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Exploring Intersectionality of Gender, Race, and Personality Traits for Black Women Leaders in Online Higher Education

About the Author(s)

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Keywords

online learning, Black women, higher education institutions, leadership, personality traits, introverts, extroverts, Black Feminist Thought, intersectionality



Exploring Intersectionality of Gender, Race, and Personality Traits for Black Women Leaders in Online Higher Education

Shanaya Kuykendahl Anderson, *Abilene Christian University*

Abstract

Researchers have used previous literature to suggest that Black women face challenges and obstacles in seeking leadership roles at higher education institutions (HEIs). Many of these Black women have consistently and pervasively faced prevailing stereotypes, biases, and barriers as they seek career advancements at online HEIs (Nigar, 2020; Tarbuton, 2019). This qualitative phenomenological study was undertaken to examine the intersectionality of gender, race, and personality traits of Black women leaders who hold positions of department chair level or higher in HEIs. Using the theoretical framework of Black feminist thought, this research was conducted to understand better the lived experiences of a selected group of Black women in leadership roles at HEIs. Purposive sampling of ten Black women leaders from Texas-based HEIs allowed for the participants to engage in virtual open-ended question interviews via video conferencing, Zoom. The participants shared experiences on their career trajectory and barriers encountered on their journey and reflected on what helped them overcome obstacles while seeking leadership roles at HEIs. The procedures of initial coding, NVivo coding, and descriptive coding were utilized to transcribe the obtained data and create three main themes and 11 subthemes. The three major themes identified included support systems, personality perceptions, and career pathways. The results of this study provide fresh viewpoints on the difficulties faced by Black women seeking leadership roles at online HEIs. The participants' viewpoints may also help improve academic environments to identify potential leadership approaches for developing Black women to acquire leadership roles.

Keywords: online learning, Black women, higher education institutions, leadership, personality traits, introverts, extroverts, Black Feminist Thought, intersectionality

Introduction

Over the years, higher education institutions (HEI) have experienced several iterations in order to meet the ongoing and ever-changing needs of the current diverse student population for whom they were initially designed to serve (Jayaweera et al., 2021; Müller & Mildenerger, 2021). Accordingly, these organizations must be ready to adapt when their demographics and student expectations continually shift. In addition, the demographic makeup of those in leadership positions within HEI should reflect the changing demographics of the student body.

Currently, at universities and institutions of higher education, women obtain bachelor's, master's, and doctoral degrees faster than their male counterparts but still do not get an equal opportunity at the round table of leadership in higher education (Freeman et al., 2019; Tarbutton, 2019). Specifically, previous research focused on female leadership in higher education has primarily emphasized leadership positions at the department chair level and above (Alcalde & Subramaniam, 2020). Women's participation in higher education leadership positions has remained highly underrepresented despite significant gains in educational levels and leadership experience earned. Alcalde and Subramaniam (2020) suggested that Black women, in particular, continue to face additional challenges within the overall HEI structures due to their race and gender, especially in the online learning environments of the institutions, leading to severe implications for professional advancement.

Online learning is the process of providing an alternative method of instruction through the Internet. It is where learning occurs between the teacher and geographically separated learners (Ayebi-Arthur, 2017; Beasley & Beck, 2017). Many institutions have concurrently implemented the online teaching model with face-to-face classroom teaching to meet the growing and diverse current population's needs (Beasley & Beck, 2017; Cordie & Lin, 2018). Within online learning settings, the delivery and instructional methods generally vary from the traditional teaching model in conventional brick-and-mortar settings, not the program's content. Furthermore, the levels of leadership needed for online learning are the same as what is necessary for a traditional learning environment of HEIs (Ayebi-Arthur, 2017; Beasley & Beck, 2017; Fredericksen, 2017).

When attempting to explore potential causes for the dearth of women Black leaders in online learning environments of HEIs, some researchers have focused on personality traits as a

potential causal factor (Brown et al., 2019; Fredericksen, 2017; Meyer et al., 2019). This may be important to note when, according to Farrell (2019), personality traits such as introversion and extraversion can be significant credentials needed for effective leadership at higher education institutions. Therefore, the changing demographics of the student body may now include a particular type of personality trait required to lead the current technologically savvy student population that has transitioned to an online learning environment.

The scarcity of women leaders as department heads or above in higher education is often blamed on gender bias and stereotyping (Hill et al., 2016). However, race and ethnicity have also contributed to the need for more diversity in these positions (Lewis, 2016). This is evidenced as Black women account for fewer leadership roles than White and Black men and White women (Breedon, 2021; Tarbuton, 2019; Wright & Salinas, 2017). Therefore, it is essential to examine the complicated relationship of the intersectionality of race and gender yet include the personality traits to understand better the obstacles that contribute to the currently limited career trajectories of Black women leaders at HEIs.

Brown et al. (2019) suggested that Black women are statistically significantly underrepresented as higher education leaders at all levels compared to their White male counterparts. Most leadership positions at the department chair level or higher are dominated by White males (Brown et al., 2019; Freeman et al., 2019; Tarbuton, 2019). According to Johnson et al. (2020), "Black women also face other issues such as stereotyping and negative understandings of their identities as leaders" (p. 24). Compounding this gender and racial divide in leadership, most Black women are challenged with not only gender biases but also racial biases that present additional barriers to achieving leadership roles. Although the underrepresentation of Black women has been debated for decades, there is no convincing explanation for why this continues (Brown et al., 2019; Tarbuton, 2019). Previous studies have looked into the experiences of Black women in higher education leadership roles and the challenges they encounter (Haynes et al., 2020).

Due to the growing demands brought on by the 21st century's need to address digital and online learning, leadership in higher education is constantly evolving. As a result, higher educational institutions (HEI) now offer several options, including hybrid learning, to meet their students' diversified needs (Müller & Mildenerger, 2021). Jayaweera et al. (2021) proposed that

with the current era of virtual/online learning, the need for innovative leaders to support a diverse student population is necessary. Diverse leaders combined with the virtual learning ecosystem require a particular personality trait that provides an engaging and inspiring platform for students to learn (Müller & Mildenerger, 2021). Moreover, inadequate gender diversity in leadership roles in online higher education continues to link to a paucity of existing research that addresses the eligibility of Black women having the personality traits needed to advance in an online higher educational environment (Chance, 2021, 2022).

Therefore, this phenomenological qualitative study aimed to explore the relationship between gender, race, and personality traits of Black women leaders at the department chair level or higher role in an HEI online learning environment and its implications for professional advancement.

Theoretical Framework

Black Feminist Theory

Initially developed by Collins (1989), Black Feminist Theory is grounded in the everyday lived experiences of Black women (Alinia, 2015). Black Feminist Theory concerns power and domination and how it is used to subjugate Black women. In addition to examining both the struggle and empowerment of this group, this theory is also concerned with the intersectionality that comes with oppression and social agents and the examination of their complex relationship between domination and resistance.

Grant and Ghee (2015) examined the difficulty Black women experienced in higher educational settings. Accordingly, Black Feminist Theory is an appropriate theoretical framework to explore the paucity of Black women leaders in higher education to examine their lived experiences and reveal their truth. Grant and Ghee (2015) reported that Black women in academia, regardless of credentials or experience, often voice concerns about a lack of opportunities for advancement.

Intersectionality

Intersectionality, a term coined by legal scholar Chance (2021), is not synonymous with diversity. However, this is the basis for understanding the different experiences of people around the world. Crossover does not mean adding one aspect of identity to another. However, it concerns how people with overlapping identities perceive the power system. Conceptually,

intersectionality allows us to comprehend how various forms of oppression, such as racism, sexism, age, and personality traits, influence the individual experience.

When used as an analytic tool, intersectionality can examine discriminatory practices faced by marginalized groups (Collins & Bilge, 2016; Moradi & Grzanka, 2017). More specifically, intersectionality can be used to describe Black women's experiences as a result of the junction of their multiple identities, such as race and gender, causing an impact on an individual's personal and professional life. Studies have noted that various stereotypes affect other people's views of Black women and their perceptions of themselves (Crenshaw, 1994; Dickens et al., 2016; Lewis, 2016).

Salient Literature

Social Identity

Social identity is defined as what someone is or who they are in terms of the groups to which they belong (Jones & Day, 2018; Moorosi et al., 2018). Within the context of this research, social identity covers black women as belonging to a particular group defined by mental, social, and physical characteristics. Black women also deal with identity stereotypes that emphasize racial and ethnic inequity more than gender-based discrimination. Since self-esteem and self-identification are essential for social interactions with others in an organization, identity is vital when developing influential minority women leaders (Jones & Day, 2018; Moorosi et al., 2018). Specific factors that affect possibilities for Women of Color, often known as intersectionality, include self-identification, group identity, and gender inequalities (Lomotey, 2019; Moorosi et al., 2018).

The intersectionality of race and gender is a critical aspect of leadership in higher education that Black women have despite not being noticed, promoted, or respected as leaders. Gender biases are present in leadership and education, as Black women are discriminated against. For example, according to Lomotey (2019), modern prejudice against Black women involves contempt, acceptance, and the endorsement of offensive stereotypes that support blatant discrimination, reducing the chances of women of color being promoted in the leadership hierarchy.

Personality Traits

An individual's unique personality is depicted by the totality of their distinctive thinking processes, associated feelings, and patterns of behavior (American Psychological Association, 2019; Mosier & Pietri, 2021). Collectively, these are displayed as personality traits and are described as sequences of behaviors, attitudes, sentiments, and habits in an individual, which are internal attributes that are relatively constant, stable, and continuous (Mosier & Pietri, 2021). When viewed in the context of substantial predictors of human behaviors, personality traits have been linked to cognitive abilities and sentiments and as an indicator of common behavioral characteristics.

Some modern personality psychologists propose five broad personality dimensions, often called the big five traits (Akuzum, 2021; Cohen, 2021; Costa & McCrae, 1992; Mosier & Pietri, 2021). These five broad personality traits consist of the following dimensions: (1) Emotional Stability vs. Neuroticism; (2) Extroversion vs. Introversion; (3) Openness vs. Closedness; (4) Agreeableness vs. Antagonism; and (5) Conscientiousness vs. Lack of Direction (Costa & McCrae, 1987, 1992). Furthermore, Hopwood and Waugh (2020) postulated that we can determine an individual's personality from their actions and character traits.

Introversion and Extroversion

Of these five factors, extraversion and introversion are used most frequently to categorize effective and innovative leaders (Cohen, 2021; Mosier & Pietri, 2021). Extraversion is a leadership personality trait that specifies how much a person expresses attributes of being outspoken, enthusiastic, outgoing, and communicative (Costa & McCrae, 1992; Farrell, 2019; Gino, 2015). On the opposite end of the extroversion scale, the introvert is more subdued, reflective, and analytical and prefers to work in smaller group settings or isolation.

Personality traits and personal characteristics are also directly related to the leadership style displayed by an individual (Powell et al., 2018). The influential personality of leaders and the complementary role behavior of their subordinates are two critical factors considered fundamental and integral to the success of an organization (Farrell, 2019; Hill et al., 2016). Influential leaders possess a particular type of personality trait. Introverts and extroverts can display important and specific leadership characteristics. Although introverts and extroverts are

from opposite ends of the personality scale, both personality traits can be effective in higher education leadership (Gino, 2015; Jensen, 2015; Powell et al., 2018).

Furthermore, extroverted people are more prone than introverts to be domineering and ambitious (Khalid & Sekiguchi, 2019). Individuals with high extrovert qualities often can communicate well and are excellent team players due to their strong communication abilities (Akuzum, 2021; Khalid & Sekiguchi, 2019; Mosier & Pietri, 2021). On the other hand, introverts seldom interact with others and prefer to work in the background.

Although leaders' personality traits may differ, an effective leader could adapt as needed or work together to achieve success. Nonetheless, introverts and extroverts both have qualities vital to effective leadership. Limited research does not indicate that introversion or extroversion is the better personality trait of an HEI leader. However, conscientiousness and openness, often associated with extroversion, have been considered favorable characteristics of a successful HEI leader working with students in an online learning environment (Gino, 2015; Jensen, 2015; Meyer, 2019; Sparkman et al., 2019).

Regardless of personality type, in the 21st century, many people from marginalized communities acquire knowledge through remote learning, which equips them with the skills to undertake leadership roles within different technology companies (Freeman et al., 2019; Leal Filho et al., 2020). However, despite the effectiveness and efficiency of online education, which has impacted diversity and leadership to some degree, women still need to be challenged to seek leadership roles in higher education (Cordie & Lin, 2018). For example, most universities are unlikely to export gender equality and advocate powerful female models. They are unlikely to offer more classes taught by women who could serve as role models. Moreover, this profoundly influences how young people think about women's societal roles (Freeman et al., 2019).

Challenges and Barriers to Women Leadership in Higher Education

Black women aspiring to leadership positions face barriers and challenges in HEI, including Historically Black Colleges and other predominantly White institutions (Freeman et al., 2019). In addition to racism and sexism, Black women encounter struggles with classism, which all contribute to the perceptions of Black women in society (Chance, 2022). Furthermore, exploitation derives from persistent prejudice against women of color in leadership positions (Freeman et al., 2019; Valerio, 2018).

Researchers suggest that women in academic leadership roles, particularly women of color, frequently encounter marginalization, contempt, alienation, rejection, miscommunication, a lack of affirmation, and an inability to obtain proper recognition (Freeman et al., 2019; Jernigan et al., 2020; Mainah & Perkins, 2015; Valerio, 2018). Freeman et al. (2019) concurred that these critical factors contribute to the difficulties faced by Black women and play a part in pushing them into non-administrative or dead-end positions. The Glass Ceiling Commission (TGCM) ascribed women's inequality to several factors, such as stereotypes, gender, racial bias, and institutions failing to follow affirmative action legislation (Mainah & Perkins, 2015).

One challenge and barrier to women acquiring leadership roles in higher education is scrutiny before they begin their leadership careers (Freeman et al., 2019; Leal Filho et al., 2020). A negative externality is associated with people's attitudes regarding women in leadership (Freeman et al., 2019; Leal Filho et al., 2020; Valerio, 332018). The personal choice of women, the glass ceiling effect, invisibility, and career positioning are also common barriers to women in leadership roles (Bartman, 2015; Tarbutton, 2019).

Black women have long been at the center of racial and gender inequity (Tarbutton, 2019; *Women in Leadership*, 2020). Women of Color must overcome challenges to earn the moniker of a "strong Black woman" (Domingue, 2015, p. 462). As a "strong Black woman," Black women leaders are expected to take care of others and show fortitude in the face of adversity, frequently at the expense of their own needs (Domingue, 2015; Tarbutton, 2019). It is vital to emphasize that the description "strong" can demean black women by failing to consider their sentiments and emotional needs outside of their leadership, even though some people may view it as a positive attribute or an indication of emotional well-being. Furthermore, Black women have suffered considerably due to stereotypes such as being considered "angry Black women" (Domingue, 2015; Pietri et al., 2018). The negative stereotype formed from this label has skewed the views of women of color's leadership capabilities. As a result, Black women alter their behaviors to combat this stereotype; nevertheless, research has conclusively shown that this typecast stereotype is an unjust misconception (Tarbutton, 2019; Valerio, 2018).

Another challenge women face is that of women seeing themselves in a top leadership position (Freeman et al., 2019). Some of the roles women prevail in can be self-limiting (*Women in Leadership*, 2020). Furthermore, women need more female role models in leadership and feel

it is complicated to achieve leadership positions. Women in leadership positions must realize their weaknesses and strengths to help them perform best in these positions (Randsley de Moura et al., 2018). Mentorship is essential to social capital and is more significant for women of color than for women of other races (Jernigan et al., 2020). Other women in leadership impact the success of Black women in leadership positions. Women, especially women of color, are often more alienated than men, lacking mentorship or a support system. Moreover, they cannot get the support they may need while confronting unusual obstacles (Jernigan et al., 2020; *Women in Leadership*, 2020). Organizations, like learning environments, need to foster supportive conditions to encourage growth and promotion (Bartman, 2015; Davis & Maldonado, 2015).

Black women continue to resist inequality in HEI. Although racial barriers continue to be conquered by women of color, gaining some success in academia, Black women still encounter difficulties obtaining and maintaining leadership roles (Freeman et al., 2019; Pietri et al., 2018). Black women often experience organizations exhibiting the glass ceiling and concrete ceiling effect, with gender and ethnicity working against them (Bartman, 2015; Leal Filho et al., 2020; Tarbuton, 2019). The glass ceiling effect is another challenging barrier that prevents qualified women from advancing to leadership roles in higher education. The glass ceiling effect is influenced by stereotypical roles, hierarchical gender positioning in careers, and disproportionately male (Tarbuton, 2019). Women in leadership also face challenges in developing their leadership style and having the confidence to stay true to it, even when confronted with adversity. Women are often seen as caregivers, so balancing work and family can hinder their advancement in leadership roles (Brower et al., 2019).

Career positioning is another negative factor affecting women pursuing leadership roles in higher education (Freeman et al., 2019). The road to leadership roles in school is quite demanding, and in most cases, women find themselves in the corners as more men advance to take these positions. More in-depth research shows that the path to higher education leadership is closely aligned with high school principalship, which favors more men than women (Tarbuton, 2019). Gender stereotypes of appropriate behavior for men and women can place women at a disadvantage. Women are viewed as less capable of possessing the necessary attributes to succeed as a leader (Valerio, 2018).

Methodology

A qualitative, phenomenological approach is this study's most appropriate research design. I interviewed Black women who described their experiences as they sought leadership roles in online higher educational settings. This is appropriate because Creswell (2014) stated that phenomenological research is appropriate for studies "in which the researcher describes the lived experiences of individuals about a phenomenon as described by participants" (p. 14).

In addition, Saldaña and Omasta (2018) suggested that this approach seeks to understand the lived experiences of the participants and the significance of those experiences. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with the Black women leaders in online higher education to gather data to examine the intersectionality of gender, race, and personality traits of these Black women who are successful as leaders. The interview process began by providing the participants with a proposed description of introversion and extroversion and having the participants self-identify based on the literature provided, in alignment with Jung's system of personality traits (Jung, 2016). Using Jung's classification system, introverts are generally identified as people who prefer environments with little stimulation and tend to self-energize. Conversely, extroverts are often recharged by external stimuli and spending time with others (Jung, 2016). After self-identifying their personality traits, the participants continued the semi-structured interview process.

Research Design

The group I chose to study provided targeted personal experiences and knowledge for Black women, particularly those who aspired to gain leadership roles, while identifying if a particular personality trait could promote or hinder success. More importantly, this study addressed how gender inequality and stereotypical views of women's behavior affected those who had achieved vital leadership roles in higher education, especially as they related to the subgroup of Black women.

Selecting a phenomenology approach design with semi-structured interview questions allowed for collecting data using the story-telling aspect of Black women's lived experiences who had experienced a bias in gender inequality in leadership roles. For this study, a qualitative research design was used by conducting virtual interviews via video conferencing based on open-ended questions that depicted the barriers Black women who sought leadership positions

encountered and what behaviors or variables helped them break the glass ceiling. These stories captured the themes of Black women's experiences facing gender inequality due to assertive gender stereotyping behaviors (Krause, 2017). The semi-structured interview was appropriate for exploring these women's difficulties along their higher educational career paths (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Krause, 2017; Marshall & Rossman, 2016).

Phenomenological qualitative research allowed for open-ended interviews and the probing for more thorough, in-depth responses about the participants' lived experiences. The participants shared their experiences as Black women who aspired for top leadership positions using the phenomenological approach. Data obtained from phenomenological research provided detailed knowledge and enabled the researcher to have an outlook on Black women's lived experiences seeking leadership positions (Krause, 2017)

Participant's Profile

For this study, I focused on Black women who had a graduate-level degree, were currently working in two-year or four-year institutions, served in leadership roles, and experienced barriers to advancing their careers. The population examined in this study consisted of Black women in higher education institutions who worked in an online learning environment. The study sample consisted of Black women currently in leadership roles who have experienced the phenomenon being explored, which is gender bias or gender inequality concerning their personality traits of extroversion or introversion, where the work environment was primarily online. Furthermore, the participants needed to share their past and present experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

The purposive sampling technique I used sought Black women leaders in higher education (Reiber et al., 2020). I initially needed to select 8-10 participants for my study. The participants' search included reviewing higher education institutions' websites for Black women leaders, recommendations, or previous networking with women in higher education leadership. Also, participants needed to have experienced the same phenomenon and be willing to share their experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Data Collection and Analysis

The effectiveness of this study relied on interpreting the meaning research participants gave to their experiences. This study was used to examine Black women's lived experiences who

had been identified through purposive sampling techniques in higher education leadership positions. The participants were asked to share their significant relationships and experiences, personal and professional characteristics, leadership styles and practices, and personal and professional barriers. Open-ended questions allowed the participants to detail their experiences seeking leadership roles, their challenges, and how they succeeded despite these obstacles.

Interviews were conducted using two main research questions: (1) What are the experiences of Black women seeking leadership positions at the department chair level or higher in higher educational online learning environments? (2) RQ2: What strategies do Black women leaders at the department chair level or higher roles employ to succeed in higher educational online learning environments? Through a virtual interviewing process, salient information was gathered from Black women, focusing on in-depth stories regarding the kind of discrimination and stereotypical biases they felt prevented them from breaking the glass ceiling (Krause, 2017).

These recorded video conference meetings gathered information for data collection and were later transcribed and analyzed for recurrent themes. This portion of my research allowed Black women in higher education leadership positions to highlight their personal and authentic experiences and the various barriers they encountered while seeking recognition and acceptance.

Analyzing the data included reviewing the responses documented in the interviews. Initial coding entailed reviewing interview transcripts multiple times and coding data segments that stand out as patterns or essential information. Once the patterns had been identified, charts and tables were used to outline the findings further to support my research questions. Semi-structured interviews and story-telling were used in the coding process.

Next, a codebook was created to help condense the information being analyzed, and I looked over those codes and grouped them based on similarities into categories. Coding is needed to utilize the participants' language to represent qualitative analysis (Patton, 2015). The purpose of process coding is to categorize the participants' actions, reactions, and interactions, as the data suggests. Coding the data pinpointed the similarities and differences between the participants. Initial, NVivo and descriptive coding were used to separate the data by patterns and phrases (Patton, 2015).

The total number of codes was well over 300, developed directly from the participants' words and phrases about their leadership, gender biases, discriminations, and stereotyping, and

how they could break the glass ceiling effect. The codes developed were separated into categories according to similarities. All codes developed were then categorized based on the similarities and interpretations originating from the data. After discovering similar meanings, The codes were adjusted to the new categories' surface. The next step was to identify themes and then group those categories into themes with phrases or sentences that directly answer a research question.

Findings

The data analysis of the lived experiences of Black women leaders in online Higher Education Institutions identified five overarching themes and three to five subthemes in Table 1. The 10 participants' responses were the foundation for the overarching themes and subthemes. The overarching themes and subthemes provide insight into the career trajectory of Black women leaders at HEIs.

Table 4

Overarching Themes and Subthemes

Support systems	Personality perceptions	Career pathways
Mentorship	Stereotypes	Entrance Level
Lack of Black Women Role Models	Extrovert/Introvert	Awareness of Career Paths
Network and Sense of Community	Implicit Biases	Required Skillsets
		Tokenism
Work and Life Balance/ Harmony		

The ten participants in this study described their experiences during their career trajectories as Black women leaders in online HEIs. Each participant shared that they experienced directly or were aware of stereotyping, gender and racial biases, and even tokenism that existed for Black women currently working or seeking leadership roles in higher education.

This is important because Black women educational leaders in the 21st century still struggle to have their employers recognize their accomplishments or honor their career development initiatives (Patterson-Stephens, 2019). Similarly, all participants stated that Black women were underrepresented as leaders in roles of the department chair or higher when

compared to their male counterparts. In addition, each participant expressed how they felt they had to work harder and more efficiently than other females from other races and the opposite gender. Thirty percent of the participants stated that although most Black women's educational leaders naturally serve as mentors and emblems of diversity and inclusion, they are continually subjected to racial and gender stereotypes.

Whether on digital platforms or in brick-and-mortar buildings, the accomplishments of Black women leaders in academia are not often understood without references to historical stories of systemic marginalization (Tarbutton, 2019; West et al., 2018). Additionally, 40% of participants reported a negative treatment that often mirrored previously related literature-identified stigmas such as tokenism and being associated with an angry and harsh gender, among other prejudices. These participants also expressed instances of being the only Black woman in the room as the "token" person to meet diversity expectations, being "othered" in the room of leaders, or being labeled as the "angry Black woman" when expressing their thoughts on a given situation.

Black women leaders who expressed reservations about these matters are frequently accused of being overly sensitive, using race as a basis for their perceived ills, or ignoring past collective group struggles (Valerio, 2018; West et al., 2018). In some cases, these social stigmas and the individual conflict with many identities led to the perception that Black women lacked initiative or agency in pursuing personal significance and self-determination (Patterson-Stephens, 2019; Tarbutton, 2019).

Notably, many participants stated that Black women in online leadership programs for higher education were frequently placed in situations where they must either dispel these beliefs or conform to the stereotypes imposed by society and the institutions where they were employed. The participants shared that this felt demoralizing and drained them in this working environment. These conditions and environments afforded Black women little to no room to thrive and fully develop as people or potential leaders.

Moreover, the Black women I interviewed reported that they consistently experienced tokenism as they attempted to acquire leadership positions at the chair level in online learning environments. For them, tokenism has had adverse effects. For example, Linda, Ana, Joanne, Veronica, and Michelle each stated that their institutions having Black women in a diversity,

inclusion, and equity leadership role indicates tokenism. That is because they are the only Black women in their institution in their specific areas, which suggests that tokenism harms Black women seeking leadership roles as it limits their career paths. Research further argues that the social structures and systems and the majority of higher education institutions function without pausing to evaluate concerns of race and gender discrimination or even the value of cultural diversity (Hyppolite, 2019).

The participants' experiences with stereotypes and biases were often compatible with the depth and complexity of the overall Black female experience as defined in Black Feminist Theory research (Collins, 2000). For example, according to the proponents of Black Feminist Theory, although Black women experience social transformation, they do not do it without difficulties and hardships (Collins, 2000). Many of these same study participants referenced the following distinguishing features of Black Feminist Thought when sharing their experiences:

1. Many Black women, regardless of location, experience some form of oppression, resulting in similar outcomes.
2. Although Black Feminist Theory originates from a connection between encounters and beliefs, not all Black women experience and share the same life experiences in the same manner (Collins, 2000).

The participants also shared about hearing of discrimination from other Black women in leadership roles when they applied for jobs. During one interview, Sandy pointed out one instance when she applied for a leadership position and did not get it even though she was the best qualified. Many of the other participants also expressed the lack of Black women in leadership roles, indicating that discrimination existed, and they knew they had to work harder to be the best to be considered for a position. More importantly, Kimberly and Linda reported that they believed they worked hard to achieve their accomplishments and still faced the same challenges of being "invited to the table."

Black women are not just underrepresented and invisible in society; this group is also underrepresented and invisible in much of the salient literature (Haynes et al., 2020; Mirza, 2015). This lack of representation is only underscored when the participants admitted that they occasionally feel invisible. This obscurity only fuels the need for Black women to have mentors and supporters who can support their work and provide professional support. Unfortunately,

many participants shared that these types of support sponsors are usually White male counterparts who have value within the institutions and little in common with them from which they can draw strength and support. Moreover, the participants claimed that what exacerbated an already tenuous situation was that the only way to stand out was with the help of these supporters, mentors, or sponsors.

Furthermore, Black women leaders at the department chair in online HEI acquire leadership positions by exhibiting extroverted personality characteristics and by campaigning for the institutionalization of gender and racial equality policies as centers of learning, as they will help promote widespread adoption of addressing gender and racial biases (Brown et al., 2019; Meyer et al., 2019). Black female leaders have historically and solely invested in gender-enabling systems to counteract biases against women seeking leadership positions. The discussions raised during this research and the prevailing salient literature have led to the critical conclusion that providing a gender-sensitive pedagogy and tackling gender inequality and racial prejudice pose significant challenges to the education pipeline (Brown et al., 2019; Haynes et al., 2020). Therefore, as a result of the conflation of these practices, the majority of Black women leaders have been successful in deconstructing negative racial stereotypes.

Findings from the research also revealed that Black women leaders at the department chair in online HEI who seek leadership positions should also be encouraged to network and work together because they have a variety of personality types that will benefit from online education. Black women build rapport and trust with the team members, whether introverts or extroverts, as they work well in a collaborative environment (Akuzum, 2021; Brazzell, 2012). The participants in this study cited support systems such as mentorships, networking, community, introverted and extroverted personalities, and professional advancements as some of the essential strategies that Black women have used to acquire leadership roles.

With online learning popularity increasing, most Black women have increased their educational qualifications, taken on more challenging roles in different organizations, looked for mentorship programs, and networked (Mainah, 2016). Moreover, regardless of whether they have self-identified as introverts or extroverts, 60% of the participants have acquired exceptional skills that will enable them to achieve leadership roles in online higher education institutions. These participants contribute to their success through networking and finding support systems

with other Black women leaders through mentorship and leadership organizations. Michelle and Linda shared that the networking relationships have encouraged them to extend an "olive branch" for upcoming Black women leaders and to become mentors for others.

A few of the participants even described opportunities when their mentors encouraged and paid for their participation in conferences, organizations, and other programs that benefited their efforts to continue their growth in leadership. The participants went on to express that this support, along with the mentoring, was seemingly committed to the cause for the advancement of Black women. In addition, the participants reported that this assisted them in facing several of the continuing challenges in today's higher education institutions for Black women, such as being "visible" and networking to find other Black women leaders.

Using the opportunity to network and meet great leaders has been another strategy that has been shown that Black women leaders at the department chair in online HEI acquire, who seek to be successful in online higher education institutions. Using this approach, some participants reported having made remarkable connections. They reported meeting some great people, including Black professionals working in higher education from mid-level leadership to executive-senior level leadership. According to Linda, Michelle, Ana, and Bianca, these connections were often used to address some of the racial challenges they faced as Black women leaders, such as discrimination, difficulty finding mentors of the same race or gender, receiving fewer opportunities and support than White counterparts, and limited growth opportunities.

Each participant also stressed the importance of specific skill sets that they believe are required to succeed in online HEIs as a leader. The required talents mentioned included a combination of technological and interpersonal skills. All participants noted that online higher education demands interpersonal skills in interacting with others in a digital or online format. In addition, Ana and Linda mentioned that being extremely innovative by being engaging and creative are skills necessary for the online learning environment to succeed with the population today. Moreover, the participants shared that leaders must be flexible and willing to continue to "think outside the box" to motivate stakeholders. Michelle and Paige noted that the online environment could often be more demanding than the traditional brick-and-mortar learning options due to the need to be more innovative and resourceful with leadership skills.

Finally, although the self-identified personality traits of extroverts or introverts were evenly divided amongst the participants, most participants believed that extrovert skill sets are needed at various times as a leader. Each participant disclosed that being a Black woman's leadership role required you to tap into extrovert skills such as being out front, taking charge, or even being more authoritative at times as a requirement for success. The participants also mentioned the ability to "code-switch" as a necessary tool to navigate different environments or people. Michelle shared that she often had to "code switch" and witnessed others do the same in different work groups.

Recommendations for Future Research

Findings from this study have added to the understanding of the difficulties faced by Black women leaders in virtual institutions of higher education and the methods they use to address concerns about racial and gender biases. In addition, this study focused on an area where contemporary research is more limited regarding the knowledge of the impact of personality traits on the career trajectory of Black women leaders at online HEIs. Further research in this area should include exploring the lived experiences of Black women leaders in various regions to capture more information outside this study's limited region. Increasing the sample size and looking at a wider variety of Black women in various occupations may produce more generalizable results.

The paucity of the existing literature indicates that academic research in this area is desperately needed. In addition, the growing diverse workforces at colleges and universities underscores the need to create and sustain more diverse and inclusive communities and environments that foster opportunities for advancement for all. Therefore, to complement the current study on Black women leaders in online higher education contexts, I recommend conducting more research using qualitative techniques and Black Feminist Theory (Alinia, 2015; Grant & Ghee, 2015). The study should address the following:

1. The methods used to find, keep, and promote Black female administrators who hold the dean or chief chancellor post.
2. The mindsets and personality traits hinder Black women's achievement in higher education.

3. The remuneration of Black women executives compared to that of White men, Black men, and males in similar leadership positions.

4. The impact of Black role models on the success of Black women leaders in online higher education.

I would also recommend researching other Black women in or out of leadership positions and researching their experiences and perspectives as the first Black women in that organization to increase the literature on Black women leaders in general. This is because the research I discovered often referenced that various women's professional and personal journeys can be characterized as the first Black woman to oversee a higher education institution practically. Finally, looking into how the highlighted difficulties differ for Black and White women would be helpful.

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