regions. In this study, two of the research participants’ institutions were located in the same Southern state. Another presided in a state geographically classified as the “Deep South.” The last research participant served at an institution positioned in the Northeastern region of the United States.

C. Presidential Lineage, Service and Age

Collectively, these four women bring twenty-four years of experience to the presidency. Where they fall in the presidential lineages of their institutions ranges from being the tenth to the fifteenth. The “youngest” in presidential years has been on the job for two years. The second to the youngest has been serving for five years. The eldest two of the presidential bunch have been leading for seven and nine-and-a-half years respectively. Although the four women were not required to share their ages, based on their educational histories and when they received their initial baccalaureate degrees, it was estimated that the women were between the ages of fifty-five and fifty-nine.

D. Notable “Firsts” in the Presidency

Throughout their professional careers, all of these women have been “firsts” or “doers” breaking new ground in their respective disciplines and careers. Three of the
women achieved this feat, race- and gender-wise, when they assumed the presidency. Two of the research participants were the first, African American women to serve their institutions. Another research participant was not the first woman to serve her college; but, the first Black women to hold the presidential post.

E. Educational Credentials

Similar to their years of service and presidential lineage, the educational credentials of the women fall along a continuum. Two of the four possessed master’s degrees: one in social work; and, the other in public policy and administration. One of these women is also working towards a doctorate in organizational management and leadership. In addition to their masters’ degrees, the other two research participants earned doctorates in the fields of educational leadership and policy and economics.

F. Occupational Trajectories

Three of the four women had formal and informal ties to higher education. An administrative route was followed by two of the women. The first had served in various leadership roles at her institution. She had been a board delegate; office director; vice-president; and, an interim president. The second woman had also served as a vice-president in her prior position to the presidency. The third woman college president had somewhat entered the presidency having ventured onto the academic route. Before serving at her respective institution, she had taught a course (at the same institution) as a visiting lecturer. The final research participant was an institutional “outsider” (Corrigan,
2002). Her professional grooming occurred in the administrative and executive ranks of the healthcare profession.

3.5 Research Methodologies and Data Collection

According to Dixson and Rousseau (2005), research studies that rely on critical methodologies should be “problem-centered.” Thus, the research dilemma should “determine the method, not the other way around” (Tate and Rousseau, 2005, as cited in Dixson and Rousseau, 2005, p. 22). Initially, my methodological plan was to employ a three-part process similar to one used by Garner (2004) in her research on African American women leaders and spirituality. Garner proposed setting up and conducting three interviews focusing on their life histories; professional experiences; and, spirituality and meaning-making practices.

I, too, wanted to meet with my research participants at least three times. Once, to conduct an initial interview; second, to observe them “in action” while at a campus or community event; and, then third, to discuss and make connections between what I “saw” and “heard.” Similar to Garner (2004), I quickly learned how valuable time was to these women—even during the summer months. While my first and last research participants allowed me to visit, as well as interview and observe them, over a two-day period, when I arrived to my second and third participants’ campuses, I was informed that my
engagement time would be limited to one day. I had to quickly modify and adapt my interview and participant-observation strategies. Regardless of my time restrictions with each woman, I adhered to the following:

**Initial Interviews**

Before beginning the first interview, the four women received a formal greeting and reminder about the purpose of the study. They were also asked to read and sign a Statement of Consent form (see Appendix C, p. 224). The consent form detailed the aforementioned information and requested permission to tape record our interviews. Once the consent form was completed, the tape recorder was turned on and the interview commenced.

Research participants were asked twenty-six questions that were thematically-segmented under five sub-headings, including: 1) icebreaker questions; 2) leadership conceived; 3) leadership perceived; 4) leadership performed; and, 5) conclusion (see Appendix D, Interview Protocol One, on p. 226). All of the inquiries were posed in a semi-structured format, and permitted room for additional questioning. This inquiry-style decision afforded me the flexibility to enter into the research process with a set of pre-conceived questions, but also room to probe each research participant further by asking additional, open-ended questions (Fontana and Frey, 2000). My objective was to create a
sisterly conversation, where each research participant felt comfortable enough to take me on a narrative journey. The interview process, at this point, lasted at most, two hours and thirty minutes.

Each of the women’s office spaces provided an appropriate setting for the interviews. All of their offices were located in the main administration buildings on their campuses. Likewise, there were important physical and spatial aspects of their offices that I noted. For instance, campus layout blueprints and designs in one president’s office signaled her desire to expand her college’s grounds. I got a sense of one president’s cultural contributions to African American history as a result of the commendations and plaques that rested in several curio cabinets. All of the women surrounded themselves with personal and professional mementoes, as well as ethnic-themed artwork.

**Participant-Observations**

As mentioned previously, two of the women permitted me to interview them; and, then observe them at a campus or community event. The other two combined my requests in one visit. However, throughout my interactions with the four women, I had the opportunity to participate in and observe these women, as they either: 1) led executive cabinet meetings; 2) entertained personal lunch invitations; 3) discussed a contractual partnership between (her) campus and a local restaurant; 4) completed an interview with a national radio program; 5) discussed the formation of an educational partnership between two college campuses; 6) delivered a welcome address at a dinner for area
youth; 7) met with an executive cabinet member; or, 8) presided over a summer
commencement.

**Final Interviews**

Completing the final interviews with the four women was a bit tricky given some
of the time constraints. Where possible, my field notes and the personal insights that were
gained from the participant-observations conducted the previous day were used to frame
the eight to ten inquiries for my final interview (see Appendix E, Interview Protocol Two,
on p. 231). All of the questions were personalized, but spoke broadly to their
“performances” of leadership, leadership style decisions and specific invention strategies.
This part of the process lasted, on average, for an hour. For the two visits, where both the
initial interview and participant-observation were held on the same day, my interview
protocol was adjusted. Questions emanating from the participant-observations, in this
instance, were generally asked before the conclusion segment of the protocol.

**Organization of the Data and Mechanics**

Organizational envelopes were developed for each research participant. Each
envelope displayed a label listing the date and time of interview; and, designated
pseudonym. A similar system was utilized for organizing my audio tapes. All of the
interviews with the women were tape recorded. According to Seidman (1998), tape
recordings have the potential to capture and protect the “words of the research
participants” (p. 97). Likewise, it preserves and honors the lived experiences of those under study. In total, I amassed eight tapes that held forty-five minutes of data on each side.

The process of transcribing the tapes came next, and was very “time consuming” (Seidman, 1998, p. 98). It took me roughly a month. Once the lengthy transcriptions were completed, the four women received copies of their responses for a member check. Conducting a member check is a critical aspect in ensuring the soundness of the research. According to Schwandt (2001), a member check serves as a useful method for “validating or soliciting feedback” from one’s research participants (p. 155). A cover letter included with the transcription encouraged the four research participants to respond at their earliest convenience with any modifications. At the time of organizing my final draft, I did not receive any constructive feedback.

3.5 Analysis of the Findings

In qualitative research, findings from the field serve as “bones” (Sunstein and Chiseri-Strater, 2007, p. 253). Meticulously, the bones are pieced together and provide the spine for the research study. With various bones in hand, the first stage of my analysis occurred as I completed each transcription. My initial intent was to listen for emerging themes. However, physically hearing the women’s voices and then putting their personal and professional experiences manually on paper, permitted me to be in their presence once again. Observations that I had documented on paper were reaffirmed. I could see
their facial expressions, hand gestures and mannerisms. My workspace, mentally and visually, began to reflect their offices and meeting rooms.

There was some meaning-making in the initial transcription process, having typed out their responses—listening to and documenting their responses. Both tasks greatly informed my second stage of data analysis. This stage involved taking the individual responses of each research participant and inserting them into a database worksheet. The worksheet also contained a space for my field notes. Cell by cell, I was able to look across the personal and professional experiences of four women, and search for common themes.

For instance, what similarities or differences did they share? Did their responses mesh with what the literature suggested? Were there streams of thoughts that I had not initially explored? Ultimately, how would I “bring to life the language” of the women whom I had studied (Sunstein and Chiseri-Strater, 2007, p. 253)? Ten major themes emerged from the data and were thematically coded (Seidman, 1998; Strauss and Corbin, 1999). Ryan and Bernard (2000) suggest that coding “is the heart and soul of whole-text analysis” (p. 780). Process-wise, it “…forces the researcher to make judgments about the meanings of contiguous blocks of text” (p. 780). All of the themes are discussed further in Chapter 4, Reporting the Findings and Chapter 5, Discussion and Interpretation of the Data.
3.6 Soundness of the Research

Throughout this entire research process, the issues of validity and credibility were always present. Both address and speak to the soundness of my research (Christians, 2000; Olesen, 2000). To ensure the trustworthiness of my findings, I employed three techniques in particular: 1) member checking, 2) triangulation and 3) peer review and debriefing. I also completed some personal journaling and reflection at various points during the research process. The first, member checking, was referenced and discussed above in Section 3.5, Research Methodologies and Data Collection.

Citing the work of Creswell (1998), Glesne (1999) notes that triangulation is the “use of multiple data-collection methods, multiple sources, multiple investigators, and/or multiple theoretical perspectives” (p. 32). I met the requirements of triangulation by acquiring and filtering my findings through multiple, theoretical and methodological venues. The study’s filter was informed by a triangular-like, inter-disciplinary framework consisting of Black Feminist Thought (Collins, 2000), invented ethos (Crowley, 1994) and performance theory (Jones, 1997). Likewise, data was obtained through two main processes: interviewing and participant-observation.

I also confirmed additional data through what Hodder (2004) refers to as mute evidence. Citing theoretical and methodological examples in such disciplines as archeology, sociology and cognitive psychology, Hodder suggests that written documents and material artifacts can also communicate a vital story. Thus, documents that were
gathered while I visited the women, including electronic sources and physical artifacts (i.e. presidential announcements; self-authored articles; trustee reports), were utilized as well.

Further, I participated in peer review and debriefing by supplying working drafts to my program advisor, and members of a Sunday evening writing group. The idea of receiving constructive criticism, as well as sustaining feedback from an individual or group, is consistent with the research perspectives of Schwandt (2001). Schwandt recommends that a researcher locate and utilize someone who can act as a sounding board, provide useful insight or find “holes” in the study. Not only did the two women in my writing group fulfill such duties, but my advisor consistently “pushed” me to keep “combing” and “questioning” what was occurring mentally in my mind and physically on my computer screen. I am eternally grateful for their untiring support.

**Researcher Bias**

The last five years, and nearly year and a half to complete this study, provided ample time for me to reflect and get my research bias in check. I have to be honest. Planning and writing this dissertation was tedious, difficult and challenging on numerous fronts. Drafts of chapters, at various points, were re-organized, re-revised and re-written. Paragraphs were sliced or removed altogether. Early on, I experienced the most frustration when I attempted to explore the lives of Black women using theories,
protocol, formats and even language that did not speak to or address their complexities.

For a while, I could not place my finger on this menacing research “itch” until I read a passage written in a piece by Omolade (1994). It read:

At first, a Black woman student gets overtaken by a passion to become scholarly to please those who have trained her, then she develops the scholar’s love of learning, the search for truth, and the concern with “objectivity.” She spends long hours in the library verifying her every instinct and thought…Books and sources are read and reread; papers are written in that precise and professional style in which the “I” and “me” and “she” have been changed into a discussion about subjects, clients and “theys” (p. 108).

The first time I encountered the passage, my eyes welled up with tears; and, not because I did not acknowledge or honor the history and basic principles of scholarly research. I became so emotional because the passage described me. I was the Black woman student! I was trying to fit African American women into a research niche that was too cramped and confining! I was trying my best not to inject “me” and “my experiences” into “them!”

My internal struggle was quite a teachable moment, because when all the drafts had been re-organized, re-revised and re-written, I had to remain true to self. I do not apologize for being passionate about Black women and their participation, regardless of their professional status, in higher education. Nor am I sorry for aspiring to the upper echelons of higher education like these women. I, too, am considering the presidential track.
For over two months, I had the privilege of sitting at the knees of Black female
wisdom. I saw tiny elements of myself in all of these women. Glesne (1999) would
contend that my understanding of “me,” in relation to my research, is central to the
concept of subjectivity:

The way to become aware of which subjectivities, of all the subjectivities
that make up your autobiography, are being engaged in your research is
to keep note. Watch for when they creep into your consciousness, be alert
for how they take over the questions you ask, and write about them, continuing
to look for them as your research progresses” (pp. 105-106).

One way in which I managed my own “autobiography” and promoted a
significant amount of self-reflection was through personal journaling. Janesick (2000)
contends that self-reflection should be the goal of journaling, since it may inform
meaningful and rich interpretation. Journal entries written early in the research process
reflect some of my hesitancy and frustration with the literature. Those which document
my travel experiences during the summer of 2008 display a sense of maturity and
comfortability; and, suggest that “I can do this!” Others note the “awe” I was in as I
engaged with these women, absorbing and pondering about their professional lessons and
advice. At these moments, even if they lasted just seconds, my face was reflected in
theirs. Several months and many journal entries later I am at a different place—
personally, professionally and even scholarly. I have grown in these aspects and am more
confident in my ability to conduct serious and rigorous research.
**Generalizability**

In research circles, the concept of generalizability “refers to the degree to which the findings are applicable to other populations or samples” (Ryan and Bernard, 2000, p. 786). However, in qualitative inquiry, the “intent is to describe a particular context in depth, not to generalize to a context or population” (Gay and Airasian, 2003, p. 116). My objective in conducting this research study was to capture a “snapshot” of the lives of four Black women who lead institutions of higher education. I was concerned with how they (and not others) conceive of or “make sense” of the presidency, craft a presidential identity and, “perform” their presidential responsibilities.

Thus, when we talk about generalizing my findings and perhaps applying them to other presidential groups, I would argue that there may be some similarities—especially with other sisters of color leading American institutions of higher education. On the other hand, we have to be careful not to treat women who are both “raced” and “gendered” as single, cookie cutter replicas or monolithic groups.

**Confidentiality**

Earlier in this chapter, I mentioned that time played a factor in my interaction and engagement with the four women. Likewise, I think that my research “reach” was limited, somewhat, by the concept of confidentiality. I had no participation from women serving at four-year, public HBCUs; and, minimal participation from those leading four-year public and private PWIs. But, the numbers dictate the handling of confidentiality.
The collective number of Black women college presidents serving at four-year, public and private institutions of higher education is still so small that a culmination of several descriptors would reveal their true identities.

Because of this reality, great care was taken to modify the personal and professional identities of the women. Pseudonyms were selected and used for identification purposes. Likewise, institutional names, geographical locations and the names of individuals mentioned by the women were changed as well. Where appropriate, the names of historical figures were not modified. It should also be noted that all of my collected findings, including audiotapes and field notes, were maintained off-campus in a locked file cabinet. Upon the conclusion of my degree program, all of the resulting data will be destroyed.
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Table 3.1, Research timeline
Figure 3.1, Interdisciplinary framework
CHAPTER 4

REPORTING THE FINDINGS

I have been extraordinarily blessed to have people who have seen something in me—despite whatever else is going on and feeling that they had something to sew in. It just really has been a blessing. You know, I could be doing anything and folks have steered me.

(Dr. Michelle Johnson, Lee College)

4.1 Introduction

In this chapter, we meet the four African American women who participated in this study; and, begin to understand how each has come to know, identify with and perform the college presidency. First, I offer brief portraits of each woman in section 4.2, Presidential Beginnings. In the next section, we learn more about their early formations and conceptions of leadership. Likewise, findings related to the women’s personal and professional identities and value systems; race and gender; and, faith and spirituality are highlighted and shared.

The women’s responses then serve as a frame and lend themselves to a discussion about their current presidential roles and perspectives on institutional leadership. In “Making Sense” of Presidential Leadership, the four women not only define the term, leadership, but they also cite role models and mentors who are stellar examples, describe their leadership styles and suggest useful presidential characteristics.
The dual identities of race and gender are the primary focus of section 4.5, *Crafting a Presidential Identity*. The women discuss how race and gender have informed their “presidential selves.” They also take into consideration and address some of the perceptions that are maintained and communicated by others. In the same manner, the women speak at length about the coping mechanisms and assessment practices they employ as institutional leaders. In the final section, *Presidential Performances*, the women talk about what they hope people “see and hear,” and touch on the preparation, content and delivery of their presidential messages.

### 4.2 Presidential Beginnings

*Shelia Davis, Ed.D.*  
*Fuller College*  
*City: Walter, Southern USA*

“Everyone wants to be an actress when they are seven years old, but I wanted to write children’s books,” said Shelia Davis. I was not surprised by her response. Over the course of two days, I had the opportunity to learn about how this former teacher, principal and higher education administrator, had been a life-long advocate for children. When I inquired about how she made the transition from the classroom to the presidential boardroom, she said:

I have always administered or led something. When I was younger, I was the Editor-of-the-yearbook and president of the Student Government Association. I have been a principal and home coordinator. When one of my mentors, President Hugh Barry learned of my administrative skills, he hired me at Washington University and gave me three units: Financial Aid, Admissions and the Registrar’s Office. After guiding and observing me for several years, one day he said to me, “You know, I think it is time that you start thinking about your own presidency.”
She did and learned of an opening at Fuller College, a small, private HBCU located in the southern city of Walter. However, instead of waiting for the formalities associated with a presidential search, she and two other colleagues visited Fuller “incognito.” I gathered that she had come to Fuller’s campus undetected, but desired to hear her explanation. Without hesitation, she shared:

We drove down here. We walked the campus, went into offices and talked to people. We talked to students. We went into the Admissions Office as if we were trying to enroll one of our children and got a sense of what the institution was like.

Dr. Davis’ undetected visit solidified what her mentor, President Barry already knew—that she was ready to lead an institution of higher education. President Davis confided that she and her colleagues started plotting on their return trip home. “Driving back,” she stated, “the three of us started planning about the kinds of changes and expansion, and the potential of the institution.” It was just a matter of time before she would formally place her name in the running.

Helen Bryan, M.S.
Civil College
City: Mansion, Southern USA

“My basic philosophy in life is that if you treat people fairly, you will fare well,” commented Helen Bryan, as she and I sat in her somewhat sweltering office. When I arrived that morning to Civil College, she told me that the air conditioning in the administration building was out and the institution’s maintenance crew was “working on it.” Simply put, the current conditions were going to make for a very warm interview period, especially in a Southern city like Mansion. It was an inconvenience that I was willing to entertain. The situation, to some extent, created the perfect backdrop for getting
to know a woman who had defied color and gender lines in the Deep South, and spent most of her professional life breaking through numerous occupational barriers.

Looking back over her professional journey, President Bryan never thought that she would be a college president. She stated:

I wanted to be a nurse or a doctor. I remember the White doctor who would come and take care of my grandparents and eat dinner with us. I was amazed that he could make people well. Growing up in the sixties, I knew that I wanted to do something that would help others and make a difference. My friends and I were so committed to social justice. We wanted to right the wrongs that had been heaped on humanity. How I ended up in this position—wow, what more powerful way, more transformative power, than higher education.

President Bryan would come to acknowledge that the “fit” of higher education suited her nicely, particularly at Civil. After a twenty-five year stint in the mental health and not-for-profit professions, as well as local and regional politics, she returned to her alma mater as a board delegate and then as its founding director of the Health and Wellness Center. Her untiring efforts to “make a center work for an undergraduate institution without a medical school or nursing program” did not go unnoticed. The sitting president also made her his special assistant for special projects. Likewise, another soon-to-be-vacancy, a vice presidential position in the area of institutional advancement, had her name on it. Unbeknownst to President Bryan, it was this opening that placed her on Civil’s presidential trajectory:

The president left. We found an interim, and thought he would eventually move into the presidency. Things did not move in that direction. They asked me to do it. I accepted, but also said that they would need to open up a search. I remember, we were getting ready for commencement and the board went into executive session.
She continued:

When they came out, they informed me that they had removed “interim” from in front of my name and wanted me to serve for at least two years. That is why I always say that my two years really turned into a six year commitment.

When I inquired how she “made sense” of her “sudden” presidency, she said that at first, “it was a challenge.” At the same time though, she liked to think that all of her professional leadership experiences “had qualified” her for the presidency, and was “what the board and Civil needed at the time.” Smiling, she said to me, “I am an example of that old saying—you never know who is watching.”

Michelle Johnson, Ph.D.
Lee College
City: Brown Heights, Southern USA

“When I was younger,” stated Michelle Johnson, “I wanted to be a writer and television commentator.” Her childhood aspirations came to fruition. Prior to the start of her presidency at Lee College, Dr. Johnson was (and still is) one of the nation’s most prolific social scientists. Thus, when she entertained the thought of coming to and leading an institution like Lee, she knew that it was, in her own words, “an act of God.” She explained:

I have tended to live my life like a Don Quixote. I have only had to worry about me. I had been approached about a couple of other presidencies. They didn’t interest me. But, I was teaching a diversity course here and fell in love with it and the students. I fell in love with the notion that we should have our own institutions no matter how integrated or multicultural we are.
Accepting the presidential assignment at Lee also allowed Dr. Johnson to cement some “things” that had been occurring in her personal life. She remarked:

I had not looked for a job in twenty years. But, I knew that I had not been put here to just write and talk, and I wanted to serve. I was in an accident in 2005. A metal bar hit me upside the head and I had concussion-nary challenges for about a year. I started to think about my legacy. And, I didn’t want to be known as, what this little White boy called me once, the “lady who yells at White people on television.” So, I put this on the altar and had a couple of dreams. I am here and I just feel peace.

Shirley James-Jackson, M.S.W.
Creek College
City: Sylvester’s Square, Northeastern USA

“You don’t mind if I sign these while we talk? They have to be ready for graduation,” said Shirley James-Jackson as the tape recorder started. “No,” I politely answered to this woman who seemed content on being a walking advertisement for her institution. It was evident from the moment she walked up to me, shook my hand and I noticed the lapel pin on her yellow blazer: a miniature tote-bag emblazoned with her institution’s name. James-Jackson was the president of Creek College, a four-year, private PWI located in the northeastern region of the United States. Entering her fifth year at Creek, she was not the first woman to serve at its helm, but the first African American woman to do so.

Unlike the other three institutional leaders, who had some formal and informal ties with higher education, President James-Jackson spent most of her professional life in the executive ranks of the healthcare profession. As a youth, she desired to be a doctor. While she did not end up wearing a medical coat, she did wear one reserved for the chief executive officer of a community medical practice. She served for twenty-one years until
she decided that it was time to do “something different.” She did not know what, but with the support of her family, mainly her husband and with a “golden package in hand,” she knew that she had options. Little did she know that, that option would find her.

A chance encounter with a gentleman at a community healthcare event, where she was providing a keynote address, changed her circumstances. After her talk, he approached and inquired if she would be interested in higher education leadership. Some individuals in the healthcare community were already aware that she was leaving; but, this gentleman was not. She shared this bit of information with him, and he offered to meet her for “tea or breakfast.” Intrigued by his offer, President James-Jackson obliged.

She met with him and remembers him saying:

“You should think about the college presidency. It is very hard to get them. It usually takes two or three years. You would be a non-traditional president, so you would need to think about the kind of institution. I am willing to help you.”

An additional opportunity would present itself, and assist President James-Jackson in connecting the presidential dots. A local healthcare organization paid for her to attend an area career counseling program. There, she participated in professional inventories and parlayed her executive administrative experience into “useable” characteristics that aligned well with those desired in higher education leadership. Coupling this experience with an honorary degree that she received from Creek College
and then learning that the institution would soon be looking for a new president,
President James-Jackson’s idea of a lengthy and some well-deserved “me time,” became
less appealing.

4.3 Development of Leadership

“Change Agents” and “Vocational” Purpose

Before the women and I focused on the concept of leadership, we devoted some
time to talking about “who they were.” President James-Jackson defined “who she was”
in relation to all of the multiple roles she occupied. She was a “spouse, mother, family
member and leader.” She not only described herself as “energetic, innovative, charismatic
and ethical,” but also “very spiritual.” Taking a moment to ponder about “who she was”
professionally, she mentioned that throughout her employment history, she had always
been drawn to “mission-driven work” where she could serve as a “change agent and
leader.”

This “change agent” sentiment was also reflected in the responses of Shelia Davis
and Michelle Johnson. Davis, the president of Fuller College, embraced and identified
with the “change agent” moniker because it represented her “lifelong commitment to
children.” Further, “who she was” professionally, was the result of spending most of her
adult life “as an advocate for children and the causes which impact the lives of those
disenfranchised by the system.”

Not one to shun her feminist tendencies, President Johnson coupled her “change
agent” status with several descriptors. When asked to define “who she was,” President
Johnson responded bluntly: “I am a cutting-edge, change agent, provocateur and intellectual thinker.” According to President Johnson, her growth as a person, both personally and professionally, had been nurtured and fostered by opportunities to dialogue and debate with others. Active participation in written and verbal discourses inspired her. She commented:

The most important thing that you could say to me about me is, “You made me think.” I like to be the person who makes you think. I like for people to walk away and say, “Hmmm. What did I think about that?” I don’t care whether or not you agree with me. I just want the thought process to continue.

President Bryan responded somewhat differently than the other three women. Her response to my initial inquiry commenced with a dismissing of the “perks” often associated with presidential leadership. Speaking from what I sensed was a mixture of confidence and experience, she stated:

Well, let me answer it this way. In making presentations, in particular to women’s groups, I have often said that I don’t want to be defined by the title, my position, the car I drive, the clothes that I wear, or the house that I live in. These are things that are external that serve to accentuate who I am. I like to think of myself as an individual who has a strong sense of purpose, commitment and guided by her faith to accomplish the things that she feels are her callings at this time.

“Personal and Professional Values: One in the Same”

President Bryan’s mentioning of faith was quite appropriate because I was going to eventually introduce it into our conversation. Before doing so though, I wanted to ask each woman about her personal and professional values. Without hesitation, President Bryan confirmed that faith and spirituality were at the core of her being. Both permitted
her to “operate” in- and outside of the presidency with “integrity, honesty and love.” As a result, there were no differences between her personal and professional values. She noted:

It is very difficult for one to separate who one is as a person, deeply rooted in the experiences, the values and the principles of which they have lived their life, and separating that from the professional individual. It is all a part of the same.

A similar refrain was echoed in the response of President Johnson. “Absolutely,” she said, “there is no real disconnect between who I am as a person and who I am as a professional and leader.” For her, the personal was professional; and, included putting people first, being “transparent” and in touch with a “higher power.” I asked her what she meant by “higher power,” and she quickly responded, “Love the Lord, and understand where you sit in the scheme of things.”

President James-Jackson contended that an individual should be secure enough in their personal and professional values that they naturally exude or “wear them on their sleeves.” Particularly in a setting like higher education, she noted, “people should know the kind of person they are dealing with.” Her presidential wisdom did not end there. She added, “Because what one believes in dictates when and where he or she can be effective.”

For President Davis, our discussion about her personal and professional values required that she mention the individuals who were instrumental in shaping hers: family members. Reared on the campus of historically-Black Reed A & M University, her father stressed constantly the importance of getting a good education. “It was,” she said, “never
a discussion of whether or not you would go to college—it was where you would go to college.” She had been taught to value the “freedom of expression” and to think “outside the box;” but, also to respect others. Understanding the “politics of the world,” through healthy debate, was encouraged as well.

When I asked what she had learned from honing her argumentative skills as a child, it was only a matter of seconds before Dr. Davis reminded me of the era in which she was reared: “It was not just about being right, but being able to negotiate through all the people and the quagmire, particularly during segregation and the period of desegregation.” Before I could ask if she possessed a different set of professional values, she continued her response and used presidential leadership as a backdrop:

I don’t think you can get away from your values and “who you are” when you move into a leadership role. You work differently and try not to impose because you think you are right. But, you also see the big picture. It is a matter of being analytical and visionary.

From listening to the four women’s responses about their personal and professional values, we glean that they view both as one in the same. Family and elements of faith have been instrumental in informing and shaping them. As a result, they have learned to act and behave in a transparent, but visionary manner—particularly when they have interacted and engaged with other individuals.

**Influences of Race and Gender**

Although the dual identities of race and gender are discussed at length in section 4.5., I felt it was salient to introduce them here; and, to discuss whether either or both had influenced the women’s conceptions of leadership. Participants’ comments about race
and gender not only reflected Black women who were at different maturation periods in their personal and professional lives, but also the social, cultural and geographical diversity amongst individuals of African descent.

President Bryan, a “child of the sixties,” suggested that all of her lived experiences, including growing up Black and female in the “Deep South,” had some “influence” on her “philosophies and beliefs.” Her affirmation, as a Black woman, was the result of being reared by a strong mother, encouraging father and supportive women in her tight-knit, Southern community. She noted, “I certainly had strong notions that African Americans and women had as much right as anyone else to ascend to the highest level.”

However, she was also a realist. As a child and young adult, she knew firsthand about the racial injustices associated with segregation and Jim Crowism. While she acknowledges the lessons now, during those moments in her life, she did not know that her observations and experiences were teaching her about leadership. She stated:

Having such strong feelings against injustices certainly influenced my leadership and that you cannot wait for someone else to make something happen. You have to go out there and join in.

“As Black children, we were taught that we always had to be better…and could not be mediocre,” commented President James-Jackson. This was coming from a woman who had spent most of her child- and young adulthood in the Midwest, but would also travel to see her grandparents in rural Arkansas. When I inquired about the influences of race and gender on “who she was,” she responded that while she had always acknowledged her “Blackness” and “woman-ness,” she had made an effort not to consider either, in any situation or circumstance, as an advantage or excuse.
The responses offered by Drs. Davis and Johnson suggested that gender, much more than race, had impacted their conceptions of leadership. Race was a “given” for President Davis because she “came up in a world where part of the educational process was learning how to negotiate a world that was racist and had racial stresses.” She knew that “there were White people,” but neither “they nor the times” defined her. What she had not quite anticipated was the genderism associated with being a woman. She recalled:

I had been an elementary school principal where you expect women to be in charge. I had worked on a college campus where a president really did empower women. But when I came here, I did not realize that some of the issues that I was dealing with, in terms of “resistance” on campus and in the community, were grounded in the fact that I was a woman.

“Resistance,” I said? She replied, “Yes, and personality notwithstanding, I was not a submissive, Southern woman.”

I was intrigued by her descriptor, “submissive, Southern woman,” and wanted to probe her more (I would have the opportunity to do so later); but before I could prompt her, her train of thought referenced other women in executive leadership roles. According to President Davis, the glass ceiling was not only true for African American women serving at HBCUs, but for most women who entered “institutions that were resistant to change.” Offering up an example, she cited the presidential experiences of a fellow Euro-American woman serving at a neighboring institution:

I think when Frances Mims went to Hillsborough College, she inherited the same kind of issues. She would give you the example of firing the football coach within the first couple of years that she was there. Had a male president done that, it would have been bravado for taking that step. But, for her to do it, it was just off the charts.
Comfort in her own “female skin” did not exclude President Johnson from experiencing similar, gender-related issues. As she stated, “when you are dealing with men, there are some challenges—gender dynamics are real.” She continued:

There are many men who have problems with female leadership. Even as the CEO of an institution that is dedicated to educating and celebrating women, I find that there are men, whose checks I sign, to be blunt, from time to time, feel that it is their job to challenge my authority. Or, to opine that perhaps I might not know what I am doing.

While President Johnson shared some choice words about some of the men that she had encountered at Lee College, she did not lay all of the blame at their feet. She also had a message for her sisters too. Espousing her feminist tendencies, she mentioned that there were “some issues” that women of color in leadership positions needed to resolve. I probed and asked her to cite some of those. She responded:

Women of color know what the micro-inequities are and understand how little traction you get from talking about that. It is true of all women. But I think with Black women, there is more—especially if you look at Audre Lorde’s *Sister/Outsider*. I think that a lot of African American women have a lot of unfinished business around class, coloration and marital status that we do not talk openly about.

**The Role of Faith**

The manner in which faith had been actualized in the lives of the women and informed their conceptions of leadership varied. Born and raised Catholic, Dr. Davis commented that she “did not come up in a Black spiritual culture.” Instead, she relied on “a very strong family structure and home environment” for spiritual sustenance. It was not until she had matured that she realized that “the structure (of her life) did not just
happen on its own.” I asked her to consider this statement in a leadership context, more specifically in her daily routine as Fuller’s chief executive officer, and she stated:

If you are asking me if I get down on my knees every night and pray for the right answers, I don’t. I trust the skills, talents and directions that I have been given and use them to make a difference here. But, I do believe that people are placed in situations for a reason and there is a game plan. When I reach the point that I am no longer able to see the answers or solutions based on the gifts and talents that I have, that is when I stop and say, “I need some help.”

Forms of “help,” according to President Davis, often “manifested” themselves through others around her. She said:

For instance, Ms. Rainey, my assistant, is entrenched in what we would consider are traditional religious beliefs. She always has a, “Well look Dr. Davis at this.” My late husband was very good at it too—“Sheila, just keep at it. Things will break.” From that perspective, it is the people in my life that probably have a stronger, abiding religion, that seem to be there at the right time.

Whether President Davis referred to these manifestations as divine intervention, she was willing to acknowledge that “something was there” during the “good and bad:”

When there have been days, many in the last eight-and-a-half years where I wanted to get in my car and drive off and not come back, something would happen that I couldn’t explain or describe. Something would happen where I would say, “Okay, there is a light at the end of the tunnel, go back.” It may have been a kid, who stopped by and said the right thing. It may have been a check that dropped in the mail at the right time. Something happens that says, “Yes, this is really where you are supposed to be.”

“I have an interesting relationship with it,” was the response that President Johnson offered when I inquired about her faith. Like President Davis, she too was raised Catholic; and, even attended parochial schools. However, Catholicism and its historical ties to “oppression” did not sit well with her as an adult. As a result, she stopped going to
Mass; and instead, flirted with “Buddhism, the unity thing and even the Nation.” It was not until she had, what she described as a “mid-life crisis,” that she began to reevaluate the role of faith in her life. She confided:

I had a crisis in my early forties. I was doing radio at a place that was not kind to me. They got my work, but they didn’t get me. So very abruptly, I was let go and had come to Washington, D.C. to do radio. But, I made the mistake of turning my identity into a radio personality. I spiraled into a period of depression and misplacement.

It took the assistance of a friend, who inquired as to whether she prayed daily, for President Johnson to reconsider the purpose of faith. Her response to her friend about prayer was not immediate; but, she located part of the solution while attending an Easter service at a well-known Baptist church in D.C. She recalled:

The preacher was talking about the rising of Christ and the rock and how it had moved. The question he posed was about how these two little women got the rock to move. It piqued my imagination. He talked about all the obstacles you can have in your life, like racism and all; and, I was like, “Yeah!” I realized that I had never let racism and sexism prevent me from anything. Why would I let them prevent me from having grace and God? That day was my reintroduction to God.

I asked her if that reintroduction or as she put it, knowing a “Father-God” and a “Father-Mother,” in any way informed her conception of leadership or was reflected in the way she led Lee College. She responded:

There is a divine order and power. I try to share this with others, especially our students. Ninety-two percent receive financial aid. Forty-five percent are first generation and have extraordinary challenges. Twenty-five percent might be what I would call “family deficient.” Six percent are orphans—mom or dad is in jail. The young lady that I was just speaking with on the phone, her dad passed in April, her mom died two years ago; and, she is being raised by her grandmother. She was on probation, but came to summer school and got a B+ and an A in her courses. These students have to know about “faith and works.”
She continued:

I was put here to do stuff. I am the CEO, but I also know that there is someone bigger than me. It is not about me. If this were a corporation, my metric would be profits. If I were a writer, my metric would be words. Here, we are talking about people. Faith, it humbles you.

President James-Jackson and Bryan reiterated their previous responses about the importance of faith and spirituality. “Faith and spirituality are just a part of who you are,” said James-Jackson. Both allowed her “to understand whatever she was going through” and reinforced the idea that “it too, would pass.” Likewise, faith and spirituality “grounded” her; gave her “confidence;” and, provided “a very different way of observing things” at Creek College. When I asked her what this latter sentiment meant, she replied, “You learn not to take things so personally and you sense that most people want to do the right thing.”

Posing this specific inquiry about faith and spirituality permitted President Bryan to fully explore the roles both had played in her life:

Faith is what sustains me. Regardless of the challenges, trials and tribulations, my faith teaches me that things will work out okay. I go back to, “With all thy getting, get understanding” and “Acknowledge God in all thy ways and he will direct your path.” Those are the types of things that echo in my mind some days. Faith gives me tenacity and the belief that “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.”

A firm grounding in her faith also informed how she interacted with individuals, from board members to middle managers, students and community leaders. Respect was an utmost priority—even when situations and circumstances were uncomfortable. President Bryan expounded:

Because of my faith, I can sit and tell you when you have done something that is less than the standards that I have. I can discipline you and give you feedback in a constructive way. I can do that in a conversational
tone. I can dismiss staff without ever abusing them or being critical of them as a person. Because of my beliefs, I am able to do that. I respect the individual.

Having the opportunity to talk about faith and spirituality, as it related to the women’s development of leadership, provided the women with some space to self-reflect on the role that each had played in their lives. Although all four women expressed different narratives about their formal and informal relationships with faith and spirituality, all acknowledged, in various ways, how both have impacted and been exhibited in their personal and presidential lives.

4.4 “Making Sense” of Presidential Leadership

“Leadership” Is…

Rogers (2001) suggests that formal definitions of leadership vary across the literature, but also possess common themes. There was some truth to this assertion as I listened to each of the women define and talk about leadership. “Leadership,” according to President Johnson, “is the power and audacity to galvanize and get people to bring their highest and best to the table.” She continued, “It is about getting them to see the world the way you see it—some buy-in.” President Davis also trumpeted the notion of “buy-in” and settled on a quotation: “Leadership is being able to make people do what they do not want to do.” Noting my perplexed look, she expounded:

You can break that apart and get into the consensus building and all those characteristics, attributes and indicators of leadership. But I think, in part, it is being able to see a goal and then causing people to be able to do it, whether they want to help you get to it or not.
To explicate her point further, she recalled a conversation that occurred in a leadership course that she taught at Fuller several years ago. She and the students were having a discussion about historical figures that represented “good” leadership. She commented:

We got a plethora of things and names of leaders. But, for the first time, I had a kid who actually said, Adolf Hitler. No one ever says that. Adolf Hitler was probably one of the most effective leaders in world history, and yet he doesn’t fit into the category where we usually talk about good leadership. But, I think that is what effective leadership is—being able to get people to do what you want them to do, whether or not they want to do it.

While she mentioned some aspects of team participation in her response, President James-Jackson discussed leadership in reference to something that was “visionary” and a “transformational” act. She stated, “Leaders chart a vision; they try to communicate that vision; and, then help their institutions achieve that vision.” I inquired as to whether all individuals had the capacity to perform the task of visioning and she replied:

Not everybody has the ability to see beyond where something is. There are some people who go into a house and it is a mess, and they think, “Wow, I can turn this into my castle!” And, there is someone else who can walk into that same house and say, “Get me out of here!”

Offering a response that was more like a two-fer, President Bryan approached the definition of leadership from a technical perspective. She declared, “Leadership is both an art and a science.” I asked her to comb through her response. “The art of leadership,” she stated, “is one’s ability to convey his or her vision to people and then being able to influence them to follow it.” “The science,” she continued, “refers to the principles of management—how you delegate, hire, select, take charge, step out and take risk and the practicality of it.” “When considered together,” she elaborated, “both are about
connecting with people in such a way that it is believable—because if you are leading and no one is following, then you are just taking a leisure walk.”

*Models of “Good” Leadership*

In the previous section, there were specific elements of leadership that were stressed. Leadership, as it was suggested, required a vision; assistance or “buy-in” from others; and, a defined plan of action. When I asked the women to cite the individuals who had exemplified “good” leadership in their lives, their suggestions fell into three, main categories: 1) family members, 2) professional mentors/role models and 3) African American luminaries. For President James-Jackson at Creek College, her grandparents who “had no formal education” but “were remarkable people” demonstrated good leadership. Likewise, she named several presidential peers in the immediate geographical area as leadership mentors: 1) Mary Miller, a fellow woman president at an all-women’s institution, Hunter College; and, 2) Brandon Long, president of notable Camden University. She also depended on the professional advice of a “little, old Jewish man” that she had known for fifteen years.

In the same manner, she mentioned two historical individuals, the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and Mary McLeod Bethune. I inquired as to why she selected both; and, she commented that she admired Dr. King because he was a “transformational leader.” She paid homage to Mary McLeod Bethune, one of the first Black women to
lead an American institution of higher education, because of “what she did for Bethune-Cookman.” President Bethune served at Bethune-Cookman College from 1904 through 1942; and, again in 1946 until 1947 (Hine, 1994). “She was,” according to President James-Jackson, “an example of extraordinary leadership.”

For President Johnson, a familial example of good leadership was her mother, who pursued her own doctoral studies while President Johnson was completing her baccalaureate degree. President Johnson admired her mother because she was a “risk-taker, organizer and spokesperson.” Another model of “good leadership” was a mentor named Patricia Williams. She was the first Black woman to receive a doctorate in economics from Tullis University, an Ivy-League institution. When I asked President Johnson to expound on this mentorship, she commented:

She was one of my professors at my undergraduate institution, very quiet and different. People could not figure out why we were so close. We were opposites. Where I am like all over the place, she was very contained. I learned a lot from the way she ran a meeting, her dignity and commitment to scholarship and how hard she worked.

Similar to President James-Jackson, President Johnson also named historical luminaries from Black history as models of good leadership. Given her multiple, professional identities, President Johnson’s listing read like a “Who’s Who in Black America:”

Dr. Hattie Dunham, whom I have known since I was nineteen. Tracie Simmons, whom I have known since I was about then as well. Dr. Margie Day, who is on our board and just a phenomenally gracious woman. My best friend Corina Benn who is very pragmatic, discerning and forthright, and Dr. Bailey who encouraged me to apply for this position. She has been a sister-friend throughout. I also love dead, Black people. Ida B. Wells was my sister. W.E.B. DuBois was my husband.
In addition to the professional mentorship that President Davis shared with her former supervisor, Hugh Barry, three other individuals had left an indelible leadership mark on her. The first was her father, a former instructor at RAMU and an entrepreneur. “He was,” in her own words, “bright, introspective and developed a program at RAMU that became its first cooperative education program.” Not only did he direct the program for several years, but his leadership extended far beyond the classroom. He was community-oriented; and, “whenever he saw issues, he went after solutions.”

The second was a former superintendent of schools in a large, Southern district. Dr. Davis’ admiration for David Ronald concerned his ability to challenge the “educational status quo;” and, to encourage children and teachers to excel. The name of one more individual, and African American woman, who had served as the executive director of a national teacher’s organization and a professional mentor to numerous educators, continued to come up during our time together. The esteem with which President Davis regarded this individual was evident when she recalled some advice that had once been shared:

I was at a point, professionally, struggling with defining “what I was” and “who I wanted to be.” She basically said, “You know, you got this talent. Let’s put it here.” She just threw me out there and made me swim. She was just infamous for her belief in reaching back and pulling someone else up. She would say, “Don’t ever leave a position that you haven’t prepared somebody else to move into. You don’t own this job—it is only as good as you are, and make sure that someone else moves into it.”

As a child, President Bryan primarily looked to her mother and father as examples of good leadership. While her parents’ primary concerns were to farm and maintain the
land they owned, they were also engaged in their surrounding community. Likewise, they were active leaders in their community church. Reminiscing, President Bryan commented:

I saw my mother and father looked to by neighbors and friends, as people who could make things happen—whether it was helping a sick child or taking someone to the doctor in the middle of the night. Or, whether it was sharing what we had with others. There was always a sense of shared responsibility.

Her father in particular, as she put it, “was probably the greatest influencer in my life.” She continued, “He had a quiet, gentle strength and was very respectful.” I asked her to share more:

My father was always encouraging me to reach beyond the common place. He had his little gems he would say to me—“that my place in this world, was where I decided it to be.” Or, “if I ever allowed people to define me, then I was opening myself up to allowing them to also confine me.”

His gems were comforting and reassuring—even when she found herself at a local police station as a result of her leadership activities in the Civil Rights Movement. She recalled that night for me:

My dad came in and talked to me, and told me that my mother was furious. He said, “I want you to look me in the eye. Do you believe in what you are doing?” I said, “Yes.” He said, “You are not just doing this to follow the crowd?” I said, “No, I really believe in this. I believe we really have got to step out there and lend our voices and support to bring about change.” He told me, “I will support you as long as you do it because you believe it. Don’t ever let others influence how you think and act, even if it means that you have to stand alone.”

**Defining Presidential Leadership**

As I continued to engage with and observe each of my research participants, I was beginning to understand how each one made sense of leadership. When I suggested
that we preface the word with “presidential,” the women’s responses assumed a greater sense of command and urgency. For instance, President Davis equated presidential leadership with a specific skill set. “Presidential leaders are supposed to be visionary, and act as consensus builders and goal-setters,” she stated. When I inquired as to whether there was a clear distinction between “leadership” and “presidential leadership,” she responded:

I think presidential leadership is somewhat different than leadership. I don’t think you have to know it all to be an effective president; but, you do have to know what you don’t know and be comfortable enough to put people in the places where you are weak—so your weaknesses don’t become a liability for the institution.

She suggested that this strategy of “substituting for one’s weakness” was even more critical at a place like Fuller:

Particularly at private institutions, you cannot lead them without external support. You have to make people like you and do things that they would not do for other people. You have to understand the politics of the land. You have to be analytical and understand where people are coming from. That is a different set of skills, I think, than you need in some other leadership roles.

President James-Jackson’s reply provided a nice juxtaposition to Davis’ since her leadership skills were developed and nurtured in the healthcare industry—and not higher education. While she did not immediately offer an outright definition of presidential leadership, she discussed at length the “pomp and circumstance” or “mystique” surrounding it. She laughed and said:

There is a mystique around presidential leadership that I don’t think you necessarily have in other professions. The president says something and people take what you say, even if you don’t mean it in that way.
She continued:

The other thing that makes higher education different is that there are so many stakeholders. In healthcare, we had patients, faculty, practitioners, a board and community relations. But in higher education, especially those with a long history, you have many stakeholders and town-gown relationships. It is much more intense—like the time required and the thought that has to go into balancing all of these relationships.

When I asked her if she had bought into this presidential “mystique,” she was mixed:

I mean, it is hard. I have tried to bring to my presidency “who I am” versus me as the “new president.” But, some of it you cannot get around. We had an event on Jean’s Island the other day. I came in and got this preferential treatment. There was also the issue of, “What do you call me?” After a lot of thought, I didn’t want to be called “President Shirley James-Jackson.” We compromised and ended up with “President Shirley.”

While President Johnson reiterated her earlier definition of leadership (“the audacity to galvanize”), when paired with a presidential descriptor, she suggested that it meant “committing oneself to setting an example.” Presidential leadership meant that she was “representative of a group of people who were looking for a way—a way to be and interact.”

For President Johnson, this latter sentiment was “easier said than done.” She confided that the representation factor associated with the institutional presidency had posed a “real issue” for her. I sensed that she was referring to the balance between her presidential and public personas; but, I wanted her to “name” the issues. She stated:

I am identified with and the primary face of this college. But, there is a bit of tension. At times, people have said to me, “Well, that is not presidential.” I know that I am an irrepressible individual. I have a good time. I have a sarcastic mouth.

I asked her to cite a moment where the “sarcastic Johnson” perhaps upstaged “President Johnson.” She referenced a television documentary in which she had recently appeared:
Well, when I responded to the question about sex and I made the “hot and horny” comment. I said it and it was not “presidential.” I probably should have said, “Well, if you have immediate plans to have intercourse with someone then perhaps you should carry a condom.”

I asked if there was a lesson about presidential leadership in the documentary example.

She let out a reassuring laugh and said:

Yes! I have to be more mindful of the position that I am in as president—in a way that I never had to be particularly mindful before. I can understand how some of the stakeholders looked and said, “That’s not presidential.” But on the other hand, you have to be who you are because that is all you are. It is a challenge.

President Bryan also spoke at length about this concept of mindfulness. Similar to Presidents Davis and James-Jackson, she associated presidential leadership with “having a vision,” “being able to engage stakeholders;” “being the face of the college;” and, interacting with “external constituents.” However, like President Johnson, she also suggested that serving in the presidential role came at a great personal sacrifice. In essence, it meant “giving up your individual persona.” She expounded:

I am the president of Civil College. I am never devoid of that identity and have to be mindful of that. It doesn’t matter if you are in Wal-Mart getting lettuce or out at the pool on a sunny day. I am still the president. Whatever I do and wherever I am, I represent in the mind of the public, the picture of Civil College.

Leadership Styles

The descriptors that the women used to describe their leadership styles were not only personalized to their presidential experiences, but also to their institutional realities. Influenced by a quotation that her father-in-law used to share, “If you are not moving forward, then you are standing still and moving backward,” President James-Jackson declared, “I am collaborative, transparent, encouraging and inclusive.” In addition, she
stated that she identified closely with transformational leadership. She was fascinated about how she could take an institution like Creek College “from here, to there:”

When I was named president here, I went around, interviewed and talked with trustees and asked, “Do you think we are about incremental change or do we need transformation?” Most people said transformation. Creek had to undergo a transformation if it was going to survive. The question then became, “To what extent?” We were going to hold onto our mission, but change our vision.

She continued:

A lot of institutions find it challenging to talk about transformation because it implies that they are doing something wrong. I don’t think that is the case. It means that the way we have done things won’t necessarily work going forward.

“Participatory” and “engaging” were the two descriptors that President Bryan used to describe her leadership style. It was also communicative. She commented:

I want to keep my pulse on everything. I always want to know what is going on with my university officers and faculty, and how the academic programs are operating. That is the central force for everything that we do. I am constantly in touch. When I travel, I am in touch electronically. I call back. I believe in sharing information.

The notion of “sharing information” was also salient to President Johnson; and, one of the main reasons why she shunned hierarchical leadership. “I like to parachute in on people in interesting ways,” she suggested. Likewise, she embraced a mode of leadership that was “direct and forceful,” yet “nurturing and open.” Smiling, she noted the inherent contradiction:

I know. I tell you what I want. I delegate. I hug, but I demand accountability. I want you to do what you say you are going to do, and I will offer the same.
Unlike the other women, who described their styles utilizing familiar leadership terms, President Davis selected a descriptor that others might suggest is a potential weakness for an institutional leader: impatience. In a direct manner, President Davis said:

The right answer would be that I am democratic and a consensus builder—that I value the input of the people who work at the institution. That is not true of me. I am visionary and analytical. I can get from point A to Z. Once I determine that you are capable and competent, then I no longer manage. If you are not, then I do micromanage. I am an “in-the-trenches” person, but I am an impatient leader.

Because I was struck by her honesty and forthrightness, she and I “marinated” for a moment on the idea that she was impatient. I wanted to know how she had come to acknowledge it as a part of her personal and presidential selves. Taking full responsibility, she commented:

Everything that has happened to me, both positively and negatively, has happened because I was impatient. When I was getting ready to be cleared for the assistant principalship, I needed nine hours of administrative supervision. The school system paid for six. My first husband suggested that I take the six hours and the last three the next year. I decided that I would pay for the three. My decision put us at risk financially; but had I not done that, that opportunity would not have been there and I do not know if it would have come again. I would not have been an assistant principal.

Her sense of impatience had also proven “risky” at Fuller as well:

I have made some decisions here that I didn’t wait for the feedback. Then, I had to work with the negative press and naysayers, back-peddle and clean up. If I had just waited, I would have saved myself those issues.
Reflecting on whether there were lessons learned about her leadership style through all of these experiences, she stated that there were two. Both required a delicate balance:

I am candid to a fault. What comes up, comes out. That is why I surround myself with people who are not threatened. If not, I know the crusade and advocacy piece comes out when sometimes it would be better just to lay low. I have to have that balance. I am reminded about the advice that my superintendent gave me when he made me assistant principal: “Shelia, you are almost right, but you can’t go barreling through to the front and get what you want. Sometimes, you have to slow down and walk around to the backdoor.”

**Presidential Skills**

As the research participants and I continued our conversations about their leadership styles, we also touched on what each woman felt were the necessary characteristics that an institutional leader should possess. Their responses yielded similar themes. For instance, President Bryan suggested that “presidents have to be willing to take responsibility for their institutions.” She remarked:

Presidents have to have a firm understanding of the mission and vision. You have to create a vision for the institution and have an appreciation for higher education. You have to know the importance of faculty credentials and attracting good students because student learning is at the heart of everything you do.

Dr. Johnson also mentioned the aspect of vision, especially in relation to her institution’s multiple stakeholders, including the trustees and alumnae, administration, faculty, staff and students. Possessing a “vision” allowed her to get others “excited” about what “Lee could be.” “At the same time,” she continued, “a good president can also freely admit their mistakes and shortcomings.” I sensed a bit of personal honesty in her latter statement. She took a moment to explain:
It is a struggle, but I think the best leaders are willing to say, “I blew this one.” A mistake is a mistake—name it, claim it and fix it. I think most people are vested when someone is willing to admit that they are wrong. This is a learning environment. You have to be willing to put your own mistakes up for inspection.

Reflecting on their presidencies, both Presidents James-Jackson and Davis mentioned financial expertise as a necessary characteristic. “For the most part,” said James-Jackson, “you do have to be a terrific fundraiser.” She continued:

You have a fiduciary responsibility to manage your institution and to be a good steward. It is all strategic. You have to know how to hold onto your market share.

President Davis’ response contained similar elements:

Presidents should be financially smart. It is about understanding finances and the intricacies of organizational finance. I am not sure how many of us get that unless we were business people or chief financial officers in the process.

Further, remaining financially un-savvy, according to Dr. Davis, was not an option:

You really have to know what money looks like, not just on paper, but in terms of operation. It is understanding the rules and regulations of the Department of Education, as well as cash flow and accrual. You have to find a way to be competitive without spending more money than you have because if you have an off-month, let’s say an eighty-thousand dollar elevator goes out in the middle of the year and you try to play catch-up the next month, you can’t do that with a multi-million dollar budget.

As a result of these multiple considerations, she offered this piece of wisdom:

These are the types of things you have to understand and in the absence of not having first-hand knowledge, your next best person needs to be your chief financial officer. This is very different than it used to be. People used to look to the vice president of Academic Affairs. Academic programs will manage themselves if you have the right person and deans. But in rank order, now of importance, I would say after the president is the chief financial officer.
4.5 Crafting a Presidential Identity

“Pleasing” to the Constituents

Broadly-speaking, all four women confirmed that their presidential appointments were well-received by their institution’s internal and external constituent groups. “Since I was a well known figure in Sylvester’s Square, I think there was a great excitement to my appointment, both Black and White,” said President James-Jackson. She continued, “Especially in the communities of color, I used to get letters saying that people were praying for me.”

President Davis shared, “I surfaced out of one-hundred and nineteen candidates and it was supposed to be a unanimous vote.” “From all indicators,” she declared, “the city and community were pleased at my appointment.” “Positive,” was how President Bryan described her reception at Civil College. She noted, “The reviews were great, and because I was local, people knew me and felt that I brought what the college needed at the time.” President Johnson thought that her hiring process had been a well-kept secret. Once she was appointed, she learned that a number of her diversity course students were fully aware that she would be the next woman selected to lead Lee College.

Along with these warm advances, however, also came the trial periods. Internal and external constituents wanted to know what each of these women were “made of.” As a self-admitted “non-academic,” James-Jackson knew that there would be a “wait-and-see” relationship between her and members of the faculty. She commented:

Even now I hear it. “They brought in someone from the outside” and “She really doesn’t understand.” Or, “Those are the blue shirts upstairs, they are the business people. They don’t understand teaching, academia or higher education.”
While President James-Jackson acknowledged that some of the faculty members’ responses were only “natural,” there was also some learning to do on her part:

I had to put all of this stuff in perspective. I am still working on it. I am also still standing. I think that is where being centered and caring about “who you are” helps. It’s really not about you. It’s about institutional change.

The faculty and staff at Civil College were already “supportive” of President Bryan when she ascended to the presidency. However, she did sense some hesitation from a “very small group” of female alumnae. One alumna in particular, a retired educator, did not hesitate to remind the chairman of the board that President Bryan had been employed at Civil in numerous capacities. In this alumna’s opinion, whenever an executive positioned opened, the board “just relied on Mrs. Bryan.” The alumna desired to know, as President Bryan mimicked, “Why she was the only person who could do anything?” I remarked that this was a bold inquiry on the behalf of an alumna, and President Bryan responded:

I laughed at it. She ended up coming in and talking to me because she needed help with something. She told me that she had said some things before, but they were not personal; and, that I was the right person for the job. This was not unlike things that have happened to me all my life, when I have been appointed to positions. I don’t ever personalize or internalize it. I trivialize it. That is the price of leadership. You will always hear the critics, seldom the supporters. It is just the nature of the game.

The “game,” for both Presidents Davis and Johnson, meant following in the presidential footsteps of well-respected and long-time serving institutional leaders. They also “inherited” as President Davis noted, “some of the dynamics” their predecessors left behind. In the instance of Davis, she had to unravel nearly thirty years of a presidency occupied by a single individual; and, two additional years that were filled by an interim.
Johnson’s task at Lee was no easier. In particular, she mentioned the “fair amount of hazing” that she was subjected to by some of her colleagues—many of whom were members of her predecessor’s executive cabinet and secretarial teams. She shared:

After the initial euphoria, there was a lot of questioning—“Who is she?” There was some skepticism. The first couple of months were pretty rocky. I felt rough treatment from my office staff—a lot of “we are going to see what she is made of.”

Similar to James-Jackson, President Johnson had to “step back” and locate the teachable moments in these experiences. Laughing, she said:

No one likes change, except a wet baby—and, even a wet baby cries! There were a number of circumstances. I wish I had brought my own team into the office. Just one person, even if it was my mama or sister. All of these people you see now have come on since I have been here. It took a minute. Looking back, I think the first year was really a year of transition. But, I am here to stay, so you know, get wit’ it!

**Self-Perceptions and Challenges**

In Section 4.3, the women and I touched on the dual identities of race and gender; and their influence, if any, on the women’s conceptions of leadership. When I reintroduced the identities at this point in our conversations, with the intent to learn about how both informed their self-perceptions as institutional leaders, the women’s responses fell along two continuums. Neither gender nor race initially entered the minds of two of the women whenever they carried out their presidential duties and responsibilities. However, for the other two, both race and/or gender had an interesting way of “creeping up” into their day-to-day presidential activities.

Presidents James-Jackson and Johnson suggested that the presidential challenges they had encountered thus far, had less to do with being “Black” and/or a “woman;” and,
more to do with institutional and environmental changes. “Higher education,” stated President Johnson, “is at a weird space right now.” I asked her to expound:

The last Higher Education Act put all kinds of additional reporting requirements on colleges and universities without providing all of the resources necessary to comply. Also, there are questions about whether HBCUs and women’s colleges can be a point of competition for distance-learning and on-line degree programs. To me, these are the challenges. Race and gender come in, in terms of how people choose or see your leadership. But, the main challenge is about how to get an institution to grow in a regulatory environment.

A similar refrain resonated in the response provided by James-Jackson. While she experienced minor racial issues at Creek, including the start-up of a gospel choir as well as the departure of several minority staff members, in her opinion, race and gender had little to do with a majority of the challenges that she faced. Instead, the challenges revolved mostly around “where the college had been” and what it was currently “faced with.” President James-Jackson opined:

Really, you are asking people, if they are not “on the bus, to get on.” These places are hard to change and move. You are asking people to take on a different level of urgency than the institution has been accustomed to. You are asking them to do more—be more engaged and involved in the way decisions are made.

President Bryan offered an alternative perspective. She discussed the racial and gender dilemmas that she confronted—not only on her college campus, but in the surrounding community as well. She commented that race, at various moments, entered the presidential fray whenever she sought financial support for Civil from the White corporate community. Many of those instances were difficult to navigate:

To try and get White Mansion to see this college as a school and deserving of their investment is a continuous challenge. Most of these corporations
are headed by White males. I lead a historically-Black college that is steeped in tradition, with a historic mission and purpose. We can compete if they give us the same kind of support that is given to others. It is a constant education. We do A to Z to tear down barriers.

Gender, in subtle ways, mattered as well. She noted:

Well as a woman, one of the things that I do say, having broken down many barriers of gender, is that higher education is still pretty much a bastion of male supremacy. Even with the influx of female presidents, elements are there. It makes you chuckle because you say, “Well, I thought that I had broken down this door, but now there is another one that I have to go through.” It is the little things, the expectations, assumptions and the way things are done.

When I inquired about the “expectations” and “assumptions,” she suggested that two types of men modeled the behaviors: “supporters” and “scrutinizers.” President Bryan commented:

I have some very good male friends who are supporters of this college. I think that sometimes they support me in ways that they probably would not a male president because they think that they have to shield me from things.

She also described the second type:

Then you have the other ones, who scrutinize everything that you do because they don’t feel like a woman is up to making tough decisions—that I don’t understand physical plant operations or finances. You know these things because you have seen male leadership and they are not subject to the same kind of expectations and non-expectations as women presidential leaders.

Posing the same inquiry to President Davis evoked a lengthy and passionate response. She singled out several instances where she felt that race and gender posed unique challenges. The first concerned the community in which Fuller was situated. She stated:

As an African American woman coming into a community that by and large doesn’t value women or minorities, you do realize that you get “very
little play” and are really the “very small minnow in a huge pond.” You have six Predominantly White Institutions and two HBCUs here in Walter. It has been difficult for me to define Fuller and my presidency because it is hard to garner the kind of attention that you would normally get in a community where there are a smaller number of institutions of higher education.

An additional challenge surfaced when she engaged with members of the corporate community in Walter. What she did not know at the time, was that her interactions with these external constituents did not always sit well others—particularly African American community leaders. President Davis commented:

I would make statements sometimes to White corporate men and they accepted it. They accepted that kind of professional banter more easily than others did. But somehow, it would get back to some in the Black community, and they would become offended. In the beginning, I got a lot of lectures about how “Mr. “X” has always been good to the Black people in Walter and supported them. How dare I make a statement—one that could offend his racial sensitivity?”

Where I sensed that President Davis experienced the most frustration was in reference to her being a “woman” and the decision-making strategies she employed. Early on in her presidency, her relationship with an all-male board was quite bumpy. Recalling that period, she said:

Many of the decisions that I made initially, which caused some heartburn, were credited to the fact that I was a woman and that I just didn’t understand. Sometimes, I think that the trustees voted for a “wife.” They wanted someone to come in, clean it up, do all the work and then they were going to be able to take all of the credit.

I quickly reminded her about a previous comment that she had made about not being a “submissive, Southern woman.” I asked if being a “wife” evoked the same connotation. It did. She was not afraid to point out that part of what bothered some
members of internal and external constituent groups, was that she refused to “fit into their particular expectations or stereotypes.” With a serious grimace, she shared:

Men need a lot cajoling, massaging and stroking. I am not good at that. I am not submissive. I think to myself, as a trustee or an alumnus, you know what the job is. Why should I have to convince you? Maybe I should not have been as aggressive and defiant. Had I been a man, I would have been perceived as being assertive, ambitious and a risk-taker.

(Mis)Conceptions and Perceptions of Women Institutional Leaders

Given what the four research participants shared about their self-perceptions, I continued our conversations by asking each one to consider the perceptions of others. Simply put, I wanted to know what the women thought about individuals “looking in” and their subsequent observations about female chief executive officers. Further, I desired to know whether they identified with or countered these perceptions.

Having somewhat addressed the “lack of respect” that some men had for women supervisors and managers in a previous response, President Johnson was able to extend her argument here. In her professional experiences, a “lack of respect,” on the behalf of men, often translated into this belief that somehow she was incompetent. She demonstrated this point by recalling an incident that occurred one week into her presidency:

We had a vendor who had not done a good job. I told him that his work was unacceptable and that he would have to do better. This man was rude, obnoxious and put his finger in my face. At that point, I was like, “You don’t have to do anything.” Just for the record—some men still think that their gender makes them superior. Some think they can charm and/or cajole on one hand; or, bully on the other. Well, you know me. I could not fathom this man doing this to another man.
The manner in which she handled, as well as reflected on the situation, echoed a point that was made earlier by President Davis. Sitting up in her chair, Dr. Johnson said:

I was just too through. See, if I was a good Southern woman, I would have eased it over with a little sugar. But, he was making mega-dollars from this campus, put his finger in my face and then said I don’t understand technology. I didn’t have my diploma up. Had it been I would have said, “Read it—the Technological Institute of what?”

Presidents James-Jackson, Davis and Bryan mentioned other perceptions held about women chief executive officers. “Is she the right fit for the institution?” was an inquiry that James-Jackson often heard from individuals. Davis mentioned the “financially-deficient” issue and whether women institutional leaders had the ability to nurture, develop and sustain institutional giving as well as corporate partnerships.

President Bryan highlighted the “either/or” realities that some women college presidents face:

Some of the perceptions are that we are not strong leaders, but then the flip side is that we are too strong. Women can also be intimidating and aggressive. Or, that we are too sensitive and lack the complexities, skills and talents to deal with the responsibilities of running an institution. Those are the kinds of things we have to deal with.

She also referenced the perceptions about women presidential leaders and their abilities to maintain a work/life balance:

Women who are single, whether that is by divorce or because they are not married, are subject to a different level of scrutiny—who they date, might date or don’t date. Men who are single, for whatever reason, are allowed the privileges of dating publicly and openly.

Continuing, she mentioned the dilemmas singlehood can pose specifically for women institutional leaders:

You have to consider the institution and if entertaining is an important role. I think the challenge is not having the spousal support that wives
ordinarily bring. It is a challenge when you are having a social function and you have to depend on an executive or personal assistant to help you with those kinds of things. It can be kind of unsettling.

While the four women were able to name the various negative perceptions held about women chief executive officers, they were just as committed to sharing the positives. President James-Jackson noted the number of women leading at small, predominantly women institutions who were achieving great successes. President Davis was also quick to point out the benefits of female leadership:

There is a growing perception that women are effective leaders. If you have a ship that is sinking, then the person that you want at the helm is a female. Women find problems and they fix them. We do clean-up. I think about everywhere a female has gone into, especially at HBCUs. Those institutions have done about faces.

She also had choice words for individuals who second-guessed women’s ability to raise corporate monies. She stated:

You’ve got some women in the field who have a strong handle on financial leadership. They are smart and non-threatened. They are openly assertive about the role that they play in their institution’s finances, particularly their investment portfolios.

Further, the work/life balance issue experienced by some women institutional leaders had its rewards—especially for other individuals employed at their college or university:

Naturally, women are committed and caring. We are more understanding of domestic and work issues—things that might impact our workers. Rules and regulations are a little more flexible and conducive to family life.

A similar theme was heard towards the end of President Bryan’s response:

We should never deny our unique properties. We bring a natural ability to organize because we juggle so many things. People talk about multi-tasking. We have been doing that for years. We run from our jobs to pick up our kids. We have a load of clothes going while we cook. We write
out schedules. We go to PTA meetings. All of these skills are at the foundation of leadership. The idea about participatory management, women have a natural inclination to do that stuff—shared governance, interdependence and all.

(Mis) Conceptions and Perceptions of African American Women Institutional Leaders

As our discussions continued to revolve around the four women’s self-perceptions, I purposefully revisited the subject of race. In addition to the gender aspect, I wanted to know if the women were aware of any widely-held perceptions concerning African American women in positions of executive leadership. Similar to the conversations above, the women readily poured forth examples and occurrences. In the same manner, they were also prepared to share personal advice and wisdom.

“I know that any perceptions that people have about Black women is also visited upon Black women who are college presidents,” began Dr. Johnson. “From people around here, I have gotten that I am too forceful and strident,” she continued. I asked if both were true. President Johnson owned up to the “forceful” descriptor; but, rejected the “strident” moniker. She did so, because in her own words, the latter descriptor was like “politely calling a Black woman an “itch” (without the “B”).

She and I stayed with this “itch” designation for a moment. Mentally, I thought that she was referring to the perception that some Black women, regardless of the setting or their professional credentials, always appear or come off as “angry.” She responded:
I think that it is the “Angry Black Woman” and “Sapphire” thing. People always expect you to have something to say, and that it will not necessarily be collegial.

I inquired as to why Black women were often “marked” as such. President Johnson smiled and replied:

If sister’s say what they mean, they are angry. Look at what is going on with Michelle Obama. Angry is someone else’s jacket though. When people talk about Black women being angry, what I think is that they are uncomfortable with any other model of Black women. It is what they revert back to. Sisters aren’t that angry, but they do have something to say. And, they should be encouraged to say it.

Since she admitted to possessing a “forceful” persona, I asked Dr. Johnson how she controlled and reined it in. Her laugh indicated a bit of “truth mixed with sarcasm”—a stance which had been revealing itself the entire time that I was with her:

The expectation is that you will be cajoling and compensate for this stereotype. Occasionally, I have to—especially in social settings. Someone will say something about a topic and I won’t talk about it, because if we did, it wasn’t going to turn out right!

Given her penchant for offering social critique, I wanted to know how difficult it was for her to “bite her tongue.” Laughing again, she said:

I constantly run it through my mind. Black women professionals are mission-driven. We aren’t here because we want to make a lot of money. We aren’t here because we want the fame and fortune. I always ask myself when I leave here, why am I going; what is my purpose; and, what do I hope to bring back? I go and speak, but what I hope to bring back is my check!

The concepts of “personal credibility, judgment and the effectiveness of Black women” were at the core of President Bryan’s perception response. Revisiting her
journey towards the presidency, she talked about various encounters with Euro-American men in the corporate and political worlds. She commented:

I got to enter into a lot of places that African Americans were not given. I was fascinated and probably made them more uncomfortable than they made me—you know, to see what would occur and how I would respond. But, I helped them to develop a confidence in me and appreciation for the expertise that I was able to offer.

President Bryan’s confidence and professional work in the field of mental health caught the eye of one of Mansion’s elected officials: the governor. Impressed by her professionalism and ability to “get the job done,” he hired her as his executive director of Federal and State Funding Programs. According to President Bryan, it was the “largest agency in state government and had the most influence and power.”

While she directed and managed an influential and powerful agency, there were immediate challenges. She stated: The governor had people, some White males, coming to me to get permission to use the state plane. I know they didn’t like it. They would give me great challenges.

One of those challenges was her deputy director. His selection was made without her knowledge or permission. The gentleman was the recipient of a political favor and in the governor’s own words, “never had to come to the office.” Looking directly at me, she said:

Many governors have the habit of selecting staff for you. I told the governor, “I don’t operate like that. I was not born with royal blood flowing through my veins or with the privilege of being put into a position of saying that I never have to show up to work. I built my reputation around my professional credibility and judgment; and, if I selected this individual to be my deputy, people who know me would question my effectiveness.”
In this instance, her self-assuredness and firmness were evident. The notion that somehow she would sacrifice her professional name for the sake of politics was the furthest thing from the truth. It countered everything she stood for:

I said to him, “I understand that some of your White male supporters are very uncomfortable with having to deal with a Black female. As long as I am the director of this office, I would like to be the person who makes the decisions. I will always be loyal, but if any of your supporters ever send anyone over to my office without consulting me, you will have to explain to the people of Mansion why Helen Bryan is no longer in this position.” After that conversation, I didn’t have any more problems. You have to know what line you aren’t going to cross. It takes confidence to do that.

Utilizing her institution as a contextual backdrop, President James-Jackson discussed several perceptions about Black women college and university presidents serving at PWIs. For instance, she cited the recent trials of a Haitian-American woman president at one of Creek’s neighboring institutions of higher education. The situation and circumstances surrounding this woman’s appointment and tenure had reached such a fever pitch, that President James-Jackson was asked to “serve on an outside commission” to help resolve some of the issues. She continued to share details:

From the day she arrived on that campus, it was a challenge—just terrible. She was called a racist. With the faculty, there were elements of racism. She was challenged by the union. They tried to fire her.

When I asked President James-Jackson if she had encountered any of the same dilemmas at Creek, she replied: “No I haven’t, but I was a bit apprehensive about how I would be accepted here.” She expounded:

This was my first time working in a predominantly-White setting. When I came here, there was only one other person of color on my board. I don’t know whether it was the institution or the people who ended up coming here, but I feel like I have been accepted.
Before we moved to the next inquiry, President James-Jackson was able to recall an incident that occurred at a graduation exercise where she felt like some alumni got the wrong impression of her. She stated:

We have a program in Moorestown and African American students primarily graduate from the program. I went to the person who coordinates our commencements and said that we would need good food and music—not just carrots and dips. Our advancement people sent out invitations to our alums.

She continued:

When I got there, there was a group of White alumni who came. When it was time for me to give my talk, you know, I mentioned that I was brought up in a working class, African American family and that I was a first-generation college student. Out of the corner of my eye, I saw them leave. Later on, I found out that they were very upset about the event. They were upset because I was talking about myself, and not about Creek and its issues.

I desired to know if she thought talking about her lived experiences, in such an intimate manner, was appropriate for any president to do—in particular the first African American woman president of Creek College. She said:

I don’t know. All of that was a learning experience! In retrospect, maybe I should have taken more time with those people. I didn’t get a chance to get over to them. I don’t want to say it was race, but it may have been a part of it. But, there was another group of White alumni, who had driven four hours, and they were eating and dancing. I guess it just really depends.

President Davis answered my inquiry by talking about the “collective” of Black women serving at institutions of higher education—especially those at HBCUs. She opined:

There is some real indication that Black women go in committed to making a difference and fixing things. I look at the schools where Black women have entered and they have turned those institutions around. They
are willing to give the time and energy to make that happen. In some instances, I think they are able to negotiate in a White man’s world, sometimes better than Black men and even White women.

The latter part of her commentary intrigued me. She knew that I was going to ask her to tease out her response. I asked, “What made the presidential leadership of women of color different from that of their presidential peers?” President Davis stated:

I think Black women see detail. They are micro-managers by history and experience. There is a personal goal of excellence at the core. They have that level of intellect, experience and personality. They look immediately at what is wrong and how to fix it. Until that level of excellence is achieved, they keep coming at it. Then they “work it.”

“They work it,” I said. She replied, “Yes, and they don’t turn into kings!” She continued:

Even if the institution provides a car as a part of our contracts, we own our own cars. And many of us either buy our own homes or keep the home that we had. We maintain a self-sufficiency that allows us to work the job until we are no longer satisfied.

This was not the first time that I had heard this theme of self-sufficiency. President Bryan, in another response, had also noted that she too owned and maintained her own home.

I reminded President Davis that women may not “turn into kings,” but some African American women college presidents, in recent memory, had turned into “queens.” Before I could cite names and institutions, President Davis completed the task for me:

Look, I don’t know all of the details, but I will say for Suzanne Price to come out of that situation at South Thomas unscathed, given all the press about her clothes and house, you do have to stop and ask yourself, “How much did they really have?” The same with Denise Ellison at Butler State. She is the most principled person I know. Whatever the transgression was, wasn’t worthy of what happened there. Once the agenda is out there, it is overkill!
I wanted to know if she thought the “overkill” was unique and specific to just African American women college presidents. She replied:

I am sure that this has happened to some White women, but the difference is, is that it has not gotten the media print. And, we do it. As a people we crucify our own. We don’t give our own the benefit of the doubt. I don’t know what happened at South Thomas, but for all the stuff that they purported they were going to be able to do, and for them to be talking about that she could get life and then you come down to it and it is a hung jury, how much proof or evidence could they have had?

**Coping Mechanisms and Assessments**

While the women named and narrated the perceived realities of being a woman of color and an institutional leader, they also shared the coping strategies, mechanisms and assessments they employed to deal with them. The themes of “mindfulness” and “commitment” were salient to both Presidents Johnson and Bryan. “I have forced myself to be mindful in conversations,” said President Johnson. She continued, “I am here to do a job and I won’t let these haters get into my head!” A similar train of thought was reflected by President Bryan. She proclaimed, “People can’t get in my head, because Civil College is in my heart.” She continued:

You can never control what people say about you, but you can always control how you react to it. I won’t allow them to get in my head. That is the challenge that I have every day. Do I want to make someone else’s issue my issue? No. I need to keep my mind on what is important and not on things that will distract me from what I am trying to do for this college.

Being aware of the perceptions and then locating mechanisms to deal with them constituted President Davis’ response:

Of course you have a pity party. You close the door, cry and threaten to never come back. Then you say, “Enough!” You use humor. You call or e-mail other women. It helps when you get an e-mail back that says, “Hang in there girl!” or, you go to meetings where you sit around and someone else
has had the same experience. You realize that it is not just unique to you. You remember that they talked about Jesus Christ, and you say, “Oh yeah right!”

Dr. Davis also shared that “knowing her options” was another coping strategy:

You know, my granddaddy used to keep a roll of money in his pocket. At any time he got to the point where he was ready to give up, he put his hand in his pocket and remembered that he had options. You don’t let people run you off. But, you also know that you have options and when the time comes, you can make the choice to leave.

President James-Jackson reiterated an earlier point that she had made about being “comfortable with self.” Reflecting on her experiences thus far, she offered this bit of wisdom:

Sure, you have tough times. But, you just get up and get back into it. Look, I don’t mean to sound arrogant, but I think that it takes a certain amount of centeredness and self-confidence to be in a setting like this. I don’t think every African American could do it. I imagine that some of the Black people who were pioneering at Predominantly White Institutions had a very different kind of experience. But, you have Black men and women now at Predominantly White Institutions who are doing exceptionally well. I have a male friend at Williamson who is having a terrific presidency. Look at Simone Richardson and Janet Smith. Their successes make it easier for me and I think it will be easier for others in the future.

4.6 Presidential Communications

Sight, Sound and Presidential Leadership

Before I could assess how the four women “performed” the presidency, it was important to understand what they hoped their presidential examples conveyed—both visually and audibly. President Bryan hoped that individuals saw her as being “committed and a person who believed in the power of education, as well as the mission
of Civil College.” For President Johnson, it was about “competence.” Likewise, she
wanted the faculty, staff and students of Lee College to know and observe that she really
“enjoyed” the presidency.

“Engaged” was the descriptor President James-Jackson used. I inquired, “In what
way?” She responded:

I said it at my first all-college meeting. I hope people see me as being
about Creek—even when there are controversial and challenging decisions
being made. I recently got an e-mail from a faculty member who has been here
for more than thirty years. Basically it said, “I appreciate the stand that you
took on this, although I didn’t agree with it. But, I think you did what was
right for the institution and I respect that.” His message was heartwarming.
You know, I hope that is what people see—that I am willing to put aside
my personal feelings to advocate for what is best for Creek.

Citing the perception that institutional leaders “are never around,” President Davis
hoped that people physically “saw” her on and about campus, and noted the “results.”

She explained:

I hope they see the flowers on the yard. Soon, they will see a new cafeteria.
They will see a football stadium. There will be new academic programs.
Everyone will make those leaps. My hope is that alumni will see the
changes too and then send twenty dollars a day—and then the same the
next week.

This “invest in Fuller” tone was also evident in her response to my second inquiry, “What
do you hope they hear?” inquiry. She commented:

That Fuller is an investment. It really isn’t about me. I hope that people
go back and say, “You know, she always talked about putting this institution
first.” It hasn’t been about taking from this institution, but about giving back.

Presidents James-Jackson and Bryan continued their “hearing” responses by
utilizing various descriptive themes. “Thoughtfulness” and “the capacity to be
reasonable” were favored by James-Jackson. President Bryan alluded to the theme of vocational service. She wanted people to hear her “passion and dedication for the role for which she had been called to serve.”

Besides suggesting the terms “optimism” and “confidence,” President Johnson hoped that individuals at Lee College heard the “no non-sense part” of her presidential personality. I asked her what she meant by this and she said bluntly: “You can’t play the player.” After getting over our moment of laughter, she got somewhat serious and explained the comment:

Don’t take this as a stereotype, but some Black people don’t like to be told, “No.” This morning, I had someone bypass the provost and come to me. I am not going to overrule the provost. Just like the young woman who just e-mailed me about a stipend that she was supposed to receive from a summer program. I nicely sent her a note that said, “You need to talk to the people who ran the program. We are glad that you had a nice summer, but I don’t do stipend checks.” Some folks just want to get their way, but I was like, “Um-umh, not today sister!”

**Presidential Messages**

The four women and I spent some time discussing the “audible” elements suggested in their previous responses. I asked them to consider instances where they thought that their messages were well-received. I also asked them to contemplate the exact opposite, and cite a time when what they meant to “convey” was not well-heard. President Bryan thought that the “passion” and “dedication” that she referenced earlier, was sincerely appreciated during a meeting with a potential donor. She recalled their meeting for me:

I had known his wife for some time, but this was my first time visiting with him. I talked to him about Civil—our dreams and needs. He asked me what he could do, and I told him three things. One of which was to make a
one-million dollar gift to the college. He made the one-million dollar gift. He also told me, “I like your passion, I hear it. You appear to be committed and that says a lot about you.” He led me to believe that the message was well received.

Never shying away from a discussion about transformation, President James-Jackson reiterated how crucial the process was to the survival of Creek. In her own words, the institution needed to “catch up” and it all “started with the board.” She commented:

Our institution was falling behind. We weren’t competitive. There had been little investments in technology, marketing and facilities. The viewbook had not been updated in ten years.

As a result, she communicated a university-wide message of “change” and “shared vision:”

That first year, I spent time asking people to come up with that vision. I also asked the trustees to make an investment of three million dollars. They gave us every penny! We were able to redo our viewbook. We did the whole branding thing. We completed a facilities master plan and laid out some fundraising goals. They got it and we were able to do all of that.

Presidents Johnson and Davis examples of well-received messages were meant for the “ears” of their campus and community constituents. Specifically, President Johnson cited an off-campus sexual assault involving one of her female students. Once it was reported, she knew that she had to “get to her students” quickly and efficiently. She stated:

I called a town hall meeting. We had to get some control because this is such a small place. More importantly, my message was about safety. I told them, “I wish you would not leave campus alone. Don’t go to parties by
you all need to buddy up and take care of each other.” Weeks later, students were still saying “buddy up,” so I think the message was clear and they definitely heard me.

“More and more, I am hearing the external community ask what it can do,” said President Davis. This sense of support from the surrounding community was much different than when, as she shared in a previous response, she nor Fuller, could “stay off of the front page news.” I asked President Davis what she thought brought about this change in perspective, and she quickly replied:

The achievements of our students. I think when our kids distinguish themselves in a way that is public and recognized, then people go, “Wow!” More and more people are seeing our kids differently. I want them to hear about Barry Bruce, a senior who just passed the Praxis. He came here without a dime in his pocket and now is about to go out and teach. I think people are getting the message.

Notable instances where the four women’s messages were not well-received, primarily involved incidents where their presidential “words” or “decisions” were misinterpreted. President James-Jackson cited two examples. The first concerned her position on tenure. She commented:

We had a bump in our tenure quotas and with higher education changing, I suggested that we have another track for people who may not want tenure. There could be room for both. Well, folks started a whisper campaign saying that I was trying to get rid of tenure. I never said that I didn’t support tenure. Presidential speak can be misinterpreted.

The second instance was when she implemented summer enrichment and first-year experience programs and had both report to the division of Student Affairs, as well as redirected the reporting line for the Registrar’s Office. Recalling the administrative uproar, she stated:

Oh, I got e-mails and letters. But, I put the programs where I thought they could be successfully implemented. And, the Registrar’s Office had been
really dysfunctional. People had complained about it for years. I moved it out of the academic, and gave it to our technology, facilities and administration vice president. Some faculty members were upset, but it actually functions much better there.

Dr. Davis’ misconstrued verbal experience occurred when Fuller initially approached the city of Walter about erecting a new football stadium. Letting out what I sensed was a bit of comic relief, she said:

Oh Jesus! It never occurred to me that a community would oppose building a stadium on our own ground. I didn’t know that it would be an imposition on the neighbors’ lifestyles. The mayor tried to compromise and relegated us to any high school stadium in the city. We just backed off and bided our time. I had to convince this community and others that they did not want to go downtown and fight. You learn to play the political agenda. Everything is fine now. It was a message that had jumped out there—I did not do a good job of being prepared.

President Johnson learned the hard way that her words mattered—especially to Lee’s students. She cited an example where students misunderstood the requirements surrounding the university’s common hour; and, the intellectual and cultural programming that was to take place. She provided the context for me:

Most universities would die for a common hour. I wanted to use ours to the maximum extent. I pulled on my networks and we got some great programming. I wanted to up the points that students could get for attending these programs. Two things went wrong. One, the final calendar was not ready when they registered and two, there were more events listed than ever before.

What occurred next, according to President Johnson, was a “mini-crisis:”

Student government came to see me. They were very strident and that didn’t work for me. I was told that “I better change the plan.” We had a very
uncomfortable week. At some point, I told them that I would meet them halfway. Since the calendars were late, I would take five points off of the attendance requirement.

She continued:

Let me clarify. If you don’t have these points, you can’t run for student body president and offices. My decision was not well-received. The students came and picketed my house. They sang, *Lift Every Voice and Sing*. Then, they got mad because I sang with them! The students had their “guns and they were ready to shoot.” The lesson for me was that I had to be mindful in how I lifted student leaders up.

Acknowledging that she was “not a few words person,” President Bryan told me about an encounter with her finance chair where “what came out” did not fare well. In a committee meeting, both were politely going back and forth about “pre-existing circumstances of the college” and “the compounding of certain items.” According to President Bryan, she respected this gentleman as the chair, knew that he had the power to influence others and could end their professional exchanges at anytime. At the same time, she could not be silent about specific corrections that needed to be made.

In the end, he ended their conversation abruptly. I asked President Bryan how she responded. She stated:

It was like what Kenny Rogers used to say, “You have to know when to hold them and when to fold them.” I had to ask myself, if I wanted to have a sidebar with him or continue our disagreement there. The sidebar clarified a lot of things. I told him, “I don’t think you are hearing me. I think you were deliberate and intentionally misinterpreting what I had to say. More importantly, I did not like the tone that you were using.” That strikes at every principle that I hold for myself. I had to be honest with him.

**Communication Preparation and Leadership Style**

The preparation techniques that each of the women used to communicate with internal and external constituents were quite similar. For instance, President Bryan
shared, “If it is a more formal group, I do background research and target my comments toward their interests.” She also took into consideration audience membership:

If I am talking to faculty, I know they want updates about the college and budget. I gather the facts. My board also gets a detailed report. Everything is all laid out in a very organized fashion. When it comes to legislators, I tell them that Civil is an investment and what it means to this state. We pump back one-hundred and nineteen million dollars into this economy. I have my “wish book” together so I can tell them everything that I want.

Otherwise, when speaking in a more informal or relaxed environment, she preferred a “natural, conversational tone” and the “use of humor to diffuse situations:”

Like this group that we just met with. It was informal. I didn’t do much preparation for our meeting. I wanted the group to feel comfortable and at ease. I am very familiar with their product. It was just important to be observant, listen and take my lead from what was said. It is about how you establish relationships. That is why I am asked him about their corporate headquarters. I know that is where the big bucks are.

While President James-Jackson relied on similar formal techniques like a trustee briefing book and institutional reports to communicate with internal and external constituents, she also depended heavily on written forms of communication. It was important for her to author at least two letters during the year, and distribute “one in the summer and the other in February to three-thousand of Creek’s friends.” However, she also welcomed opportunities to speak where she could “do a lot of stuff from the heart.” She stated:

I give a lot of speeches and do a lot of panels. I like to be on the ones where I don’t have to prepare anything and it is more like a dialogue or conversation. Sometimes it depends on the mood of the room. I think about the key points that I want to make, but for the most part, I just talk.
Dr. Davis at Fuller College also appreciated “just talking.” When I asked her this same inquiry about communicative preparation, she simply said, “I just show up.” I was not surprised by her forthrightness. It had been exuded the entire time that I was with her. She commented:

Every now and then, I will take bullet points or jot down points that I want to make sure that I cover. My grandmother was a storyteller and I inherited some of that. I do very well extemporaneously and so riding to a place, I think about what I am going to say and that’s it.

President Johnson responded that she knew how to “flip” language depending on the audience. I observed it firsthand. Prior to us getting to the “meat” of our interview, she paused to receive a call from a national radio program. Her “mindfulness” and a white notebook served as prompters. I asked if this type of preparation was routine and she said:

I am a wind-up doll when it comes to talking. I had my folder and I knew that we were going to be talking about unemployment. There are some groups where I prep more. It depends on the who, what, when, where and why. I ask what their expectations are. I think about the topic, people and then I just sort of go.

After learning about the communicative techniques the women employed, I wanted to know if they altered or modified their styles of leadership when they delivered various forms of presidential communication. Their responses were quite telling—especially in relation to where the women were in their presidential maturation. Dr. Johnson, the youngest among the four, confided that “the same President Johnson that
you see on national television or speaking at a fraternal convention may not be the same one at Lee College.” We had discussed this “tension” between her multiple personas in an earlier response. She explained:

Somewhere else, I can use humor and make my points. I can speak, just free flow. But here, we have rituals and I take them very seriously. I actually write out my speeches which is very hard for me. I don’t think you really want to “get off the reservation” with our rituals. I am very deliberate and have thought about what I want to say. It needs to be inspiring.

The most “seasoned” institutional leaders, Presidents Davis and Bryan, accommodated for setting and audience, but rarely changed their modes of leadership.

“One thing people will say about me is that I am consistent,” declared President Bryan. She continued:

There are times where I use humor, and other times when I can be serious. If I am attending the funeral of an alumnus, then I am going to be more formal and sober than if I am congratulating an alums on a retirement. But, basically, you are going to get the same Helen Bryan on the surface level. You are going to see the same style. It is not going to deviate that much.

A similar theme resonated in the response of President Davis:

The teacher that you see in the classroom is the same person you see at graduation. Like when people say I have stopped graduation and chided kids for inappropriate behavior. I have to remind people that it is a ceremony of integrity and that if they whoop and holler, other parents will not be able to hear their child’s name.
CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION AND INTERPRETATION OF THE DATA

Just as in some African myths of creation, the Black woman has been called upon to create herself without model or precedent.  

(Carroll, 1982, p. 126)

5.1 Introduction

In Chapter 1, I introduced the three main inquiries that would guide this study. Then, I located and discussed the current research which has addressed the concepts and theories related to leadership and presidential leadership. The latter was sieved through feminist and Black feminist lenses; and, the resulting gaps were noted. In the following chapter, I built the “skeleton” for the study by devising a triangulated and interdisciplinary framework that was informed by Black Feminist Thought (Collins, 2000); invented ethos (Crowley, 1994); and, performance theory (Jones, 1997). In the same manner, I highlighted two methodological techniques that would assist in the collection of my findings.

Pertinent findings were presented in Chapter 4 and now provide the purposeful foundation for the current chapter: discussion and interpretation. In Chapter 5, I take my findings and layer them on top of the literature. While this action produces numerous similarities, differences are noted; and, create a new stream of thought about women of color and how they conceive of, perceive and “perform” the college presidency.

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5.2 Black Women and Sense-Making

The first inquiry, which guided this study, desired to understand how African American women “make sense” of presidential leadership. From the onset, I have argued that Black women “make sense” of it by sense-making (Royster, 2000). In other words, they “make obvious, visible and flexible what has been hidden and assumed” about the college presidency; and, do so from raced and gendered perspectives (p. 49). Further, they “reveal continuities and discontinuities and set up contrasts between what is there and not there and what should or could be there instead” (p.49). As a result, they rearticulate or “stimulate a new consciousness” about presidential leadership (Collins, 2000, p. 32).

The four women institutional leaders, who participated in this study, “made sense” of presidential leadership by recalling familial expectations; being aware of their raced and gendered realities; entering into personal and professional role model and mentorships; relying on faith; and, developing value systems.

Familial Expectations

The four women’s responses about familial expectations continue to build upon the research of Adam (1996), Hite (1996), Jones (1997) and Parker and olgivie (1996). Collectively, these studies suggest that as youth, Black women are taught about the 1) importance of education; 2) intricacies and complexities associated with race; and, 3) saliency of personal motivation. Similar sentiments were reflected in the narrative of Dr. Davis. She mentioned the pivotal role that her father, a former university instructor and community servant, had played in shaping her perspectives about formal education.
Likewise, his encouraging words to always “think outside the box” in order to understand “the politics of the world,” assisted in her development as a leader. President Bryan also described a close bond with her father. He was her “greatest influencer.” Like the immediate and extended family members mentioned in Jones’ (1997) research, he often shared “little gems” of wisdom.

A set of grandparents and a mother, respectively, were salient in the lives of President James-Jackson and Dr. Johnson. Even though they “had no formal education,” the grandparents of President James-Jackson served as incredible leadership examples. She cited them because they lived during a time when Black people were “one family member removed from slavery;” but, still found a way to acquire acres of farm land in rural Arkansas. A theme of persistence was also conveyed in Dr. Johnson’s narrative about her mother and the importance of education. She noted that while she was obtaining her baccalaureate degree, her mother, whom she referred to as a “risk-taker, organizer and spokesperson,” was pursuing a doctorate of her own.

**Race and Gender**

When the women and I initially broached the subjects of race and gender, particularly in relation to how both identities may have influenced their conceptions of leadership, their responses revealed similar and different developmental processes. For President Bryan, there was a “dialectical” tug as she attempted to define “herself” in terms of her multiple identities (Collins, 2000, p. 2). She confirmed that growing up “Black” and “female” in the “Deep South” had a profound effect on her personal development and how she thought about leadership. While her identity as a young girl
had been affirmed by her mother and a host of other-mothers (James, 1993) in her local community, “who she was” racially, was nurtured on the front lines of the Civil Rights Movement. As a result of her involvement, she was fully aware of the oppressive systems, namely Jim Crowism, which surrounded her (Collins, 2000). The racial injustices and intentional acts of segregation associated with it compelled her enough to get involved instead of waiting “for someone else to make something happen.”

The “dialectical” tug, for Presidents Davis and Johnson, had less to do with their racial identity; and, more to do with their gendered one (this reality would become a recurring theme for the two women throughout their presidencies). Race, in some ways for both women, was almost like an afterthought. Dr. Davis stated that as a child, “part of the educational process was learning how to negotiate a world that was racist.” President Johnson possessed a similar perspective: “Women of color know what the inequities are and...how little traction you get from talking about that.”

However, once they assumed their presidential positions, a majority of their daily frustrations were due in large part to genderism. President Davis spoke at length about having to deal with the “resistance” that she encountered when she arrived to Fuller College—all because she “was a woman.” Dr. Johnson also mentioned the dynamics of gender, and the need for some men to: 1) question her authority; and, 2) challenge her ability to lead. Both women also suggested that it did not help, that their institutions were located in the South, where traditionally, women were supposed to behave in a “submissive” manner and learn to smooth “things over with a little sugar.”

Although Collins (2000) posits that Black women often challenge and counter what has been deemed and validated as pure knowledge (i.e., a Western, Eurocentric
male and heterosexual perspective), I think her position can be extended here to include the African American male leadership domination that has long existed within the Ebony Towers. This existence has birthed specific “expectations and stereotypes” of Black women in the academy. For example, there has always been the assumption that African American women were most effective in positions such as “coordinators, assistants, or assistants to the major decision maker” (Smith, 1982, p. 320). But in this research instance, Drs. Johnson and Davis were the primary decision makers and refused to confine themselves or their leadership capabilities. Instead, they challenged and countered these gendered perspectives by employing similar acts of resistance. Both resisted the need to “cajole, massage or stroke” the personal egos and professional agendas belonging to some of the men who were either employed at their institutions or served as members on the board of trustees.

The dualities associated with race and gender took an interesting turn when President James-Jackson was asked how both influenced her leadership development. Unlike some of the other presidents, who were raised in predominantly African American settings, President James-Jackson was reared in the Midwest. While she had been taught at an early age “to be better” and to not “be mediocre,” when I asked her what these instructions meant, in terms of being an African American woman, she commented that she was told to not use either as an excuse or advantage. The content of her response mimicked some of the Black women cited in Hite (1996), who were also told by family members to not concentrate “on race as the motive for behavior or as the key issue in every interaction” (pp. 13-14).
For the most part, the latter mantra came to frame how President James-Jackson viewed her professional achievements, career transitions and even the college presidency. She believed that as she climbed the administrative and executive ladders in the healthcare profession, her ascension was based on her qualifications and merits alone. Neither race nor gender had little to do with her promotion or tenure. She felt the same way about her appointment at Creek.

I have to admit that I struggled somewhat to “make sense” of President James-Jackson as I engaged and interacted with her. I did not know immediately where she fell on a racial or gender identity continuum. As I continued to observe her though, I noticed that she moved “in-and-out” of raced and gendered situations with ease. It was not that she was “race-less” as Tatum (1997) has mentioned in her research on racial identity. President James-Jackson possessed more of a self-internalized “I know who I am, but do not have to wear it on my sleeves everyday” attitude.

I observed this attitude firsthand when she invited me into her office for our interview. Besides her executive assistant, she was the only woman of color in the administrative wing of her building. However, this did not prevent her from displaying a beautiful collection of Black women angels, in the window sills and bookshelves, of her office. I saw this same attitude demonstrated when I attended summer commencement and President James-Jackson assumed her place on the dais. Outwardly, she wore her presidential regalia; but underneath her garb, hung the hem of a bright green, Kente-cloth inspired dress. I witnessed it again when she hosted three other Black women and me, at an impromptu lunch gathering to celebrate in so many words, “some good sisterhood.”
I am unsure if the angels, attire and lunch served as “mini-acts” of resistance, but what it did confirm was that President James-Jackson was chameleon-like. She could quickly adapt, culturally and behaviorally, to any given situation. This unique quality, as it applies to Black women, has been discussed in the research of Bell (1990), Jones and Shorter-Gooden (2003) and Parker and olgivie (1996). Parker and olgivie (1990) have noted that the “social location” of Black women, particularly “within a dominant cultural organization,” determines the type of behavior they exhibit (p. 190).

In a similar fashion, Jones and Shorter-Gooden (2003) have referred to this behavior as double- shifting. Often dwelling in two distinct and racialized worlds, Black women have the ability to:

… change the way they think of things or the expectations they have for themselves. Or they alter their outer appearance. They modify their speech…They adjust the way they act in one context after another” (p. 61).

Bell’s (1990) basic premise about Black women being bicultural follows a similar train of thought. Bell asserts that a woman of color lives “in a bicultural world that requires shaping careers in the white world, while maintaining other aspects of personal life in the Black community” (p. 461). In the instance of President James-Jackson, who had spent a significant portion of her personal life in the Midwest and professional life in the Northeast, she had, to some extent, perfected a bicultural identity. Thus, in her mind, “having membership in one group (her Blackness and/or woman-ness), was “considered no more exclusive than having membership in the other” (serving as president of predominantly, White Creek) (p. 464). I contend that President James-Jackson
viewed her biculturalism as a “source of empowerment” which “affirmed and nurtured her inner resources…giving her a feeling of spiritual, emotional and intellectual wholeness” (p. 464).

**Personal and Professional Role Models and Mentors**

The four women’s abilities to *rearticulate* presidential leadership were not only shaped by the motivational words of family, but also those suggested by personal and professional role models and mentors. Several research studies have mentioned the importance of role models and mentors in the occupational and leadership development of Black women (Hite, 1996; Holmes, 2004; Jones, 1997). Likewise, distinctions have also been made in the literature about the types of individuals who can serve in either/or both capacities; and, if race or ethnicity matters (Hughes, 1988).

Notable findings in the previously mentioned studies were reflected in the narratives of the four women. For instance, President Bryan’s personal role models were her parents and distinguished Black women in the local Mansion community. Her revelation is consistent with some of the African American women in Jones’ (1997) research who depended on the guidance of women family members and community servants.

Drs. Johnson and Davis were fortunate enough to have located Black women professional mentors. President Johnson noted that her primary professional mentor was a former professor who had achieved a number of Black woman “firsts.” She also commented that she “had learned a lot from the way she ran a meeting, her dignity and commitment to scholarship and how hard she worked.” Similarly, President Davis talked
about the professional mentorship that she had with a prominent African American woman who rose to the executive ranks of a national teacher’s organization.

Like three of the Black women in Holmes (2004) research, two of the women relied on the professional advice and guidance of male mentors. Dr. Davis greatly attributed her presidential preparation to her former supervisor, President Hugh Barry. She also cited the professional example of a male superintendent who “took a chance” and hired her. President James-Jackson named two presidential peers, one female but also one male, as professional mentors. In the same manner, she cherished a fifteen year old mentorship that she shared with a local, Jewish businessman.

**Faith and Value Systems**

Two additional areas where the four women advance our understanding about how women of color conceive of leadership are their faith connections and value systems. Garner’s (2004) research on the spiritual leadership of three Black women administrators provides some initial insight. However, for the most part, the women who participated in this study did not talk about or frame their faith as a tool of “resistance.” Rather, they spoke about how they viewed and implemented it into their presidential work at their respective institutions.

For President Davis, amazing graces revealed themselves through “people of faith” who surrounded her, like Ms. Rainey, her executive assistant; or, a student who happened to stop by her office. Monetary donations that were received in the daily mail were also seen as incredible blessings. Having already declared that an individual should “love the Lord” and know “where he or she sits in the scheme of things,” President
Johnson was able to put into perspective how faith influenced her presidential responsibilities. At an institution like Lee, a “divine order and power” was at work. Because most of the women students faced significant financial and familial challenges, Dr. Johnson said that it was her responsibility to teach them about “faith and works,” and the humbling aspects of both.

A sense of being “grounded” in and by faith was the reality for both Presidents James-Jackson and Bryan. As a result of her spiritual connection, President James-Jackson felt confident in her leadership role at Creek College. Faith permitted her to observe institutional matters in a “different way;” and, taught her not to “take things so personally.” President Bryan mentioned that her personal belief in God and the practicing of her faith informed how she related to Civil’s internal groups (cabinet, faculty, staff and students) and external constituents (donors and community members). For example, if she was talking with an errant college employee, she could simultaneously “discipline them” and “give feedback in a constructive way,” while also maintaining a professional level of respect.

In a similar fashion, all four women professed that their personal and professional value systems were essentially “one in the same.” The women used such phrases as:

“wear them on your sleeves,” so “people know the kind of person they are dealing with” (James-Jackson);

“…there is no real disconnect between who I am as a person and who I am as a professional and leader” (Johnson);

“I don’t think you can get away from your values” (Davis); and,

“it is very difficult for one to separate who one is as a person…the values and the principles of which they have lived their life, and separating that from the professional individual” (Bryan).
Presidential Leadership

The multiple attempts of educational researchers to define leadership in singular terms were already cited in Chapter 2. When the four women were asked to complete a similar task, they too, did not settle on a single definition. Rather, they offered a “blending” of several. According to the women presidents, leadership encompassed three main elements. Referring to leadership as both an “art” and “science,” President Bryan suggested that at the core of leadership was a vision. Likewise, in the words of President James-Jackson, the visioning process was unique to certain individuals. She commented:

There are some people who can go into a house and it is a mess, and they think, “Wow, I can turn this into my castle!” And, there is someone else who can walk into that same house and say, “Get me out of here!”

Their assessments were similar to that of Birnbaum (1988) who refers to leadership as “something identifiable” and “tangible” (p. 22).

The second aspect of the women’s definition, according to President Johnson, was about collective work and soliciting “buy-in.” It was about encouraging people to “bring their highest and best to the table.” The notion of collective work within organizational settings resonates in the research of Heifetz and Laurie (1997) and Woodard, Love and Komives (2000). However, Dr. Davis was quick to add that on some occasions, leadership was also about “making people do what they do not want to do.” While she mentioned that consensus-building should always be taken into consideration, a leader also has to know when to devise the “goal and then cause people to be able to do it, whether they want to help you get to it or not.” The third and final element was the
possession of a “plan of action.” As President James-Jackson suggested, there has to be a leadership roadmap or some sense of direction in order for an institution to “achieve” their “vision.”

Some of the women’s responses were also reflective of the leadership premises advocated by Starratt (1993). Starratt posits that leadership is a moral activity and requires an individual to put the collective good before his or her personal needs. This sentiment was quite evident when President Bryan spoke candidly about her executive experiences as a part of one of Mansion’s gubernatorial administrations. While she could have concurred with the decision that was made concerning the political appointment of her deputy director, knowing “who she was” and her responsibility to the people of Mansion, she stood on principle and refused to jeopardize what many had come to respect her for: her professional credibility and judgment.

An additional premise of Starratt suggests that leadership is salient in the longevity of “modern democratic institutions and societies” (p. 14). Institutions of higher education are included in this broad grouping, because they are instrumental in preparing the minds of individuals. Starratt’s point was conveyed nicely by Drs. Johnson and Davis, especially when they discussed their leadership in relation to the survivability of their institutions—two HBCUs. While Dr. Johnson reasoned that college-bound, women of color possessed a number of college and university options, institutions like Lee would
remain viable because a sense of “efficiency,” “competency” and “financial stability” would mark her tenure. Dr. Davis also mentioned the viability of an institution like Fuller:

All of these HBCUs will not survive. Ten or fifteen of them are already defined by virtue of who they are. There are probably thirty slots left and I think Fuller is positioned to be one of those. I want to be a part of making sure that it is ready and stable enough to grasp its place. I framed this presidency to do that.

**Presidential Skills**

Various conceptual and theoretical perspectives on leadership have also been utilized to define presidential leadership. Historically, there has been a particular focus on two traditional perspectives, trait and power and influence, as well as an emerging one, cultural and symbolic (Bensimon, Neumann and Birnbaum, 2000). Trait theory identifies and separates out the qualities and characteristics that are unique to institutional leaders (Cohen and March, 1974; Kerr and Gade, 1986). Likewise, power and influence theory often manifests itself through charismatic, transactional or transformational leadership (Bass, 1985; Bornstein, 2003). Further, at the core of cultural and symbolic leadership is the expression and execution of the college presidency through symbols (Tierney, 2000).

Particular aspects of each of these perspectives were contained in the four women’s responses. For example, Dr. Davis defined presidential leadership in terms of possessing traits or a “specific skill set.” “Presidential leaders,” she commented, “are supposed to be visionary, and act as consensus builders and goal-setters.” She added that presidents needed to understand the “politics of the land” and “be analytical,” while also being aware of their “weaknesses.” In a similar fashion, President Bryan associated
presidential leadership with several traits, including “having a vision;” “being able to engage stakeholders;” “knowing the importance of faculty credentials;” and, interacting with “external constituents.”

Elements of personified leadership were also present in the responses provided by President Bryan and Dr. Johnson. While both women were able to verbalize their leadership commitments to their institutions, they also acknowledged that serving in the presidential role required certain trade-offs. Dr. Johnson and President Bryan talked pointedly about sacrificing a part of their personal identities because they were the “faces” of their institutions. They are not alone. Kerr and Gade (1986), in their research on the college presidency, note that many institutional leaders feel as if they are “under constant observation” (p. 28). As a result, President Johnson, who delicately balanced her public and presidential personas, had to be more “mindful” of “what came out”—even when on national television. Mindfulness was also critical for President Bryan. She commented that whether she was out and about in the Mansion community or in Wal-Mart, she was inextricably tied to Civil College and never “devoid” of her identity as its presidential leader.

Unlike the other women, who immediately defined presidential leadership using familiar terms, President James-Jackson talked about the “mystique” associated with the college presidency. Her observations were to be expected since she entered higher education as an institutional “outsider” (Corrigan, 2002). President James-Jackson was amazed by all of the “pomp and circumstance” and the notion of “town/gown” relations.
Likewise, it took her some time getting used to the “presidential jargon;” and, learning what was (and was not) acceptable “presidential speak:”

For example, when I first came here, I made the statement, “Well, you know, our students are our customers.” A number of our faculty took great exception with my words. The reality is, is that they are our customers. They are shopping. Four years later, I rarely use the same words. Now, I use words like “student-centered.”

In addition to their definitions, the four women college presidents offered a listing of necessary characteristics that an individual should bring to the presidency. According to President Bryan, he or she needed to “have an appreciation for higher education.” Dr. Johnson offered this bit of advice: good presidents “can…freely admit their mistakes and shortcomings.” Leadership, as President James-Jackson noted, was not the only task at hand for institutional leaders. Being a financial steward was part of the job as well. Her suggestion was similar to those offered by Fain (2006), Guthrie (2002) and Kerr (1984).

Dr. Davis also asserted that if a presidential aspirant was not financially-cognizant, then it was his or her responsibility to locate and hire someone who was. In her assertion, she challenged the long-held perception that the academic affairs officer or provost, behind the president, was the “second in command” or the “heart of the enterprise” (Kerr and Gade, 1986). In her opinion, during these tumultuous and unpredictable economic times, “in rank order…after the president” should be the “chief financial officer.”

**Leadership Styles**

In various aspects of the literature, it has been suggested that Black women ascribe to leadership styles that are participatory (Fields, 1998; Jones, 1997); and,
spiritual, intuitive and transformative (Garner, 2004; Stewart, 2002). Hamilton (2004) suggests that their modes of leadership are built on consensus and collaboration, but also involve some risk-taking. Others have reasoned that African American women rely on an African worldview (Stewart, 2002), as well as view and experience leadership through culturally-informed lenses (Parker and Olgivie, 1996).

Several of the aforementioned terms were used by the women to describe their modes of leadership. President Bryan referred to her leadership style as being “participatory” and “engaging.” It was also communicative. In his research on cultural and symbolic leadership, Tierney (2000) suggest that communicative leadership is usually demonstrated by institutional leaders who enjoy “talking with students “on their own turf,” entertaining faculty or strolling around campus or walking into offices” (p. 227). President Bryan not only exhibited this style of leadership in her day-to-day responsibilities (“I want to keep my pulse on everything;” “I believe in sharing information”), but also when she was physically away from campus (“I am in touch electronically;” “I call back”).

Dr. Johnson also preferred a communicative mode of leadership. She liked to “parachute in on people in interesting ways.” She also described her style as being “direct and forceful” when necessary, but also “nurturing and open” when appropriate. Further, she disliked hierarchy:

…the HBCU context is sometimes challenging for me because it is a very hierarchical situation. I go out of my way to hear from people.

President James-Jackson, citing the transformative leadership experiences of the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and Mary McLeod Bethune, identified closely with
a transformative mode of leadership. According to Burns (1978), a sense of morality, ethics and a commitment to change serve as the foundational basis for transformational leadership. President James-Jackson demonstrated all three when she arrived to Creek. She maintained a sense of transparency and inclusiveness as she “went around” and “talked with trustees” about the state of the college. Further, she acknowledged that if Creek was going to survive in a city like Sylvester’s Square (which was already home to thirty-plus institutions of higher education), then it had to “undergo transformation.” Her assessment reflected greatly the beliefs of Bornstein (2003) who suggests that transformational leadership works best at institutions that are “in need of change” (p. 89).

In President James-Jackson’s words, Creek had to “go from here, to there.” While it would continue to “hold onto its mission,” it would also “change its vision.”

In previous sections, Dr. Davis hinted at leadership utilizing some of the same descriptors as the other women (i.e., analytical and visionary; democratic; leaders as consensus-builders); but, was open enough to share that she did not always display them. Rather, she was an “impatient” leader and did not apologize for being so. I gathered that she was not an “impatient” leader, like in the mold of a plebiscitary autocrat (Cohen and March, 1974). Instead, her impatience stemmed from wanting to “get things done.” I observed this firsthand when I sat in on an executive cabinet meeting and an inquiry about the physical aesthetics of the residence halls was raised. The individual who had been assigned the task reported that she had not been able to secure enough artwork for all of the halls; and, was still searching for additional pieces.

From the expression on Dr. Davis’ face, I sensed a bit of frustration. When I asked her about the art issue later and what was going on in her mind, she said:
I was thinking about that A to Z thing we talked about on yesterday. I am already there (she demonstrates with her hands). I am sure if I had coaxed Dr. Gray long enough, she would have come up with a solution. You know, I was thinking for one-hundred dollars at twenty-nine dollars a pop, you could put up enough art in a lobby to send a message. So, I will go out to TJ Maxx and pick up five or six pieces and bring them back. Or, go up to my attic and bring down a few pieces.

While Dr. Davis’ impatient quality might come off as a lack of sensitivity, I think it was rooted in her desire to accomplish a majority of Fuller’s institutional goals—including the summer preparation of the residence halls for the arrival of students in the fall. Several pieces of artwork were not going to prevent the institution from making a good impression on them or their parents. Thus, in the likeness of Parker and olgivie (1996), Dr. Davis confronted the issue (the lack of artwork in the residence halls); displayed creativity (suggested purchasing artwork from a local store); and, took matters into her own hands (she would either purchase the artwork or retrieve some from her attic at home).

5.3 Crafting Presidential Identities

The second question which framed this research study inquired about the influences of race and/or gender on the women’s crafting of presidential identities. Crowley’s (1994) notion of invented ethos, with additional support coming from Washington (1987), Giddings (1984) and Royster (1994), provided the theoretical backbone. In the rhetorical tradition, Crowley (1994) posits that when individuals do not operate within a situated ethos, either because they are not “in an influential position” or seen as possessing critical and salient knowledge, then they must invent one (p. 110). Given their raced, gendered and even classed realities, historically, women of color have
not operated from an authoritative social position nor viewed as reservoirs of knowledge. In response, they invent “self.” They “create their own sense of character, agency, authority and power” (Royster, 1994, p. 65).

Although I encountered a limited amount of research that specifically addressed the self-perceptions of Black women institutional leaders, in an interview with June (2007), Shirley A. Jackson, president of Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, referred to herself as being a “change agent” (June, 2007, p. 3). Interestingly enough, in this study, Drs. Johnson and Davis, as well as President James-Jackson, did the same. President Davis perceived herself in this manner because it reflected her “lifelong commitment to children,” while President James-Jackson attributed it to her professional ties to healthcare and being attracted to “mission-driven work.” In addition to her “change agent” status, Dr. Johnson not only considered herself to be “cutting-edge,” but also a “provocateur and intellectual thinker.”

Although President Bryan did not use the same descriptor, her perception of self contained a similar “service to others” undertone. Because of her unwavering belief in faith, she was fully aware of and connected to her vocational purpose. According to Palmer (2000), vocation is not a standard-to-be-met or “goal,” but “a calling” that is heard when life is silent or in transition (p. 4). President Bryan shared that she wrestled with accepting the presidency at Civil College, but recalled a “little gem” that her father told her: “God calls all of us according to his purpose…some people are called to lead, and this may be another time as such a time as this.” She heeded the presidential call.

When I asked the four women to consider their presidential identities, in light of them being “African Americans” and “women,” their responses fell along two
continuums. President James-Jackson and Dr. Johnson did not immediately view or experience their presidential leadership through racialized and gendered lenses. Instead, they suggested that the challenges they had encountered thus far as college presidents, revolved more around the current state of higher education and the stability of their respective institutions. I should note that I found Dr. Johnson’s response to this inquiry a bit surprising. In an earlier response, she, along with Dr. Davis, spoke candidly about genderism in the institutional workplace.

The responses of Presidents Davis and Bryan were quite the opposite. Both women talked openly about experiencing the presidency through raced and gendered lenses. According to President Bryan, while higher education had progressed, it still remained a “bastion of male supremacy.” There was a constant press to convince both African American and Euro-American men that she was fully capable of running Civil College. In reference to White men, there was also a certain “appeal” that had to be maintained. President Bryan knew that if Civil College was going to survive institutionally and remain an economic force in Mansion, then she would have to enter spaces dominated by White, corporate males and “sell” and “market” it. A similar reality was told by the sole Black woman in Martin’s (2002) study. The identity of race became more prevalent whenever she attempted to solicit institutional monies from corporate groups, foundations and philanthropic groups constituted primarily of White men.

Race and gender were a constant for Dr. Davis. First, the community in which Fuller was situated posed several dilemmas. Not only was it in the institutional company of two other HBCUs, but also six PWIs. Further, she was the only Black woman chief executive officer among her local presidential peers. She admitted, “As an African
American woman coming into a community that by and large doesn’t value women or minorities, you do realize that you get “very little play” and are really the “very small minnow in a huge pond.”

At times, there were also problems with a select group of African Americans who in some way, proclaimed themselves as the “middle men and women” between the local Black and White communities. They worked tirelessly to smooth race relations between the two communities. Thus, they were upset when Dr. Davis would interact and engage with the White community in an unbecoming manner (i.e., her professional banter with White corporate men).

Throughout her presidential tenure, genderism had reared its head on numerous occasions. She shared that many of the presidential decisions that she made early on “caused some heartburn” because she was female. In addition to resisting the “submissive woman” moniker that was somewhat regional, there was another gendered label that she had to refute: “wife.” Given her initial interactions with an all-male board, Dr. Davis believed that some of the men who were involved with her hiring, advanced her symbolically, but did so thinking that they were going to get a woman who could “come in, clean it up…and do the work.”

As both women narrated their realities, I was trying to “make sense” of their raced and gendered experiences. At first, I reasoned that the various challenges that the two women encountered were the result of their geographical locations; however, like sentiments were not immediately expressed by Dr. Johnson who also served at a Southern institution. Then, I reflected back on the patriarchal histories associated with African American institutions of higher education. Unlike President Bryan and Dr. Davis, Dr.
Johnson was not a presidential “first.” She served in the shadows of a small, but influential group of African American women who had presided over Lee College. Within the hundred-plus years of their institutions’ existence, Presidents Davis and Bryan were the first Black women to serve in the presidential role.

Gender relations, disparities and the lack of African American female leadership at predominantly-Black institutions have been addressed in the research of Carroll (1982), Gasman (2007) and Smith (1982). Even Williams (1986), in her study on Black women chief academic officers and provosts serving at HBCUs, posed a related inquiry: “Why has the presidential domain at HBCUs been “largely a male preserve”” (p. 451). A number of Black women researchers have attributed this “preserve” to the similar dominance of Black men in other traditional African American gathering spaces, including the Civil Rights Movement and the African American church (M. Colleen Jones, as cited in Stewart, 2002).

Others contend that the lack of Black female leadership on the campuses of historically-Black institutions may have severe ramifications for an increasing, Black female student population. In an interview with Fields (1998), then president of Norfolk State University, Marie V. McDemmond offered this perspective:

I think women in leadership positions across this country…have to work sometimes a lot harder to succeed…At an HBCU, African American women at the top are also in that same bind. We are not often seen as the ones who should be the leaders… For me, that’s unfortunate, because at Norfolk State and all of our HBCUs, there are more women in our student bodies than men…And, I think that’s the case across the board…Not to have women in the top leadership, I think, does not provide good role modeling for our female students (p. 24).
Hughes and Howard-Hamilton (2004) have also argued that creating a critical mass of Black women administrators and executive may not only contribute to the retention and matriculation of African American female students, but also foster mentor and mentee relationships and shadowing opportunities.

**Others’ Perceptions of “Women” and “Black Women” in Positions of Leadership**

The four research participants listed a number of the gendered and raced perspectives that have been documented or verbalized about women institutional leaders. For instance, in the research, the belief exists that they “don’t measure up” when compared to men (Pluviose, 2007). This sentiment was reflected by President James-Jackson who commented about the “fit issue” and the question that always comes with it: “Is she right for this institution?” Likewise, Dr. Davis cited the “financially deficient” descriptor usually associated with women.

In a similar fashion, Dr. Johnson mentioned the “incompetence” perception that is maintained and even verbalized by some men. She commented about an instance where a male vendor had become so irate with her, that he “put his finger” in her “face;” and, told her that she “didn’t understand technology.” After telling him frankly, that he didn’t “have to do anything” for Lee College, she reflected that if she was a male, her encounter would have played out differently. Looking back, she stated, “I could not fathom this man doing this to another man.”

Jablonski (1993) and Klenke (1995) have noted that in instances where women have assumed male-like qualities (i.e., independence, assertiveness), they are casted as being gender neutral or counter-stereotypic. Dr. Davis illustrated this reality when she
talked about a Euro-American female president at an area institution that was criticized harshly for releasing the football coach. She commented:

Had a male president done that, it would have been bravado for taking that step. But, for her to do it, it was just off the charts.

In her response, President Bryan also alluded to the “either/or” realities or the double standard that women in positions of power face. For instance, women are either deemed to be “too strong” or “not strong enough.” She continued that unlike her male presidential peers, the martial statuses of women greatly mattered. Male college presidents were never questioned about “who they date, might date or do not date.” Likewise, she suggested that numerous obstacles arose for women who remained single, but were still expected to assume the spousal role in terms of the planning and execution of presidential and social events.

Her sentiments reflect those echoed in the research commentaries of Manzo (2001) and Jacobson (2002). It was Manzo (2001) who observed that within some institutional communities, boards of trustees preferred that their “women candidates be married” (p. 12). In Jacobson’s (2002) piece, it was a former woman college president who mentioned an incident with an administrative assistant who inquired about some “floral arrangements” and the responsible party. Had the woman college president been a man and married, the floral responsibility would have been assumed by his spouse.

While all four women were able to cite some of the negative perceptions that existed about women institutional leaders, from their experience and first-hand knowledge, they also provided some of the positives. Interestingly enough, the positive perceptions referred to elements that were heavily domesticated and had been nurtured in
the home. Dr. Davis refuted the idea that women college presidents did not possess solid
financial bearings. She commented, “You’ve got some women in the field who have a
strong handle on financial leadership.” To some degree, she also reclaimed an earlier
label, “wife,” and used it here as a term of empowerment:

> If you have a ship that is sinking, then the person that you want at the
> helm is a female. Women find problems and they fix them. We do clean-up.

Both she and President Bryan also alluded to women’s abilities to “juggle.” Dr.
Davis noted that women institutional leaders tended to be “more understanding of
domestic and work issues” and were “a little more flexible and conducive to family life.”

President Bryan continued:

> We should never deny our unique properties. We bring a natural ability
to organize because we juggle so many things. People talk about multi-
tasking. We run from our jobs to pick up our kids…We go to PTA
meetings. All of these skills are at the foundation of leadership.

The two women’s observations were similar to those of Helgesen (1990) who has argued
that in general, women bring a wide range of domestic and managerial skills to the work
environment—skills that actually aid them in their negotiation and actualization of
leadership.

As referenced in *Chapters 2 and 3*, women of color have had to deal with various
“labels” assigned to them. Historically, African American women have been referred to
as *mammies, Sapphires* and *gold diggers*. In other instances, when they have not fallen
within these categories, they have been placed into others (i.e., *Claire Huxtables, Black
Women Overachievers*) (Collins, 2000; Foster, 1973; Jewell, 1993; Lubiano, 1992;
Morgan, 2002; Richardson, 2003; Villez, 2003). Further, these categorizations present a
number of assumed and applicable characteristics. Black women have been perceived as
“assertive and dominant” (Fleming, 1983); “Black matriarchs” (Hughes, 1988); and, “hard, overly aggressive and superstrong” (Jones and Welch, 1980). Presidentially, Black women have been described as “too formal and aloof” (June 2007) and “abrasive” (Maxwell, 2007).

To some extent, all of the women at some point in their interviews mentioned the trials and tribulations of being Black, female and leading an institution of higher education; but, it was Dr. Johnson who teased out fully the (mis)conceptions and perceptions. Relying on the expertise of her public persona, she and I went back and forth about the identity realities for Black women; and, what was “somebody else’s jacket.” She volunteered that some individuals at Lee College had deemed to her to be “too forceful and strident.” She accepted the first, but disowned the latter.

Dr. Johnson connected the “strident” label with the notion that Black women always appear “angry” and do not have any desire to be “collegial. She also suggested that this was the farthest thing from the truth:

If sister’s say what they mean, they are angry. Look at what is going on with Michelle Obama…When people talk about Black women being angry, what I think is that they are uncomfortable with any other model of Black women…Sisters aren’t that angry, but they do have something to say. And, they should be encouraged to say it.

Similar to her previous suggestion that being considered a “wife” in the college presidency has its disadvantages (i.e., particularly when associated with genderism), Dr. Davis commented that when owned and used as a term of empowerment, especially in the instance of Black women serving at HBCUs, wifeism brought forth a powerful dynamic. She noted that when Black women enter into traditionally-Black environments,
they “go in committed to making a difference and fixing things.” She continued, “I look at the schools where Black women have entered and they have turned those institutions around.”

When I asked her to provide me with a reason, she stated that Black women “work it.” Essentially, because women of color “are micro-managers by history” and possess a “personal goal of excellence at the core,” they “see detail.” Further, she added that unlike White women and even Black men, African American women were “able to negotiate in a White man’s world, sometimes better than Black men and even White women.” A similar assertion was made in the research of Parker and Olgivie (1996). The researchers contended that because of their unique positionality and dualities, Black women have the capacity to cross multiple and cultural boundaries. Earlier in this chapter, this type of cultural exchange and navigation was referred to as biculturalism (Bell, 1990) and double-shifting (Jones and Shorter-Gooden, 2003).

Of importance to the current research study is how the four women of color who participated in this study dealt and coped with some of the aforementioned perceptions. According to President Johnson and Bryan, when the perceptions were “someone else’s jacket,” they remained “mindful” of and “committed” to the task at hand. Dr. Davis and President James-Jackson mentioned that “you cry, but then get back up.” Likewise, President Davis recommended that Black women rely on, via e-mail and phone, the small, but dependable sorority of Black women college presidents.

At various moments in their interviews, Presidents Bryan and Davis also suggested that Black women resist the “crab mentality” that is oftentimes prominent within the African American community. Individuals who possess this mentality are like
crabs in a bucket. While one crab may attempt to ascend and escape the container, others become jealous of its progress and pull it back down. President Bryan experienced it when the single woman alumna approached the chair of Civil’s board of trustees and questioned her leadership qualifications. In the same manner, Dr. Davis referred to it when she mentioned the presidential demises of other Black women institutional leaders. She commented:

And we do it. As a people we crucify our own. We don’t give our own the benefit of the doubt.

The coping mechanisms that President James-Jackson noted, included being “self-centered” and “self-confident.” Aware that she was among a minute group of Black women, and African Americans in general, serving at PWIs, she concluded that “not every African American” could serve in a traditionally-White institutional setting. However, citing her presidential success thus far, as well as those of other prominent African American institutional leaders, she somewhat believed that opportunities would become more plentiful for other Black women in years to come. Her reflection mimicked that of M. Colleen Jones, who in a piece by Stewart (2000), advocated that more women of color would be hired by PWIs in the near future.

5.4 “Performing” the Presidency

The final part of this research study was dedicated to learning about the strategies and mechanisms that women of color employ as they “perform” their presidential duties. In the most traditional sense, all of the women performed the college presidency. Through common tools like speech and writing, they “resolved” institutional issues and concerns (Hauser, 1991, p. 34). For example, President Bryan verbally communicated her
“passion” for Civil College, in order to convince a potential donor that his one million dollar gift would be a worthwhile investment. No stranger to speaking her mind, Dr. Johnson utilized her vocal capacities to summon women students on Lee’s campus after one of its own was involved in an off-campus, sexual assault incident.

The written word had proven to be a powerful tool for President James-Jackson. On one hand, she used it to convince Creek’s board that they needed to “re-brand” the institution through its marketing and publications. On the other, her written expressions composed the substance of formal letters that were sent to alumni and friends of Creek twice a year. The written word, namely in the form of Walter’s main newspaper, had not always been kind to President Davis and her institution. However, she worked diligently to “re-write” how people saw Fuller and its students. She commented:

More and more people are seeing our kids differently. I want them to hear about Barry Bruce, a senior who just passed the Praxis. He came here without a dime in his pocket and now is about to go out and teach. I think people are getting the message.

In addition to being concerned with the content of their messages, the women were equally astute to the delivery of them. Of utmost priority were the types of effects that each one of the women desired to have on their respective audiences (Briggs, 1988, as cited in Durante, 1997). President Bryan shared that she always took into consideration audience membership prior to speaking before and entertaining an internal or external group. She stated:

If I am talking to faculty, I know they want updates about the college and budget. My board gets a detailed report…When it comes to legislators, I tell them that Civil is an investment and what it means to this state. I have my wishbook together so I can tell them everything that I want.
A similar refrain was heard in the response of Dr. Johnson. During her interview with a national radio program, she relied on a white notebook as a prompter.

Some of the women college presidents also noted that they enjoyed public speaking engagements where they, in the words of President James-Jackson, could “do a lot of stuff from the heart.” She commented, “I think about the key points that I want to make, but for the most part, I just talk.” In the same manner, Dr. Davis just liked to “show up.” While some of her preparation entailed the writing down of “bullet points,” she would just “think about” what she “was going to say,” and “that’s it.”

While the aforementioned examples undergird and demonstrate some of the traditional aspects of “performance,” throughout this study, I have suggested that the chief executive experiences of African American women would offer a new opportunity to view presidential performance—but from a “Blackened” and “feminized” perspective. In Chapter 3, it was noted that “performance” within the African American tradition, did not necessarily fall within a “Western form of abstract logic” (Christian, 1987, p. 399). Rather, it encompassed elements of the African Diaspora, including “its worldview, its resistance, its politics (Jones, 1997, p. 55). Further, “performance” was expressed through “…narrative forms…in riddles and proverbs, in the play with language…” (Christian, 1987, p. 399).

From the presidential research, we know that women of color employ directness, embrace their female-ness and possess an “eye” for detail (Martin, 2002; Parker, 2001). But, they also rely on the techniques of conversational signifying and indirection (Mitchell-Kernan, 2001); the Black Woman’s Laughter (Morgan, 2002); and, body
language, facial expressions and physical movement (Richardson, 2003). Likewise, they tell their survival stories (Etter-Lewis, 1996); truth-tell (Bell-Scott and Johnson-Bailey, 1988); testify (Austin, 1995); and, sing (Omolade, 1994).

Even within the traditional expectations and confines of the presidential role, the four Black women who participated in this study, not only carried out their presidential duties by employing some of the “Blackened” and “feminized” techniques described above, but did so unapologetically. For example, as I sat and observed Dr. Davis during a cabinet-level meeting, it was difficult not to notice that she was very direct in her instructions—particularly as she engaged with some of the members. In this instance, she wanted to know “where Fuller stood” in terms of autumn enrollment and housing numbers. The latter were an issue that she had to contemplate every week. She cited the numerous e-mails that had gone out during the morning and why she had not received much feedback. When a vice president chimed in about student room deposits, it was as if President Davis was not hearing “any of it.” Later, when I asked her about her perceived directness, she commented:

It was like, “Here we go again!” That is why I said that the director of Admissions needed to be there. You know, you try to respect rank and file, but there comes a point where you have to say, “Look, give me the real deal.” The bottom line is that I can’t sit through enrollment to see if we succeed. I need to make sure that the numbers are going to be where they need to be by mid-July. If not, then we need to pull the right people to make that happen.

As the meeting progressed, I also observed that Dr. Davis’ mind operated like a mental rolodex. Figuratively, she flipped through “mental cards,” retrieved them and then
inquired about the details. Later, when we reflected on what occurred during the meeting, Dr. Davis did not apologize for her attention to detail. Sounding like an earlier comment that she had made about Black women being “micro-managers by history,” she confirmed that “details always mattered:”

If you don’t pay attention to detail, sometimes, those are the things that come back and kill you. I just tend to hold onto information. One of my vice presidents teases me all the time. He says that I don’t forget anything. Things come back to me at the right time. Being here for almost nine years, you get into a pattern.

For President Bryan, **testifying** (literally in the “church” sense), appeared to be the strategy that she was comfortable with and employed the most. As noted in some of the research sections above, she either explained her responses through the recitation of Biblical scriptures, or sieved them through an inspirational lens. For example, when we talked about the role of faith in her life, she stated:

Faith is what sustains me. Regardless of the challenges, trials and tribulations, my faith teaches me that things will work out okay. I go back to, “With all thy getting, get understanding” and “Acknowledge God in all thy ways and he will direct your path.” Those are the types of things that echo in my mind some days. Faith gives me tenacity and the belief that “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.”

Even when she and I dined at a local, Southern favorite and I observed her interact and engage with members of the wait staff, a former donor to the college and other customers, she exuded a spiritual grounded-ness. Her faith allowed her to come across as “genuine” and “humbled.” When she and I returned to the campus and I had the
opportunity to ask her about the “aura of light” that somewhat surrounded her, she laughed and said, “Thanks, but I am not an angel—not yet anyway.” Turning serious for a moment, she did offer the following reason:

We are in the South and it is about relationships. I don’t sit in an Ivory Tower over here separated from the community. I connect with people and I am approachable. The waiters at that restaurant are always nice to me. The young man that I embraced, Richard, he is part of the catering team here and has served at my house before. I treat him like family. And, the young woman who served us dessert—somehow I always end up with her. I talk to her because she is a person and not just someone who brings water or cleans the table. You have to value and respect people.

The sharing of survival stories was President James-Jackson preferred method of performance. On two different occasions, I had the opportunity to hear and observe her speak about the historical struggles of people of color, but also their eventual triumphs and accomplishments. The first was at a closing dinner for local high school youth of color who had just completed a summer enrichment program at Creek. President James-Jackson shared with them how it took her “two years to get Creek to agree to a college bridge program;” but if there was one thing (besides their coursework) that she wanted them to take away from the experience, was a sense of determination and achievement. Noting that her grandparents in the rural South owned acres of land, she told the young people, “It was hard, but they had courage and were determined to make life better for their children; and, I want the same for you.”

Later, when I asked her why it was so important to share such personal details with the youth, she replied that it was “a part of her job as a leader.” She continued:

I think many kids of color haven’t had that drilled into them the way my generation did. I think there are at least two generations of young people who just don’t have this in their culture, spirits and genes. Too
many of our kids think that they just automatically get things. No, you have to work your way up. I am here to help them connect the dots.

The second occasion where President James-Jackson shared a *survival story* was after the impromptu lunch date that she, three other Black women and I attended. When she and I returned to her office, after having talked about the upcoming presidential election, pending vacation plans and memberships in Black Greek organizations over summer salads, I wanted to know if she was (or was not) concerned about other campus constituents’ perceptions? As she got adjusted in her chair, she leaned over to me and said, “Sometimes, we need to do that.” I asked her to expound and she stated:

> You have to find ways to get together, apart from the institution. It is not all about hidden motives. I go to lunch with friends who are chief executive officers at other agencies here in the city. Sometimes, it is important to make a statement. Trust me, half of the place knew that I went to lunch. You know, I think Black presidents at predominantly White schools can take two positions. You can say, “I am really not going to show or do anything that makes it look like I celebrate my Blackness;” or, you can say, “They are just like everybody else and I am going to find the time.” I choose the latter, because at the end of the day, these might be some of the people who are going to cover my back.

For the last woman president, Dr. Johnson of Lee College, two mechanisms constituted her presidential performances: *truth-telling* and *playing on words*. She greatly valued language and rhetoric. One minute, she would add colorful flairs and flourishes to her responses; and, then make bold or sarcastic notations the next. Similar to Dr. Davis, she never apologized for her verbal and rhetorical takes on issues related to the college presidency. For example, she recalled for me a conversation that she had with a student who was exploring her graduate school options. The young woman desired to attend Harvard and approached President Johnson about writing a letter of recommendation. Without losing an ounce of her composure, she re-enacted her “performance:”
I told her, “You know this is not going to happen? I mean, I had to be real. I had seen her writing. I didn’t want her to get it twisted. I told her, “You can’t have a 2.8 grade point average, trying to get into Harvard. There are a gazillion folks from other HBCUs with a 4.0. You can forget it.”

Not at all taken aback by her retort and subsequent colorful language, I asked her if she thought that she was in the best position to advise that particular student in that manner.

Cutting me the side eye, Dr. Johnson responded bluntly:

I know, it sounded harsh. But, there is no amount of affirmative action that can turn “chicken shit” into “chicken salad.” I told her that I wasn’t going to sign my name to a recommendation for a mediocre student to go to Harvard. I wasn’t going to do it. What I did share with her, softly, was that I didn’t mind meeting with her again and going through other graduate school options. I had no problem getting her graduate school ready.

As evidenced in Chapter 4 and throughout this chapter, Dr. Johnson’s quick-witted and sarcastic “tongue” had a way with words. I did not want to end our time together until I had the opportunity to ask her about some of the language that she used. I referred back to her “hot and horny” comment. I mentioned the “ain’t” and “haterate,” as well as the “you can’t play the player” and “get wit’ it” sentiments. Smiling, she addressed some of my rhetorical concerns:

I spend a lot of time with young people. I sample—I am a sampler. The fact of the matter is that we want to create and provide some of these types of opportunities for our students. This is exciting. Our students are looking for something and want to be heard. I don’t mind doing whatever it takes.

5.5 African American Women and (Re) Inventing Presidential Leadership

The preceding discussion and interpretation of the findings from this study offer an alternative way to view presidential leadership, and how it is conceived, perceived and “performed.” Unlike previous studies associated with “traditional” presidential
leadership, this study focused on the raced and gendered experiences of Black women college presidents. From the very beginning, I have advanced the notion that Black women institutional leaders “make sense” of the presidential role by bringing a lived, dualistic view to the presidency; inventing a presidential ethos; and, exhibiting unique strategies and mechanisms that would lend themselves to the process of (re)invention. The four women who participated in this study, to some extent, confirmed my suggestions.

From one perspective, they adhered to the “traditional” definitions, characteristics and styles of presidential leadership; and, shared commonalities with other women chief executive officers. For example, the four women defined leadership as a three-part process. It included: 1) visioning; 2) soliciting some “buy-in;” and, 3) charting a “plan of action.” Likewise, each of the women was able to cite and recommend the pertinent skills that should be brought to the institutional role. Besides those mentioned in their collective definition of leadership, the women also suggested that presidential aspirants understand the “politics of the land,” “be analytical” and financially astute (Davis), while also “engaging stakeholders,” “having an appreciation for higher education,” “knowing the importance of faculty credentials” and “interacting with external constituents” (Bryan). Dr. Johnson reiterated the saliency of mindfulness; and, President James-Jackson highlighted the “pomp and circumstance” associated with the role.

In terms of their modes of leadership, the women also used familiar terms such as participatory, communicative, transformative, democratic and consensus-building. Further, they spoke candidly about the personal and professional issues that women leaders encounter on a daily basis—from the “fit,” “incompetency” and wifeism issues,
to the balances between the masculine/feminine (i.e., “too strong” or “not strong enough”) and work/life (i.e., the marital, non-marital and dating statuses of presidents).

However, these women also “made sense” of their institutional roles by sense-making and rearticulating presidential leadership, inventing a presidential ethos and “performing” the college presidency from a raced and gendered perspective. For instance, their conceptions of leadership and presidential leadership were informed heavily by familial expectations and relation- and mentorships with personal and professional role models. While the role of faith varied for each woman, it along with “one in the same” value systems, also contributed to their sense-making and rearticulation of the two concepts.

Their shared, raced and gendered experiences, highlighted numerous similarities, but also signaled differences in their identity development. These differences were mainly attributed to the four women’s child- and young adulthood experiences, as well as their geographical, situational and institutional differences. Thus, a woman of color living and presiding over a historically-Black institution of higher education in the “Deep South,” may have a slightly different presidential experience than one leading at a traditionally-White college in the Northeast. This reality reminds us that even within racialized and genderized groups, there is diversity within diversity; and, that African American women do not constitute a monolithic group (Collins, 2000).

Race and gender did pose an undeniable “obvious” as the women carried out their daily presidential duties. While three of the women viewed themselves as “change agents,” and the fourth as being aware of her vocational purpose, depending on the context, the concepts of race and gender, individually and collectively (or not), moved in
and out of the fore- and background. What remains fascinating is how these four women chose to respond. Oftentimes, when they were “labeled” or “stereotyped” by others, they either ignored them or employed “mini-acts” of resistance. But, in other instances, they owned the characterizations, (re)invented them and used them to their presidential advantage.

Similarly, the four African American women college presidents participated in and exhibited “traditional” presidential behaviors, including the processes of speech-making and writing. At the same time, they found ways to incorporate “who they were” (as women of color), as well as their conceptions and perceptions of presidential leadership, into their executive performances. Whether or not they were fully cognizant that they actualized or demonstrated various communicative strategies and mechanisms that are unique to the rhetorical “performances” of Black women, their behaviors were just one more example of how they (re)invented presidential leadership.
CHAPTER 6
IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Sometimes, we get so caught up in all the other things that we forget about our purpose. Some people look at whether you get into *US News and World Report*. I get that. But, at the heart of what I know is how well we educate and graduate these students. I can build an endowment that is great. I can have state-of-the-art facilities. But, at the end of the day, if this institution fails to educate and graduate the men and women who come here, then we fail and I fail as a leader.

*(Helen Bryan, Civil College)*

6.1 Introduction

In *Chapter 1*, I commenced this research study by discussing my child- and adulthood experiences with African American women who had served in administrative and executive roles. Upon the completion of this study, I will have added another piece to the Black woman’s “dark testament,” after having engaged and interacted with four incredible African American women institutional leaders. From the very beginning, I was driven by one broad inquiry, “How do Black women experience the college presidency?” More specifically, I separated that question into three subsequent inquiries. First, how do African American women college presidents “make sense” of presidential leadership? In the same manner, how does being a “woman” and “of color” influence and/or inform their crafting of a presidential identity? Further, what are the strategies or mechanisms they employ or display, which enable them to “perform” the presidency?
In the chapters that followed, I reviewed the current literature and defined the study’s theoretical and methodological backing, as well as presented, discussed and interpreted its findings. As I conclude this study, I commence a lifelong commitment to understanding the “hearts, minds and stomachs” of other Black women college presidents (Royster, personal communication). I am reminded that they, too, are reservoirs of “untapped knowledge” waiting to be discovered and centered.

6.2 Limitations of the Research

The limited sample size yielded for this study will certainly prevent it from being generalized to all women of color who serve in presidential capacities. As noted in Chapter 3, three of the women who participated in this study presided over four-year, private HBCUs. President James-Jackson completed the same task at a four-year, private PWI. My sample did not include any Black women serving at four-year, public historically-Black or White institutions. While I gather that the latter two presidential groups may share some similarities with the women who were documented in this study, I also think that presidential employment, within a state or system-wide institutional setting, might bring an entirely different set of leadership and political dynamics and challenges.

In the same manner, some might fault me for theoretically framing my study from a “Blackened” and “feminized” perspective. For instance, Smith (1998) cautions Black feminist researchers not to categorize “Black womanhood” or place it “along a linear trajectory” (p. xviii). There is some truth to Smith’s assertion. The lives of Black women
are far too complex to suggest that their lived experiences can be confined to and
delineated along a “neat” or “straight” continuum. This is why I purposefully triangulated
my theoretical framework.

Women of color are at the core of the framework; and, the three angles of *Black Feminist Thought* (Collins, 2000), *invented ethos* (Crowley, 1994) and *performance theory* (Jones, 1997) “converse” with and between each other. Collectively, the angles create and foster a theoretical dialogue that focuses on women of color; and, how they think about, perceive and “perform” the college presidency. It permits the four African American women in this study to tell and assume ownership of their presidential narratives. As a result, we find that the women *sense-make* in the presidential role by recalling familial expectations; being aware of their raced and gendered realities; relying on personal and professional role model and mentorships; incorporating faith; and, developing value systems. Further, they identify with participatory, communicative, transformative and even confrontational or impatient styles of leadership; and, “offer up” to their immediate and external audiences “performances” consisting of *directness, testifying, survival stories and truth-telling*.

By utilizing the three “angles” of inquiry to frame the interpretation of their presidential situations, we have come to appreciate the relationship between the “sense” they make of their institutional roles and their “personas,” differently than more “traditional” and “mainstream” models of presidential leadership might have allowed. The angles provide the theoretical space and lenses for uncovering and revealing elements of the women’s presidential roles that are derived from their realities of

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historical oppression; being Black and female; the need to invent and establish identity, credibility and authenticity; and, exhibit their “performance” styles.

In the likeness of Jones and McEwen’s (2000) Model of Multiple Dimensions of Identity, this type of multi-dimensional framework could be used more broadly to guide research about other sisters of color—not only those serving in presidential capacities, but also in other corporate, governmental and judicial posts. By emphasizing “group-specific” perspectives, with a focus on invented ethos and “performance,” this triangular approach highlights the importance of mining the sources of their realities, rather than comparing their behaviors to leadership models developed through the research on “traditional” presidential populations.

6.3. Contemplating Additional Research

This study serves somewhat as a catalyst, and its findings should spur additional research. While we have a better understanding of the ways in which Black women conceive of, perceive and “perform” the college presidency, what does this mean for women within the demographic who still cannot be “named?” The presidential sorority of African American women has increased slightly from the time when the American Council on Education began collecting survey data on institutional leaders nearly twenty-one years ago. However, there are still too few; and, I am unsure if future research will have the opportunity to “call” them by their names, so they can be recognized for “who they are.”

The research in higher education is in desperate need of a historical and textual repository, as well as an accurate chronological timeline of Black women in the college
presidency, both at four-year, public and private historically-Black and traditionally-White institutions. This timeline would not only serve as another, tangible contribution to the presidential research conversation, but also act as a “starter” reference for researchers interested in exploring and building their studies around this presidential demographic group.

If we are able to overcome these stumbling blocks, I contend that potential research studies not only continue along this conception, perception and “performance” continuum; but, also explore the development of a Black woman’s presidential leadership model. Building upon the inter-disciplinary, triangulated work that has already been presented here, how do future researchers add to, support or even counter the conceptual and theoretical angles in their current state? Additional research should explore some of the other personal and professional angles which might contribute to how Black women “make sense” of presidential leadership? For instance, what influence do their occupational trajectories have? Should they follow a strict academic or administrative route; or, possess a blending of the two? If they adhere to an administrative track, what other executive-level or “outsider” positions prepare Black women for the presidency (Corrigan, 2002)? Is there some value in participating in presidential leadership development opportunities?

In this study, I heard the “untapped knowledge” of four African American women college presidents, but what about their fellow peers? What are their “self” and “othered” narratives? More importantly, do they name or cite different coping mechanisms and strategies that they employ, in order to counter the (mis)conceptions and perceptions
about them? Likewise, can meaningful and distinguishable delineations be made between the presidential experiences of Black women serving at HBCUs and PWIs? And if so, how do these women describe, as well as decide on, when to utilize “mini-acts” of resistance?

Jones’ (1997) declaration that the “performance” of Black women becomes the theory remains salient to the direction of future research. While the techniques cited in this study were unique to three African American women serving at historically-Black institutions and one at a traditionally-White college, are these, as well as others, shared amongst their presidential peers? What do their “performances” entail and in what types of instances do these women become them? Further, how should their performances be assessed, described or characterized?

6.4 Implications and Recommendations

The findings from this study are not only meant for the “ears” of higher education, but also those belonging to colleges and universities, boards of trustees and women of color who aspire to the presidential ranks. As conveyed in Chapter 5, the presidential experiences of women of color add a new element to the conversation on institutional leadership. While on the surface, they adhere to and display “traditional” leadership definitions, characteristics and styles, they also extract what is needed while simultaneously (re)inventing their own.

As a result, institutions of higher education, as well as the internal and external constituents who are responsible for their hiring (namely the board of trustees), should be well aware of women of color presidential candidates; and, how they conceive of,
perceive and “perform” presidential leadership. For instance, in a presidential search, the findings from this study might assist an institution (and its board) in “selecting” and “framing” its candidate pool—particularly if Black women are in it and being seriously considered. Given what we have learned from this study, institutions and their boards can connect and pair their administrative and executive needs and desires with the qualities and skills provided by prospective Black women candidates.

In the same manner, those involved with the presidential decision-making process should also acknowledge that when hiring women of color, institutional type matters. Black women, who are appointed to presidencies at HBCUs, may confront a historical past (and perhaps current reality) grounded and rooted in African American patriarchy. However, with a significant increase of Black women attaining their initial baccalaureate degrees from these institutional types, African American women college presidents not only have the opportunity to make their leadership presence felt. They also can serve as role models and mentors to female and male students in the process.

A slightly different reality may exist for women of color who seek out and are selected for presidencies at PWIs. While they may not encounter a specific racial history rooted in Black American patriarchy, historical and institutional issues surrounding race and gender might await them. Rather than use their presidential tenures to dwell on the past, in the spirit of President James-Jackson, they should spend their time moving their institutions forward, while also nurturing, developing and perfecting bicultural identities.

I should note that part of my “off-the-cuff” remarks with the four women inquired about the advice that each had for women of color aspiring to the presidential ranks. My
reason was two-fold. The first was partly selfish. I make no apologies for desiring to work on the administrative and executive levels of higher education. However, given what we have learned about Black women and their perspectives on presidential leadership, I thought it was important to “spread the knowledge,” particularly as a number of African American women are currently contemplating or already progressing through the presidential pipeline. In addition to their leadership conceptions, perceptions and “performances,” the four suggested that Black women should:

1) *Understand how businesses, including higher education, function.* Dr. Johnson explicated this point nicely, when she commented:

> We run businesses. Our financials have to undergo the same kind of rigor as the next. We have to be able to effectively fundraise. If someone gives me a dollar, I need to be able to tell them where I spent it. We have to be responsible stewards. We are not exempt from that because we are African Americans;

2) *Possess confidence.* President James-Jackson noted that this phrase guided her daily activities at Creek; and, was the attitude she took whenever it was time for her annual review with the board:

> They always ask me who they should talk to. I casually say, “I don’t care.” My view is that they can talk to anybody they want. I know that I have done a good job and it really doesn’t matter. Not everybody is going to like what I have done, but I have been on top of my game ninety percent of the time;

3) *Obtain the appropriate credentials.* Dr. Davis, in her closing comments to me, could not stress this point enough:

> You want to make sure that you have the academic credentials. They make you more marketable. Find your niche or signature, so that when you move to the next level, you have something that says you are unique. Accreditation might be an area. Institutional effectiveness is another;
4) Join a networking, service-oriented or philanthropic group—preferably one with a predominant White membership. Both Presidents Davis and Bryan talked about the importance of interacting and engaging with members of the White corporate and philanthropic communities outside of their presidential duties. President Bryan stated, “That way, people won’t be shocked when you come into a leadership role.” Dr. Davis concurred:

You want to be in a women’s philanthropy group. Don’t just be a member. You want to assume a leadership role. It suggests that you are willing to give back, but it is also strategic. You have to find the right person who is willing to mentor you. There is no need going to someone who doesn’t have a strong network; and,

5) Know that with the presidency comes sacrifice—especially at home. Again, both Presidents Davis and Bryan agreed that this sentiment was critical. President Bryan commented that she would have not ascended to the presidency without the support of her husband. In classic form, Dr. Davis offered her advice in a more direct fashion:

If you have a family, you need to have a husband that knows that his role will have to shift. He will have to assume a parenting role because you have to be where you are supposed to be. If the Junior League wants you there, they don’t care if your baby has measles. They don’t care about the babysitter. You can’t use those types of excuses. You can’t risk your credibility and respect—the two things that are going to move you up that pipeline.

6.5 Final Thoughts

In the end, some might suggest that this study is incomplete because it did not make a cross-comparison with other presidential demographic groups. However, I would quickly remind them that members of other raced and gendered groups were not the focus
of this particular study. Black women were. Again, I do not think it would have done any research good if I would have made cross-cultural comparisons without fully understanding the leadership experiences of African American women. Perhaps in the future, this type of suggestion could serve as another (and needed) thread in the presidential leadership research.

In the same manner, I would encourage Black women institutional leaders, where possible, to entertain the research requests of those interested in documenting and preserving their presidential lives. I know that these women lead extremely busy and compacted lives. However, part of building and contributing to a historical and textual repository, as well as developing a chronological timeline on Black women college presidents, requires that they also be willing to impart their personal, professional and presidential knowledge to others.

This latter sentiment is even more critical as Black women serve and then somewhat “disappear” from the leadership way. What occurs after their initial tenures? Do they assume presidential posts at other institutions; or, do they return to the classroom, public or private life? Likewise, what about their presidential legacies? Before departing from each woman, I had the opportunity to pose the latter inquiry. President James-Jackson stated that she “wanted people to say that she was great for Creek.” She continued:

I know the trustees thought bringing someone in from the outside, with a different set of lenses, might actually help the institution. I said it then, and in my first or second summer letter, that I want us to be a thriving, innovative, well-known and excellent place that people have the highest regard for. I think if people have the highest regard for the institution, they will have the highest regard for me.
The desire to be known for “restoring the intellectual vigor” at Lee College was President Johnson’s aim. She “was,” because of “her students:”

Lee wants to define what it means to be a woman of African descent in the twenty-first century. I want every student here to leave the country. Because my students come from a certain profile, that means I have to get out there and raise money. This whole thing is about intellectual excitement.

Laying the groundwork for future institutional leaders was the legacy objective of President Bryan. Pausing for a moment, she commented:

I want my legacy to be about building a strong, stable and foundation upon which Civil College can continue to grow. It has been about putting the organizational infrastructure in place. I want the next president to come and bring their vision in; and, to benefit from things that were already here.

Like President Johnson, she too conceded that serving as president of Civil College has not been about her, but rather the institution. She expounded:

I tell my cabinet members and colleagues all the time, in the next fifty years, it would not please me more than to sit in a rocking chair and have the president say, “Wow! What those people did in the early 2000s!” I know that most of what has been done hasn’t been for this route. We are planting it, but its maturity will come much later.

In her reflection, President Davis’ described herself as a woman who had worked tirelessly to “make a difference” at Fuller College. Contemplating her potential legacy, she said:

I have been in enough situations where I understand that it is kind of like dropping a pebble in a pot of water. There is an extraordinary ripple until that pebble settles. I want folks to say that I came in and made my mark. I helped stabilize an institution that is a premier one—that I helped to save kids and move people to another level.

From her response, I sensed that President Davis had already been thinking about her vocational plans post-presidency. She was the first woman I spoke with, and set my
data collection tone with the other women. Among the group, she was the longest
serving—having been at Fuller for nine-and-a-half years. Time had taught her many
things; and while some of her reflections were filled with optimism, others struck a realist
tone. Aware that I was interested in eventually pursuing the college presidency, she left
me with one final “realist” remark. Essentially, “when it is time to go, it is time to go.”

She stated:

Coming here, I had no intentions of being one of the longest sitting
presidents. When it is time for me to go, I don’t want an office on campus.
I don’t need to be on the board here. I think I am closer now to seeing the
work of my years here and so I am more comfortable in saying that “I am
going to leave it better than I found it.” When it is time for me to go, I will
go. That engenders in me some peace, and some okay that I can slow down
and smell the roses.

President Davis’ sentiment is certainly applicable to the conclusion of this study.

To some extent, my study will leave the presidential literature “better than it was found.”

As a researcher, that brings me incredible solace. Having the opportunity to travel this
nation of ours, to meet and interact with, as well as observe these women, was a
professional experience that will not be soon forgotten. Hopefully, this study will not be
my last research endeavor, but only serve as the beginning— because there are so many
other African American women presidential “dark testaments” waiting to be centered and
told.
LIST OF REFERENCES


Carroll, C. (1982). Three’s a crowd: The dilemma of the Black women in higher education. In G. Hull, P. Scott & B. Smith (Eds.), *All the women are White, all the Blacks are men, but some of us are brave: Black women’s studies.* Old Westbury, NY: The Feminist Press.


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APPENDIX A

EXEMPTION APPROVAL
**Title Page - Application for Exemption**

**From Review by the Institutional Review Board**

The Ohio State University, Columbus OH 43210

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**Principal Investigator**

- **Name:** Ada Demb
- **Phone:** 292-1005
- **Department or College:** Educational Policy & Leadership
- **Campus Address (room, building, street address):**
  - Remseyer, 301A
  - 29 West Woodruff

**Signature:** [Signature]

**Fax:** 292-7020

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**Co-Investigator**

- **Name:** Davida L. Haywood
- **Phone:** 214-3853
- **Campus Address (room, building, street address) or Mailing Address:**
  - 2760 Bramblebush Court
  - Columbus, Ohio 43224

**Signature:** [Signature]

**Fax:**

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**Co-Investigator**

- **Name:**
- **Phone:**
- **Campus Address (room, building, street address) or Mailing Address:**

**Signature:**

**Fax:**

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**Protocol Title:** (Re)Inventing in the 'Dark': African American Women and Presidential Leadership

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**Source of Funding**

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**For Office Use Only**

- **Approved:**
  - Research has been determined to be exempt under these categories:

- **Disapproved:**
  - The proposed research does not fall within the categories of exemption. Submit an application to the appropriate Institutional Review Board for review.

**Date of Determination:** 3/20/08

**Signature:** Janet A. Schultz

Office of Responsible Research Practices

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Approved by the Policy Coordinating IRB, 3/18/08, revised 8/25/06
APPENDIX B

FORMAL LETTER OF INVITATION
April 1, 2008

[Name]
[Address]
[City, State, Zip]

Dear [Name]:

My name is Davida L. Haywood and I am a fourth-year doctoral candidate pursuing a degree in Educational Administration and Higher Education at The Ohio State University. Currently, I am in the process of completing my dissertation, under the supervision of Dr. Ada Demb, Associate Professor of Higher Education & Student Affairs. My dissertation concerns African American women institutional leaders and presidential leadership. I am writing to seek your participation as an interviewee in my study, which is outlined below.

African American women college presidents remain under-researched in the higher education literature and few studies examine how they conceive of, perceive and perform as presidential leaders. Further, some theoretical and epistemological frameworks utilized in leadership studies have not taken into consideration the dualities of race and gender. My research study addresses these dimensions by providing a research space where African American women college presidents can describe and interpret their leadership styles—in their own words. Through two individual interviews and participant observation, I hope to acquire insight about the following inquiries:

1. How do African American women college presidents conceive of or “make sense” of presidential leadership;

2. How does being a “woman” and “of color” influence and/or inform their crafting of a presidential identity; and,

3. What leadership practices do African American women employ as they carry out and perform their presidential duties?

I would like to explore these questions through conversations with Black women college presidents serving at four-year, public and private Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) and Predominantly White Institutions (PWIs). My research goal is
to involve three to five presidential participants representing different institutional types as defined by student population, geographical location and degree offerings. If this describes you, I would like to encourage you to participate.

It is documented in the higher education literature that women of color who are serving in the presidential role often hesitate to participate in research efforts because the small numbers increase the possibility for identification. I can assure you that both interviews and opportunities for participant observation will be treated with the utmost confidentiality, and at no time during the research process, will proper names be used.

All participants will have the opportunity to assume a personal pseudonym for reporting purposes and to designate a pseudonym for institutional names and geographical locations. Participation is completely voluntary and all of the data and results will be maintained off-campus, labeled and locked in a secure file cabinet. At any time, if a participant were to become uncomfortable, she may remove herself from the interview or study process, with no consequences.

I would like to begin institutional visits beginning in May 2008. My desire is to spend three to five days at your institution. I would conduct an initial interview that would focus primarily on your personal and professional leadership development. If you wish, interview questions could be provided to you ahead of time.

I would also like to attend several university and community events and meetings, to have the opportunity to observe your presidency in action. My research stay will culminate with a final interview informed heavily by these observations.

I will plan to contact your office in about two weeks, to see whether you might agree to participate. In the meantime, if you find the study to be of interest, please call me at 614-214-3533 or send an e-mail to haywood.21@osu.edu. My academic and dissertation advisor, Dr. Ada Demb, is available as a resource and can be reached at 614-292-1865 or by e-mail at demb.1@osu.edu. Thank you again for your interest, and I look forward to hearing from you.
Sincerely,

Davida L. Haywood  
4th Year Doctoral Candidate  
Educational Administration and Higher Education

Ada Demb, Ed.D.  
Associate Professor  
School of Educational Policy and Leadership
APPENDIX C

STATEMENT OF CONSENT
CONSENT FOR PARTICIPATION RESEARCH

I consent to participating in research entitled:

(Re)inventing in the ‘Dark’: African American Women and Presidential Leadership.

Davida L. Haywood, Co-PI and the authorized representative of the Principal Investigator (Dr. Ada Demb) has explained the purpose of the study, the procedures to be followed, and the expected duration of my participation. Possible benefits of the study have been described, as have alternative procedures.

I acknowledge that I have had the opportunity to obtain additional information regarding the study and that any questions I have raised have been answered to my full satisfaction. Furthermore, I understand that I am free to withdraw consent at any time and to discontinue participation in the study without prejudice to me.

Finally, I acknowledge that I have read and fully understand the consent form. I sign it freely and voluntarily. A copy has been given to me.

Date:        Date:

Signed        Signed

Co-PI        Participant
APPENDIX D

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL ONE
Interview Protocol #1

Oral Introduction:

Thank you for agreeing to participate in my research study. As I mentioned in your letter of invitation, I am conducting research on how African American women “experience” the college presidency. Specifically, I desire to know how Black women conceive of presidential leadership, craft a presidential identity and “perform” the college presidency.

First, I am going to request that you read and complete a Statement of Consent form. Please sign and date it. I will do the same and provide you with a copy. By signing this form, you have agreed to participate in this study. I have agreed to ensure that all of the information you share remains confidential. Please note that the pseudonym you have chosen will be used throughout the research study. A similar process will be used for your institution and its geographical location.

With your permission, I would like to audiotape your responses, as well as take notes. If at any time you become uncomfortable during the taping, please signal to me and I will turn the tape recorder off.

With that in mind, are you comfortable and ready to proceed? I will begin the tape recorder now.

I want to explore several topics with you, but also want to get to know you personally.
Interview Questions

Icebreaker Questions

1. What year were you appointed to the presidency? **Probe:** Where do you fall within the presidential lineage? Did your appointment confirm any notable “firsts?”

2. How did you decide on assuming the presidency here at (name of institution)? **Probe:** What factors went into your decision?

Leadership Conceived

3. How do you see yourself? Who are you? **Probe:** What are some of your personal values? Are these different from your professional values?

4. How do you define the word “leadership?”

5. In what ways has race and/or gender informed or influenced your definition of leadership?

6. Who are the people and/or events in your life that have served as examples of “good” leadership?

7. How has faith or spirituality impacted your life? **Probe:** Has faith or spirituality had any influence on how you define or think about leadership?

8. When you were a child, what were your professional aspirations?

9. When did you begin considering an administrative career as a professional goal? **Probe:** Did you set an occupational timeline?

10. Earlier, I asked you to define leadership. Now, I will preface the word with presidential. Will you tell me how you define “presidential” leadership?

11. How do you describe your leadership style? **Probe:** How have you arrived at these descriptors?

12. What characteristics should a college or university president possess?
13. Looking back over your tenure, has your definition of “presidential” leadership or style remained the same or has it changed? **Probe:** What factors have contributed to this?

**Leadership Perceived**

14. You were appointed in *(year)*. How was your appointment perceived? **Probe:** 1. Board of Trustees; 2. faculty; 3. students; and, 4. external community?

15. As an “African American” and/or “woman” leading an institution of higher education, what have been some of the challenges that you have faced?

16. In general, what are some of the perceptions that others may have about “women” presidential leaders? **Probe:** I would like to ask a follow-up question. Will you share with me some of the perceptions that others might have about “African American” women presidential leaders?

17. How have you have learned to deal or cope with these perceptions?

18. How have these perceptions, whether positive or negative, assisted you with “framing” your presidency here at *(name of institution)*?

19. How do you evaluate or assess your presidential progress?

**Leadership Performed**

20. In your daily routine, as the chief executive officer, what do you hope people see?

21. When you communicate with others, what do you hope they hear? **Probe:** How do you get your thoughts and messages across?

22. Share with me a time or instance when you thought that a message was well received? **Probe:** Share with me a time or instance when you thought that a message was not well received? How did you handle the situation?

23. How do you prepare to communicate with an audience? **Probe:** 1. Faculty; 2. board members; 3. students; 4. businessmen and women; 5. legislators/governing boards?
24. In delivering these forms of communication, does your leadership style change given the group and/or circumstances? **Probe:** 1. Convocation; 2. Graduation; 3. Board of Trustees meeting?

**Conclusion**

25. Who are your personal and professional mentors and/or role models? **Probe:** How has this individual(s) impacted your life?

26. One final inquiry. When all is said and done, what do you want your presidential legacy to be?

You have provided me with a wealth of information. I tried to ask you inquiries that would speak to your personal, professional and presidential experiences. Please take a moment to think about our conversation. Is there an area or something that I have overlooked or did not ask? (Pause)

I really appreciate you for assisting me in my study and thank you for your time.
APPENDIX E

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL TWO
Interview Protocol #2

Oral Introduction:

Thank you again for agreeing to participate in my research study. I would like to remind you that I am conducting research on how African American women college presidents “experience” the college presidency. Specifically, I desire to know how Black women conceive of presidential leadership, craft a presidential identity and “perform” the college presidency.

Please note that I will continue to use the name you have chosen throughout the study and your responses will remain confidential. Likewise, you have read, signed and been provided a copy of the Statement of Informed Consent. Do you need for me to read it again or address any questions that relate to the form?

With your permission, I would like to audiotape your responses, as well as take notes. If at any time you become uncomfortable during the taping, please signal to me and I will turn the tape recorder off.

With that in mind, are you comfortable and ready to proceed? I will begin the tape recorder now.

I want to take the next few minutes to ask you about some of the observations that I made concerning your presidential “performance” over the past several days.