How Racial Microaggressions Influence the Career Experiences and Trajectories of Black Women Senior and Executive Administrators at California Community Colleges: A Constructivist Grounded Theory

by

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How Racial Microaggressions Influence the Career Experiences and Trajectories of Black Women Senior and Executive Administrators at California Community Colleges:
A Constructivist Grounded Theory

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ABSTRACT

The scope of this study was to examine how racial microaggressions influence the career experiences and trajectories of Black women senior and executive administrators at California community colleges. Critical race theory, Black feminist thought, and microaggression theory served as the conceptual framework for this study. A constructivist grounded theory methodological design was used to answer four research questions: (a) What are the salient experiences of Black women senior and executive administrators who experience racial microaggressions at California community colleges?, (b) How do racial microaggressions influence the experiences and career trajectories of Black women senior and executive administrators at California community colleges?, (c) What strategies are employed by Black women senior and executive administrators at California community colleges to overcome racial microaggressions to ensure career advancement and success?, and (d) How do support networks impact the successful retention of Black women confronted with racial microaggressions within the California Community Colleges system? The study employed qualitative semi-structured interviews with 15 Black women senior and executive administrators at California community colleges. Four overarching themes emerged: (a) “Here We Go Again”—Prevalent lifelong experiences of racial microaggressions, (b) “This is Not for the Meek”—Burden bearing, (c) “Nobody Puts Baby in a Corner”—Resulting impact and influence of racial microaggressions, and (d) “I’m Prayed Up”—Coping strategies. This study contributes to the limited body of research on Black women administrators in postsecondary education and how racial microaggressions influence their career experiences and trajectories.
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(Elder, Scholar, Educator)

I write for those women who do not speak, for those who do not have a voice because they were so terrified, because we are taught to respect fear more than ourselves. We’ve been taught that silence would save us, but it won’t.

– Audre Lorde (1997)
CHAPTER 1—INTRODUCTION

Recently in the field of higher education, increased efforts are being made to improve access, retention and success of marginalized and disenfranchised communities of students to include students of color, those with visible and invisible disabilities, foster youth, and socioeconomically disadvantaged populations. However, relatively little is being done to highlight the marginalization and disenfranchisement of Black women as college administrators. The California Community Colleges system is the largest system of education in the nation, with 2.1 million students attending 115 colleges (California Community Colleges Chancellor’s Office [CCCO], 2019). In the state of California, laws are detailed through the California Education Code and are guided by Title 5 regulations that require community colleges to address the needs of those disproportionately impacted by lack of equal opportunity, which include, “American Indians or Alaskan natives, Asians or Pacific Islanders, Blacks, Hispanics, Whites, men, women, and persons with disabilities” (Student Equity Plans, 2019, para. 9). Additionally, SB 860: The Education Omnibus Trailer Bill (S. 860, 2014) requires that foster youth, veterans, and low-income students are included in institutional efforts to provide equal opportunity to students categorized disadvantaged or disproportionately impacted groups. Within the academy and particularly California community colleges, institutions are realigning goals in efforts to: (a) close the achievement gap for students of color, (b) decrease recidivism of the formerly incarcerated, (c) promote equity for those who need a “level playing field,” (d) assist students with a lower socioeconomic status, and (e) to support diversity and inclusion for all. At the helm of the institutional shifts that are taking place at colleges throughout the state are college administrators who are
charged to lead and manage the largest system of higher education in the state and the nation. C. King (1993) identified challenges of women as they enter these roles of leadership in educational institutions, stating:

Increasingly, although slowly, women are entering the upper echelons of management in higher education. They move into a predominately male society and many find themselves operating in a radically different culture, with different perceptions and assumptions. (p. 94)

Women, specifically Black women, must contend not only with the perceptions and assumptions of being a woman, but they are also confronted with microaggressions that target their race and intersecting gender identity. The emphasis on student success and learning outcomes is a necessary expectation within academia; however, there is a significant need within the academy to analyze and critically review its efforts to recruit, retain, and develop educational administrators of these same groups who are charged with the care and responsibility to successfully educate and care for those that enter higher education institutions seeking knowledge, wisdom, and social advancement.

While in service as senior and executive administrators, Black women are also part of the marginalized community people of color inclusive of Black Americans. They are in service to support students pursuing success in the form of a degree or certificate completion. Therefore, their persistence and contributions to support student success efforts are crucial to the academy. As a community, Black women are among the most educated populations in the United States. In 1977, there were 1,237 Black women who were conferred doctoral degrees. Over the course of 40 years, the number of Black females earning doctoral degrees have consistently and steadily increased to 8,807
degrees, which account for slightly over 10% of doctoral degrees conferred to women in 2016 (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2018). Similarly, the educational attainment of Black women in earning master’s degrees also remains consistent in the increasing of degrees conferred. According to NCES (2018), Black women accounted for 15% of master’s degrees earned by women in 2016, which is an increase from 9% in 1977. Although Black women remain consistent in their educational advancement, the degrees that they earn do not void them of the persistent perpetuation of racial microaggressions as they equip themselves academically in preparation for the careers that lie ahead of them. Unfortunately, the impact of microaggressions insults and invalidates Black women and can alter their career trajectory and contribution to the academy. As stated by Sue (2010), microaggressions have the lifelong insidious effect of silencing, invalidating, and humiliating the identity and voices of those who are oppressed. Racial microaggressions are defined as:

Brief and common place daily verbal, behavioral, or environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicates hostile, derogatory, or negative racial slights and insults toward people of color. Perpetuators of microaggressions are often unaware that they engaged in such communications when they interact with racial/ethnic minorities. (Sue, Capodilupo, et al., 2007, p. 271)

**Background of the Study**

A racial microaggression is the subtle manifestation of modern day racism in America that is rooted in the oppression of people of color. The research studies within the past 10 years related to racial microaggressions have generally focused on the
overarching element of people of color or students within a college or university setting. A few studies have been conducted on the impact of racial microaggressions on Black women in corporate America, but scant research has been facilitated specifically related to Black women within the California Community Colleges system and how these experiences impact Black women in senior and executive leadership roles.

Racism is interwoven into the fabric of the United States and is part of the American experience. Historically, racism is the belief that one race is superior over all the others, and therefore has the right to dominate (Solórzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000). Over the past decades, expressions of overt racism, most frequently referenced as “old-fashioned” blatant racism has declined (Sue, Capodilupo, et al., 2007). The new appearance of racism is identified in various ways by researchers such as: (a) modern racism, (b) averse racism, and (c) implicit stereotypes. For the purpose of this study, “microaggressions” will be used for the behavior and actions of the manifestation of subtle racism. As stated by Sue, Capodilupo, et al. (2007) microaggressions are the “everyday insults, indignities, and demeaning messages sent to people of color by well-intentioned White people who are unaware of the hidden messages being sent to them” (p. 271). These microaggressions manifest themselves in three manners: (a) microassault, (b) microinsult, and (c) microinvalidation (Sue, Capodilupo, et al., 2007). In some research studies, microassaults are identified as macroaggressions. For the purpose of this study, I use the term microassault, which is considered to be the overt type of racial attack that is meant to be denigrating and discriminatory in nature similar to old-fashioned racism in that it is intentional and occurs on a conscious level. Microinsults are “verbal and nonverbal communications that subtly convey rudeness and insensitivity and
demean a person’s racial heritage or identity” (Sue, Capodilupo, et al., 2007, p. 272). A microinsult could be when a White employer tells a prospective candidate of color, “I believe the most qualified person should get the job, regardless of race,” or when an employee of color is asked, “How did you get your job?” The underlying message from the perspective of the recipient may be twofold: (a) people of color are not qualified; and (b) as a minority group member, you must have obtained the position through some affirmative action or quota program and not because of ability.

According to Sue, Capodilupo, et al. (2007), microinvalidations are “communications that subtly exclude, negate, or nullify the thoughts, feelings, or experiential reality of a person of color” (p. 272). An example could be when Asian Americans, who are born and raised in the United States, are complimented for speaking good English or are repeatedly asked where they were born. The effect is to negate their U.S. heritage to convey that they are perpetual foreigners. When Blacks are told, “I don’t see color,” or “We are all human beings,” the effect is to negate their experience as racial and cultural beings (Helms, 1990).

**Statement of the Problem**

As a Black woman administrator who has served in the California Community Colleges system and the California State University system, I had a vested interest in knowing and understanding the impact of racial microaggressions on the career trajectories of Black women administrators within the academy. There is a growing body of research about racial microaggressions against students of color on college campuses (Nadal, 2008; Solórzano et al., 2000; Sue, Capodilupo, et al., 2007). However, very little
research has been conducted on Black women, and specifically, African Black women administrators within community colleges.

There are numerous barriers, including the glass ceiling and concrete ceiling effect, that impede their ascension to executive leadership position. In addition, racial microaggression has the ability to cause institutional attrition of Black women and long-term impact on the self-efficacy of Black women.

Focusing on the retention and transfer rates of Black students, research shows that the presence, involvement, and interaction with Black faculty, staff, and administrators plays a critical role in the success and outcomes for Black students. In the state of California, over 2.1 million students enrolled in a California community college in the 2017-2018 academic year (CCCCO, 2019), yet the 2-year graduation rate of African American students enrolled within the system hovers slightly over a 3% average.

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this constructivist grounded theory study is to examine how racial microaggressions influence the career experiences and trajectories of Black women who are senior and executive administrators at California community colleges. The targeted population consisted of Black women administrators from the Southern, Central, and Northern regions of California. The results yielded racial microaggression themes including prevalent lifelong experiences of: (a) racial microaggressions, (b) burden bearing, (c) resulting impact and influence, and (d) coping strategies related to racial microaggressions.

This study sought to understand, examine, and illuminate the experiences of Black women senior and executive administrators. If their experiences with racial
microaggressions are not published, discussed, and addressed, the perpetuation or racial aggressions against Black women administrators will contribute to the attrition of Black women at California community colleges and leave the role they play in providing support and motivation to Black students vacant within these institutions.

Directions for further research study and field implications of the experiences of racial microaggressions and coping strategies for African American women in higher education are discussed.

**Research Questions**

To fulfil the purpose of this constructivist grounded theory research study, I answered the following questions:

1. What are the salient experiences of Black women senior and executive administrators who experience racial microaggressions at California community colleges?
2. How do racial microaggressions influence the experiences and career trajectories of Black women senior and executive administrators at California community colleges?
3. What strategies are employed by Black women senior and executive administrators at California community colleges to overcome racial microaggressions and ensure career advancement and success?
4. How do support networks impact the successful retention of Black women confronted with racial microaggressions within the California Community Colleges system?
Significance of the Study

Current research demonstrates that microaggressions are detrimental to people of color. The implications of imposed microaggressions cause mental, emotional, and physical harm. The presence of microaggressions can create a toxic and volatile racial climate within the work environment, impede progress, and add additional stressors. The significance of this study avails itself in the need to reveal and disclose the impact of racial microaggressions as it pertains specifically to Black women within California community colleges and is transferrable to other institutions of higher learning.

Given the lack of empirical insight on the unique leadership experiences of Black women administrators, there are significant areas that are most important in critically analyzing, documenting, and bringing voice to their experiences (Gable, 2011). The experiences of racial microaggressions are crucial to understanding the unintentionally imposed barriers that Black women administrators must also navigate while leading within their respective institutions. Black women represent a great source of talent and leadership that is needed in the community college system to propel the institutions’ mission to best serve those within the community. The attrition of Black women within the academy is detrimental to the success of the college, community, state, and nation. The presence and pervasiveness of racial microaggressions can cause the recipients of these slights to choose other forms of employment or to leave the academy all together. Furthermore, this study serves as a resource for Black women in leadership to better understand and employ coping mechanisms to overcome the impediments of racial microaggressions as they progress in their roles in higher education.
Delimitations

The emphasis of this doctoral research study was on women who self-identify as African American/Black and who have served in senior or executive positions at California community colleges. The intent of this study was to focus on the impact and experiences of racial microaggressions throughout their career trajectories.

Limitations

All efforts were made to ensure the trustworthiness and transferability of the data that were collected and analyzed for this study. However, one limitation of this study is that it is exclusive to California community colleges and it did not include any representation for Black women from the state’s California State University (CSU) system or the University of California (UC) system. Although the emphasis for this study centered on racial microaggressions perpetuated by the dominant culture and other racial identities, experiences of intraracial microaggressions surfaced several times throughout the study and is a topic that should be explored in future studies relative to racial microaggressions and Black women. Furthermore, I have worked in the California higher education system for over 15 years. I earned a Bachelor of Arts degree in Spanish from a historically Black university (HBCU) and a Master of Arts degree in education with an emphasis in postsecondary student affairs. My graduate and undergraduate experiences differ in having attended both an HBCU and a predominantly White institution (PWI). My career journey as an administrator has been primarily in the areas of student affairs/services, providing leadership within various programs, departments, and services that assist socioeconomically disadvantaged, underrepresented students of color at both 2- and 4-year institutions. As a midlevel practitioner in the community college system, I
had to take note of personal biases throughout the research process to ensure my personal thoughts, ideas, or opinions did not interfere with the data provided.

**Definitions and Related Concepts**

*Administrator*: A person appointed to serve as an associate vice chancellor, associate vice president, vice president, president, or chancellor with managerial responsibilities of a college or a community college district.

*African American*: Citizens or residents of the United States who have at least partial sub-Saharan ancestry from Africa (Gable, 2011). Throughout this study, I use “Black” and “African American” interchangeably. I capitalize Black because “Blacks, like Asians, Latinos, and other ‘minorities,’ constitute a specific cultural group and, as such require denotation as a proper noun” (Crenshaw, 1989, p. 142).

*Ascription of intelligence*: Assigning a degree of intelligence to a person of color based on their race (Sue, Capodilupo, et al., 2007).

*Aversive racism*: The conflict between the Whites’ denial of personal prejudice and underlying unconscious negative feelings toward and beliefs about Blacks (Dovidio & Gaertner, 2004).

*Covert racism*: Racism that is underhanded and subtle but very insidious (Levchak, 2018).

*Executive administrator*: A leadership position consistent with the president or chancellor role of an institution; also refers to the Chief Executive Officer in higher education (Gable, 2011).

*Environmental microaggression*: Racial assaults, insults, and invalidations, which are manifested on systemic and environmental levels (Sue, Capodilupo, et al., 2007).
Implicit biases: Attitudes and stereotypes that we hold toward other people unconsciously (Levchak, 2018).

Intra-racial microaggression: Unintentional or unconscious microaggressions perpetuated by members of the same racial group.

Microaggression: The brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral, and environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative racial, gender, sexual orientation, and religious slights and insults to the target person or group (Sue, Capodilupo, et al., 2007).

Microassault: Explicit racial derogations characterized primarily by a violent verbal or nonverbal attack meant to hurt the intended victim through name calling, avoidant behavior, or purposeful discriminatory actions (Sue, Capodilupo, et al., 2007).

Microinsult: Behavioral/verbal remarks or comments that convey rudeness, insensitivity and demean a person’s racial heritage or identity (Sue, Capodilupo, et al., 2007).

Microinvalidation: Verbal comments or behaviors that exclude, negate, or nullify the psychological thoughts, feelings, or experiential reality of a person of color (Sue, Capodilupo, et al., 2007).

People of Color/Person of Color (POC): Individuals of non-European descent.

Overt racism: Blatant and direct racism consciously intended to cause harm to people of color.

Predominantly White Institution (PWI): A college or university with majority White students.
**Racism:** The mistreatment and harm that people of color experience throughout the social structure on the basis of their race (Levchak, 2018).

**Racial microaggression:** The everyday subtle and often automatic “putdowns” and insults directed toward Black Americans (Pierce, Carew, Pierce-Gonzalez, & Willis, 1977).

**Senior administrator:** A leadership position consistent with the vice president, provost, or vice chancellor role of an institution (Gable, 2011).

**Stereotype:** Unreliable generalizations about all members of a group that do not recognize individual differences within the group (Gable, 2011).

**Organization of the Study**

This chapter reviewed the background, statement of the problem, purpose of the study, significance of the study, research questions, delimitations, and limitations. Chapter 2 reviews existing literature. Chapter 3 outlines the method of research employed for the facilitation of this study. Chapter 4 presents the findings and results of the conducted research study, and Chapter 5 provides a discussion on the findings and results, including a summary of the study, implications for practice, and implications for future research.
CHAPTER 2—LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

In this chapter, an examination of extant literature was provided, outlining Black women in higher education, modern racism, microaggressions, and the conceptual theoretical framework that guided this research study, which includes critical race theory (CRT), Black feminist thought (intersectionality), and microaggression theory. Collectively, these four sections illustrate the need for further exploration of racial microaggressions and the impact of these experiences on the career trajectories of Black women. Emphasis has been placed on identifying the gaps in the literature for Black women senior and executive administrators at California community colleges.

Literature providing evidence of the experience of racial microaggressions and the impact on the career trajectory of Black women administrators within the California Community Colleges system is scant. There was limited literature that provided insight into the experiences of senior and executive Black women administrators. Current published literature only examines midlevel managers, corporate managers, mentoring of Black women, and the retention issues related to minority administrators of color in higher education (Harley, 2008; Holder, Jackson, & Ponterotto, 2015; Howe-Barksdale, 2007).

There is a need for additional research concerning Black women and their unique experiences within higher education. Black women in the academy differ in their experiences, backgrounds, appearances, educational levels, demographics, occupations, and beliefs. What connects them all is their struggle to be accepted and respected members of society, and their desire to have a voice that can be heard in a world with
many views (Collins, 2009). The occupational realities for Black women often involve experiences of marginalization (Guillory, 2001; Mosley, 1980), limited opportunities for mentoring (Collins, 2000), that combine to form restrictive and oppressing experiences for Black women at institutions of higher learning. As defined by Patitu and Hinton (2003), marginalization is any issue, situation, or circumstance that has placed individuals outside of the flow of power and influence within their institution. Isolation, a byproduct of marginalization, “may lead to greater feelings of loneliness, to the persistent awareness of ‘not fitting in,’ to always being on guard, and to the fatigue that comes from always having to be one’s own support system” (Daniel, 2000, p. 132).

Recently, there has been a substantial amount of literature and research on microaggressions experienced by students of color within PWIs. However, studies pertaining to Black female administrators at the associate vice chancellor, associate vice president, vice chancellor, vice president, president, or chancellor level remain dormant. Research on Black women in leadership describes the challenges and opportunities they confront in the field of education as they symbolically and materially challenge social injustice at the intersection of race and gender (Alston, 2005; Bloom & Erlandson, 2003). Additionally, attempts to uncover an understanding of Black women leaders and their plight are absent in the academy. There is a severe gap in the literature that specifically addresses the unique experiences of Black women administrators. The pervasiveness of inadvertently acceptable microaggressions toward Black women administrators may cement the concrete ceilings to their careers. White women refer to a glass ceiling to describe barriers to career success whereas Black women encounter a concrete ceiling,
whereby opportunities for career advancement are significantly reduced or nonexistent (Ray & Davis, 1988).

Black women in academia are doubly bound by discrimination that is related to both gender and race (Stanley, 2008; Turner, 2002). Black women in the academy are confronted with challenges and barriers that are due to a large extent to the social construction of race across time and contexts, and the pervasiveness and permanence of racism and sexism (Agosto & Karanjha, 2011). The challenges faced by individuals in administrative leadership roles within higher education settings are difficult. However, the difficulties and challenges of African American women in leadership roles in higher education are exacerbated by the duality of their racial and sexual identity, which entwines racial and gender based microaggressions that assault, insult, and invalidate Black women in the academy.

There were two significant themes that emerged from the review of the literature concerning the experiences of Black women administrators with racial microaggressions. The first theme relates to the manifestation of racial microaggressions in the form of microinsults, microassaults, and microinvalidations. The second significant theme sheds light on the impact of racial microaggressions. These themes will be further explored in the sections that follow.

**Modern Racism**

Recently, the concept of racial microaggressions has received national attention across the United States (Huber & Solórzano, 2014). To comprehend racial microaggression, one must understand its origins rooted in racism. Racism may be defined as any attitude, action, institutional structure, or social policy that subordinates a
person or groups because of their color (Jones, 1997; Ponterotto, Utsey, Lance, & Pederson, 2006). Racism is defined as a multifaceted ideology made up of beliefs in oppression and racial dominance that are created by the dominant group accepting individual behaviors, institutional policies, and societal policies that have an adverse effect on people of color (Harrell, 2000; Jones, 1997). Lorde's (1992) was the most concise, defining racism as the belief in “the inherent superiority of one race over all others and thereby the right to dominance" (p. 496). Racism can have detrimental effects on a person of color’s well-being, since it is a socially constructed idea that classifies people into categories in a society that is race-conscious and marginalizes people of color because of their race (Harrell, 2000; Jones, 1997).

As a racial minority, Black women can experience blatant racism in multiple forms. According to Jones (1997), the manifestation of racism can occur at three different levels: (a) individual, (b) institutional, and (c) cultural. Individual racism is best known to the American public as overt, conscious, and deliberate individual acts intended to harm, place at disadvantage, or discriminate against racial minorities (Sue, 2010). Institutional racism is any policy, practice, procedure, or structure in business, industry, government, courts, churches, municipalities, and schools by which decisions and actions are made that unfairly subordinate persons of color while allowing other groups to profit from the outcomes (Sue, 2010). Understanding institutionalized racism helps to acknowledge the context of collective manifestations of racism, which include disparities such as educational achievement, treatment in the criminal justice system, and many others (Harrell, 2000). According to Sue (2010), examples of this include discriminatory hiring and promotion practices that impact career ascension. Lastly, cultural racism is defined as
the individual and institutional expression of the superiority of one group’s cultural heritage (arts/crafts, history, traditions, language, and values) over another group’s, and the power to impose those standards upon other groups (Sue, 2004).

In modern day America, overt demonstration of racism has subsided over the decades. The old-fashioned forms of racism that characterized the segregated southern states diminished greatly in importance and seemed to have disappeared (Dovidio, Gaertner, Kawakami, & Hodson, 2002; Jones, 1997). Within its historical context, these forms of old-fashioned racism are blatant and visible (Dovidio & Gaertner, 2000). Bonilla-Silva (2006) explores modern racism as a racialized social system that is part of a larger social system. Contemporary racism is viewed as an expression of “original sin”—as a remnant of past historical racial situations (Bonilla-Silva, 2006). He further asserts that racialized social systems are societies that allocate differential economic, political, social, and even psychological rewards to groups along racial lines; lines that are socially constructed. Additionally, many race scholars believe that racism has not disappeared, but has: (a) morphed into a highly disguised, invisible, and subtle form that lies outside the level of conscious awareness; (b) hides in the invisible assumptions and beliefs of individuals; and (c) is embedded in the policies and structures of our institutions (Sue, 2010).

Researchers and scholars do not deny that major advances in positive race relations have occurred because of the legal, political, and social forces against racism, but they cite an increasing body of evidence suggesting that prejudice is alive and well under the labels of “modern racism,” “symbolic racism,” “aversive racism,” and “racial microaggressions” (Sue, 2010, p. 143). As defined by Levchak (2018), modern racism is
a mutation of flagrant racism that manifests through a variety of covert racist attitudes and actions. The term symbolic racism references the ideology that racism has taken on a new form where overt prejudice is supplanted by subtle negative attitudes derived from the socialization of negative affect toward Black Americans (Sears, 1988; Sears, Sidanius, & Bobo, 2000). Dovidio and Gaertner (2004) describe aversive racism as the conflict between Whites’ denial of personal prejudice and underlying unconscious negative feelings toward and beliefs about Blacks. Finally, Sue, Capodilupo, et al. (2007) defines racial microaggressions as:

- brief and common place daily verbal, behavioral, or environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicates hostile, derogatory, or negative racial slights and insults toward people of color. Perpetuators of microaggressions are often unaware that they engaged in such communications when they interact with racial/ethnic minorities. (p. 271)

The empirical literature today implies that covert racism has deteriorated; however, it has been reconfigured and has a different presentation of itself. The body of literature on the morphing of racism suggests that while old-fashioned racism has declined significantly, it has manufactured a new face; it is more covert, has become implicit, and is not under conscious control (Dovidio et al., 2002; Jones, 1997).

**Racial Microaggressions**

The term racial microaggressions was coined by Chester Pierce in the 1970s to refer to the everyday subtle and often automatic putdowns and insults directed toward Black Americans (Pierce, 1970; Pierce et al., 1977). As defined by Torino, Rivera, Capodilupo, Nadal, and Sue (2019), “Microaggressions are derogatory slights or insults
directed at a target person or persons who are members of an oppressed group. Microaggressions communicate bias and can be delivered implicitly or explicitly” (p. 3).

Torino et al. (2019) assert that microaggressions may be expressed in the form of implicit bias where the individual is unaware of the biased communication, or via explicit bias where the person is aware that they are engaging in discriminatory actions. As an example, mistaking a Black person for a service worker is a microaggression that mistakenly views African Americans as less competent or capable (Torino et al., 2019).

Microaggression theorists conceptualize three major classifications of microaggressions: (a) microassaults, (b) microinsults, and (c) microinvalidations (Sue, 2010). Sue, Capodilupo, et al. (2007) originally conceptualized these three manifestations of microaggressions for people of color, which are further elaborated in this chapter.

**Microassault**

The term microassault refers to a blatant verbal, nonverbal, or environmental attack intended to convey discriminatory and biased sentiments (Torino et al., 2019). Nadal (2008) highlights that microassaults are similar to old-fashioned racism, where people behave and speak in blatantly racist ways (e.g., the use of a racial slur to attack someone or striking a person with the intent to harm them because of their race). Microassaults are in many respects easier to deal with than those that are unintentional and outside the perpetuators’ level of awareness (Torino et al., 2019).

**Microinsult**

Microinsults are unintentional behaviors or verbal comments that convey rudeness or insensitivity or demean a person’s race or heritage/identity, gender identity, religion, ability, or sexual orientation identity (Torino et al., 2019). Nadal (2008) gives
the example of a microinsult, which can include a student of color being watched on campus as if they are criminal, a thief, or dangerous. Another example is when an individual expresses surprise that a person of color, and particularly a young person of color, holds a position of power or has a prestigious occupation, such as a professor, medical doctor, lawyer, or director of a program (Levchak, 2018). Additionally, when a person assumes the Black woman standing in an academic office is a secretary and not a professor, the underlying message is that Black women belong in service roles and are not intellectually capable of holding an advanced degree (Torino et al., 2019).

**Microinvalidation**

Microinvalidations “are statements and behaviors that negate or nullify a person of color’s experiences or realities” (Nadal, 2008, p. 22). Examples of microinvalidations include a person of color being told that they are “too sensitive about race” (Nadal, 2008, p. 23) or a person tells a person of color that they “don’t see race” (p. 23). Nadal (2008) expresses that proclamations such as these are harmful because the perpetrator ignores the target’s racial experiences and reality, and in essence, the perpetrator denies the reality that they are capable of perpetuating racism.

Microinvalidations also occur when people of color have their ideas, opinions, and feelings ignored, when they are left out of conversations, or when they are mistaken for someone because they share the same racial or ethnic background (Levchak, 2018). A common microinvalidation is when individuals claim that they do not see religion or color but instead see only the human being. Common statements such as “there is only one race: the human race” negate the lived experience of religious and ethnic minorities in the United States (Torino et al., 2019).
Gender Microaggressions

Gender is a socially constructed concept in which people are classified on the basis of their birth sex, phenotype, and other characteristics (Nadal, 2018). In our society, men have traditionally held the highest positions of authority based on their sexual classification. Throughout the history of the United States (and in most parts of the world), men have more power and privilege than do women, which results in sexism on systemic, institutional, and individual levels (Nadal, 2018). The subtle manifestation of gender microaggression toward women based on their sex creates a phenomenon of sexism. As articulated by Swim and Cohen (1997), covert sexism is less direct, less revealed, and often less conscious, in that many men believe themselves to be liberal but still view women as an inferior gender (Nadal, 2018). As exemplified by Nadal (2018), most men believe in women’s ability to enter any career fields, yet they might still view female police officers as less strong, female physicians or scientists as less smart, and female politicians as having less effective leadership capabilities. Similarly, the leadership abilities of women who are Black are at times doubted and may be assumed to be subpar due to their gender identification. As asserted in the study by Capodilupo et al. (2010), the assumptions of inferiority are instances in which women are treated or perceived as intellectually or physically inferior.

Like racism, sexism can operate at an overt conscious level or at a covert and less conscious one (Fiske, 1993). These subtle forms of sexism are similar to aversive racism in that they come from well-intentioned men who believe in gender equality and would never deliberately discriminate against women (Sue, 2010). Blatant, unfair, and unequal treatment toward women can be manifested in sexual harassment, physical abuse;
discriminatory hiring practices, or in women being subjected to a hostile, predominantly male work environment (Sue, 2010).

In the world of work, for example, many women described a pattern of being overlooked, disrespected, and dismissed by their male colleagues (Sue, 2010). Sue (2010) cites the following example:

During team meetings in which a female employee may contribute an idea, the male CEO may not respond to which were seemingly not here the idea. However, when a male coworker makes the identical statement, he may be recognized and praised by the executive and fellow colleagues. (p. 167)

**Stereotypes**

Stereotypes are a form of racism used to dehumanize individuals or groups. Black women find themselves enduring forms of oppression due to stereotypes. They find themselves withstanding negative attitudes from others toward them. Stereotypes attributed to Black women view them as being inferior to men. Additionally, stereotypes contribute to Black women being relegated to lesser or undesirable roles within work environments (Zastrow, 2004). Along with the intersection of race and gender, Black women are also burdened with stereotypes of the intersectionality of their identity, which impedes professional ascension. African American women in leadership positions experience a profusion of race and gender stereotypes (Davis & Maldonado, 2015). Although they may be viewed as competent, Black women may also be stereotyped as hostile and aggressive, which are not qualities that will lead them to the “executive suite” (Holder et al., 2015). The “maid syndrome” becomes more evident when African
American women remain at PWIs, where many abuses constantly beset their sensi
tiveness (McKay, 1997).

In addition to caregiving Mammies, African American women are often portrayed as sexually irresponsible, promiscuous Jezebels, and as combative Sapphires (Collins, 2000; Jewell, 1993). Modern stereotypes, such as the superwoman or crazy woman with an attitude, also create barriers for Black women in the workplace (Reynolds-Dobbs, Thomas, & Harrison, 2008).

The Mammy image, which originated in the South after slavery, is one of the most pervasive images of Black women (West, 2012). Christian (1980) described her as: black in color as well as race and fat with enormous breast that are full enough to nourish all the children in the world; her head is perpetually covered with her trademark kerchief to hide the kinky hair that marks her as ugly. Tied to her physical characteristics are her personality traits: she is strong, for she certainly has enough girth, but this strength is used in the service to her white master and as a way of keeping her male counterpart in check; she is kind and loyal, for she is a mother; she is sexless. (pp. 12-13)

Mammy has not retired. We can encounter her in our daily life as the smiling Aunt Jemima, an icon that has appeared on breakfast products for more than a century. The domestication of the Mammy extends beyond household walls and into the professional lives of Black women as well. Professional status and education cannot protect Black women from the Mammy image (West, 2012). Oprah Winfrey, a renowned and established television mogul, entrepreneur, and philanthropist is also plagued as being the “mother to America” (West, 2012, p. 294).
During the era of slavery in the United States, Africans arrived to the shores of the new world. Black men and women alike were placed on display for auction to be sold and inevitably provide free labor in service to the economy and their respective slave masters. This laid the foundation for the introduction of the Jezebel stereotype image of Black women to be viewed undignified sexual exhibits, as described by West (2012):

Upon arrival, bondwomen were placed on the auction block, stripped naked, and examined to determine their reproductive capacity. Once sold, they were coerced, bribed, induced, seduced, ordered, and of course, violently forced to have sexual relations with slaveholders, their sons, male relatives and overseers. (p. 294)

The Jezebel stereotype, which branded Black women as sexually promiscuous and immoral, was used to rationalize sexual atrocities (West, 2012). The modern day “Jezebel” has been re-imaged from the slave auction blocks for the purpose of display to the publicized and advertised “hoochie,” “freak,” “hoodat,” “thot,” or “chickenhead” on televisions, magazines, and in social media (West, 2012, p. 294).

As a final stereotype, Black women are portrayed as being the bitter, nagging, hostile, and angry “Sapphire.” They are characterized as strong, masculinized workhorses who labored with Black men in the fields or as aggressive women who drove their children and partners away with their overbearing natures (West, 2012). The image of the hostile, nagging Black woman was personified by the character Sapphire on the 1940s and 1950s Amos ‘n’ Andy radio and television shows. After years of complaints, the show was taken off the broadcast schedule in 1953 (Jewell, 1993). However, traces of this angry sister with an “attitude” can still be seen on reality television shows such and movies, such as Omarosa on Donald Trump’s The Apprentice, and other reality shows.
and movies (Millner, Burt-Murray, & Miller, 2004). The Sapphire image within a professional context does not serve the image of the Black woman well in controversial discussions or debate, even when posed in a calm and professional manner.

The presence of past and modern day stereotypes creates relational and professional barriers that impact the progress and persistence of Black women in their work environments. The existence of race-based stereotypes in the workplace can adversely impact Black women’s careers and relationships with colleagues at work (Reynolds-Dobbs et al., 2008). Black women also experience the perception of being intellectually inferior, which can undermine their credibility (Holder et al., 2015). The assumption of inferior intellect, including the underestimation of personal ability that involves stereotypes and negative perceptions about one’s capacity to succeed in academia, is also devastating to the progress of Black women in the academy. Particularly, this includes the sense of having to constantly prove one’s ability (Torres, Driscoll, & Burrow, 2010). Most threatening to the individual Black woman is the notion that these negative stereotypes also impact the health and well-being of Black women. Researchers have documented a link between the internalization of negative stereotypes and chronic health problems, psychological distress, and low self-esteem (Thomas, Speight, & Witherspoon, 2004).

**Manifestation of Microaggressions**

In the qualitative study on the experiences of executive Black women by Holder et al. (2015), the authors contend that Black women experienced five types of microaggressions: (a) environmental, (b) stereotypes, (c) universality, (d) invisibility, and (e) exclusion of Black women. First, environmental, microaggressions were reflected in
the underrepresentation of Black women in an organization that employed nearly 1000 people, yet only a few Black women were in senior management positions. Second, stereotypes of Black women were microaggressions based on the stereotype of Black women as aggressive employees whose credentials were consistently challenged. Third, the universal experience comprised microaggressions that reduced Black women to employees who know “all” other Black people within the organization or have similar experience of the “typical” Black person. Fourth, they highlighted the invisibility of Black women, when speaking during meetings Black women received unexpected body language from coworkers (e.g., head facing down and writing) or simply little to no eye contact. Finally, exclusion was revealed when Black women were not invited to social gatherings where appointments and opportunities were discussed, leading to fewer ways for them to move up within the organization.

Within the workplace, microaggressions can occur in peer-to-peer or superior-to-subordinate relationships (Sue, Lin, & Rivera, 2009). When microaggressions are delivered by supervisors or superiors, minority employees describe lower life and job satisfaction, organizational commitment, morale, motivation, self-esteem, and work and family life satisfaction (Sue, 2010). Qualitative research has shown that supervisors can be a primary source of microaggressions in academia (Cartwright, Washington, & McConnell, 2009). Receiving recognition from supervisors is an important aspect of work as it highlights the contributions of workers within an organization (Kim, Nguyen, & Block, 2019). Recognition should be consistently provided to employees with in the workplace (Kim et al., 2019). In the work of Cartwright et al. (2009), one African American faculty member recalled that the Dean sent out recognition emails whenever
awards were given or faculty articles were published. She anticipated the Dean’s email when achieving these milestones, but recalled, “She sent out everyone else’s email, but forgot to send mine out” (Cartwright et al., 2009, p. 175). Inconsistent recognition by supervisors may lead employees to feel that they have been snubbed, perceived as unimportant, or treated as invisible at work (Kim et al., 2019).

In the workplace, people must also contend with microaggressions from those who are in junior roles (Kim et al., 2019). Within academia, White students tend to address Black female faculty members as “Miss” rather than “Doctor” (Cartwright et al., 2009). Snubs by students can also take the form of course evaluation feedback (Kim et al., 2019). Peer-to-peer microaggressions occur between individuals who occupy equal status relationships in the organizational chart, but do not necessarily experience an equal amount of power and influence (Sue, 2010). Coworkers and colleagues who are of a similar rank within the organization have also been demonstrated to be a source of microaggressions (Kim et al., 2019). As an example, Cartwright et al. (2009) shared that when one faculty of color wanted to teach other courses beyond the topic of diversity, her peers asked whether she was stepping outside around of expertise.

**Responding to Racial Microaggressions**

When a person experiences a microaggression, he or she can respond in several ways (Tynes, Lozada, Smith, & Stewart, 2019). The responses that are elicited are proximal, occurring immediately in the moment, while other responses are more distal, occurring sometime after the microaggression has occurred (Holder et al., 2015). Even when the microaggression is obvious, the individual may experience confusion and uncertainty about how best to respond (Sue, 2010). A typical proximal, or immediate,
respond to a microaggression involves the affective and cognitive labor that is exercised by an individual to make sense of the microaggression (Steinfeldt, Hyman, & Steinfeldt, 2019). Interrupting microaggressive behavior usually becomes the responsibility of the target, call victim, or concerned bystander (Levchak, 2018). Dealing with microaggressions can take up the target cognitive and emotional resources because he or she must first stop to think and determine if the slight is, in fact, a microaggression (David, Petalio, & Crouch, 2019). Holder et al. (2015) illuminates the mental thought process that takes place when individuals navigate the aftermath of workplace microaggression. This process is referred to as hypothesis testing through which the target tries to determine the intent and meaning behind the microaggression (Holder et al., 2015). Experiencing a microaggression entails navigating not only how to interpret the slides, but also how to deal with whether to respond and how that may be perceived by others (Torino et al., 2019).

**Impact of Racial Microaggressions**

The symptomatic impacts of microaggressions are numerous. Root (2003) identified 10 categories representing the most common symptoms likely to manifest in employees who experience chronic microaggressions: (a) anxiety, (b) paranoia, (c) depression, (d) sleep difficulties, (e) lack of confidence, (f) worthlessness, (g) intrusive cognitions, (h) helplessness, (i) loss of drive, and (j) false positives (persons overgeneralizing negative experiences with others due to persistent feelings of harassment). The invasive hostility of microaggressions causes damage toward Black women and to the academy as the result of the symptomatic impact of racial microaggressions leads to the attrition of Black women from the academy. Hostile work
environments can impede their persistence in academia (Aguirre, 2000; Dowdy, 2008; Turner & Meyers, 2000). The structured racism leads to the steady dismemberment of Black faculty and administrators to the body of the academy. Some scholars have blamed structural racism, inherent in many college and university tenure systems, for the “thinning” (Lee & Leonard, 2001, p. 168) of Black faculty in academic positions. Systemic changes (e.g., policies, structures, and practices) in institutions of higher education need to consider the challenges that Black women continue to face in the academy, act against their dehumanization, and celebrate their contributions (Agosto & Karanxha, 2011). In an increasing competitive and multicultural environment, organizations cannot afford to squander their human resources. The following sections will specifically highlight the impact of microaggressions in terms of the impact on the careers, health, and self-efficacy of Black women and the impact on institutions as it pertains to the care of Black women and their potential attrition from the academy.

**Career.** Black women are intersected by the duality of their identity. As such, they can, at times, identify a more dominant factor that contributes to their professional hardship. With this ability to distinguish between the two identities, Parker and Ogilvie (1996) assert that African American women report that racism, rather than sexism, is the greatest barrier to opportunities in dominant culture organizations. Although Black women share the gender identity of White women, the perceived barriers and career impediments differ. African Americans report having to constantly prove their ability and observe the surprise of managers and colleagues who may have had initial assumptions about their ability and their competence (Sue et al., 2009; Torres et al., 2010).
Health. Far from being benign and insignificant, research indicates microaggressions take a heavy psychological and physical toll on targets (Torino et al., 2019). Microaggressions are constant and continuing experiences of marginalized groups in our society; they assail the self-esteem of recipients, produce anger and frustration, deplete psychic energy, lower feelings of subjective well-being and worthiness, produce physical health problems, shorten life expectancy, and deny minority populations equal access to opportunity in education, employment, and healthcare (Sue, 2010). Sue (2010) states when a marginalized group members encounter microaggressive stressors, they cause negative impacts, which can be: (a) biological: there may be direct physiological reactions (blood pressure, heart rate, etc.) or changes in the immune system; (b) cognitive: it may place in motion a cognitive appraisal involving thoughts and beliefs about the meaning of the stressor; (c) emotional: anger, rage, anxiety, depression, or hopelessness may dominate the person’s immediate life circumstance; and (d) behavioral: the coping strategies or behavioral reactions used by the individual may either enhance adjustments or make the situation worse.

The psychological and physical impact of racial microaggressions on the health and well-being of Black women is significant. Being exposed to the daily assault of racial microaggressions has major psychological implications and consequences (Holder et al., 2015). Increased levels of stress are an added burden that is inflicted upon the victim of microaggressions, which leads to other outcomes such as depression and the triggering of various traumas. Given that racial microaggressions contribute to perceived stress, African Americans have the added load of managing these race-related events, which ultimately puts them at greater risk for experiencing depressive symptoms (Torres et al.,
Microaggressions can trigger intrusive memories of traumatic racially related incidents (Hall & Fields, 2015). The impact of the slights of racial microaggressions imposes a greater level of psychological damage than blatant and clearly articulated forms of discrimination. It has been suggested that these everyday disparaging messages, which are often ambiguous, carry more severe psychological consequences than overt forms of discrimination (Solórzano et al., 2000). Transactional stress and coping models posit that race-related stressors, including racial microaggressions, are likely to increase perceptions of general stress, which contributes to mental health problems (Berry & Mizelle, 2006; Clark, Anderson, Clark, & Williams, 1999).

Racial microaggressions have an impact that is both quantitatively and qualitatively different. For targets, microaggressions are continual, never ending, and cumulative in nature. Marginalized group members experience them from the time they awake until they go to sleep, and they experience them from the moment of birth until they die. As a result, people of color are under constant race-related stress that requires ongoing vigilance and psychological arousal (Owen, Tao, & Drinane, 2019). Too often, racism and its consequences are ignored or downplayed, even though experiencing racism can be traumatic for people of color (Levchak, 2018). According to Nadal (2018), there are four psychological dilemmas that make microaggressions difficult to discuss or address. First, the clash of realities describes the conflict that arises when people interpret situations differently. Although perpetuators of microaggressions presume that their behaviors are innocuous or well intentioned, targets of microaggressions perceive perpetuators’ behaviors as biased or malicious (Nadal, 2018). The second dilemma, invisibility of unintentional bias, refers to the idea that people are socialized with
dominate group norms and beliefs that result in implicit bias toward various marginalized groups (Nadal, 2018). The third, perceived minimal term microaggression, refers to the false notion that the impact of microaggressions is minimal and such experiences do not cause much grief or damage in peoples’ lives (Nadal, 2018). Finally, the fourth psychological dilemma, the catch-22 of responding to microaggressions, involves the difficulty in addressing microaggressions, especially given the possible consequences (Nadal, 2018).

Sue, Capodilupo, Nadal, Torino, and Anderson (2008) conducted a qualitative study of 13 Black Americans divided into two focus groups. The students were graduate students or worked in higher education on a college campus. As a result of their studies, the researchers were very emphatic when they stated:

Microaggressions have a harmful and lasting psychological impact that may endure for days, weeks, months, and even years. Participants reported feelings of anger, frustration, doubt, guilt, or sadness when they experience microaggressions and noted further that the emotional turmoil stayed with them as they tried to make sense of each incident. (p. 183)

Data indicate that the cumulative experience of being a victim of microaggressions predicts negative mental health, specifically negative affect and depression (Mazzula & Campon, 2019).

The physical impact of racial microaggression is evident in the life expectancy for both Black women and men. According to a study by Clark et al. (1999), Black people have the lowest life expectancy (men are lowest) compared with other people of color, and highest rates of infant mortality (Clark et al., 1999; Gravelee, 2009; Hardy, 2007;
Smedley & Smedley, 2005). When Black women are in their 20s to 30s, their infant mortality worsens because they have already sustained significant stress. Furthermore, disparities in mental and physical health risks range from cancer to diabetes (Hall & Field, 2015).

**Isolation.** Alongside Black women administrators in higher education, Black faculty are also confronted by the impact of racial microaggressions in which the results are the voluntary and involuntary self-isolation of Blacks in the academy or divisive separation that create segregated barriers that are facilitated by the dominant communities within the academy. Social isolation emerges as a frequently reported experience, with Black faculty members describing the “cold shoulder” treatment, loneliness, and feelings of betrayal within institutions of higher education where they are employed (Burden, Harrison, & Hodge, 2005). The study’s findings reinforced that African American women faced exclusion from informal social networks and did not have card-carrying memberships to the “good old boys” club (Davis & Maldonado, 2015, p. 57). Further adding to support the isolation of Blacks within the academy is the assumption that Blacks, both men and women, are displaced and do not “belong” within these institutions. In essence, African Americans are not seen as native in the academy, and Black bodies are imagined politically, historically, and conceptually circumscribed as being out of place (Collins, 1986). Their existence within the academy is legitimatized by legal mandates. Frequently, African Americans are still not seen as talented and competent faculty, but as “Black” faculty—a segregated distinction with certain references to special hires and affirmative action quotas (Harley, 2008).
Persistence. The notion that one is intellectually inferior or must prove their existence in the academy causes pressure for Blacks within academia to intensify their work efforts to validate their roles. Black professors often believe that they need to work harder to be seen by their colleagues as legitimate scholars and accomplished researchers (Constantine, Smith, Redington, & Owens, 2008). Turner, Myers, and Creswell (1999) assert:

The ability to overcome barriers and challenges associated with being a Black woman administrator in the academy can lead to dismay and the loss of the contribution of potential leaders due to dissatisfaction and lack of encouragement. African American female administrators encounter significant barriers within academia that discourage them from becoming productive and satisfied members. (p. 28)

Sue (2010) has suggested that microinvalidations may represent the most insidious form of microaggression, both because they undercut rights and opportunities that may be of vital importance to stigmatized groups, and because they negate the significance of identity in the lives of marginalized individuals (Nadal, 2018; Sue, 2010).

Institutional attrition. The inevitable result of the impact of racial microaggressions toward Black women within the academy is the establishment of a sustained hostile work environment, which stifles their growth and hinders their contributions. Hostile work environments in which Black women work can impede their persistence in academia (Aguirre, 2000; Dowdy, 2008; Turner & Meyers, 2000). Microaggressions lower the retention of students, staff, and faculty (Turner, Gonzales, & Wood, 2008). Microaggressions reinforce and support racial oppression, while
suppressing the brilliance, creativity, and vision of people of color that would otherwise benefit our world (Levchak, 2018).

Research indicates that microaggressions reduce work productivity and impair employee performance (Dovidio, 2001; Hunter, 2011). Bryant-Davis (2019) asserts that microaggressions experienced in workplace settings include lack of representation of one’s own, invisibility, invalidation of one’s individual experience, and exclusion from social events. The authors also contend that collectively, these types of microaggressions can lead to high rates of depression, isolation, and absenteeism in the workplace. Perceptions of worker attitudes and behavior by supervisors can lead to reprimanding and negative performance plan evaluations. Moreover, microaggressions can lead to turnover and dismissal (Bryant-Davis, 2019).

Equitable and fair expectations should take place to level the playing field for Black women in higher education to avoid excessive workloads that place added demands on the individual and further equate their roles and responsibilities to those of domestic workers. Black women tend to be overburdened and underappreciated in PWIs of higher education, and therefore play out their various roles above the standards while balancing multiple roles. Harley (2008) metaphorically describes Black women scholars as maids of academe, which structures their teaching as childcare activities, research and scholarship as field work, and service as housework, cooking, and other duties. Interacting in an environment that is not culturally diverse, as is the experience of many ethnic minorities in academia, significantly limits the availability of social supports, which have been thought to be a key resource in ameliorating psychological distress (Utsey, Giesbrecht, Hook, & Standard, 2008). Much of the existing literature pertaining
to the attrition of Blacks from higher education relevant to its faculty however can imply a similar experience of Black administrators inclusive of Black women in higher education positions. Some scholars have blamed structural racism, inherent in many college and university tenure systems for the “thinning” (Lee & Leonard, 2001) of Black faculty in academic positions. Since women are not a majority of talent available for leadership, reducing the obstacles for African American women can also reduce the amount of attrition in organizations (Davis & Maldonado, 2015).

**Theoretical Framework**

The experiences of Black senior and executive administrators are unique, and differ from the experiences of men and women of the dominant culture. Finding and applying theoretical constructs that are appropriate for explaining and understanding the experiences of African American women can be challenging (Howard-Hamilton, 2003). Furthermore, it is important to understand why the experiences of African American women are different from those of other women, and that the experiences of African American men are steeped in the historical progression and ideology of Black people in the United States (Howard-Hamilton, 2003). For these reasons, I used the concepts of CRT, Black feminist thought, and microaggression theory. Selecting appropriate theories for understanding the needs of African American women should be based on their cultural, personal, and social context, which clearly differs significantly from those of men and women who have not experienced racial and gender oppression (Howard-Hamilton, 2003). Both CRT and Black feminist thought address the intersection of the dual identities of Black women. Theoretical frameworks that offer promise for understanding the intersecting identities of African American women and explaining
ways in which their needs can be addressed effectively are Black feminist thought and critical race theory (Howard-Hamilton, 2003).

Selecting appropriate theories for understanding the needs of African American women should be based on their cultural, personal, and social context, which clearly differ significantly from those of men and women who have not experienced racial and gender bias (Howard-Hamilton, 2003). Critical race theory and Black feminist thought were selected to shed light on the unique experiences of Black women senior and executive administrators in relation to racial microaggressions and their influence in the career experiences of Black women.

Critical Race Theory

The CRT movement is a collection of activists and scholars engaged in studying and transforming the relationship among race, racism, and power (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). According to Delgado and Stefancic (2017), CRT sprang up in the 1970s as a number of lawyers, activists, and legal scholars across the country realized, that the heady advances of the civil rights era of the 1960s had stalled and, in many respects, were being rolled back. Historically, CRT began to formulate a discourse that focused on issues of race and racism in the law in the same way that education scholars began to formulate a critique of race and racism in education (Crenshaw, 2002; Tate, 1997). Matsuda (1991) views CRT as

the work of progressive legal scholars of color who are attempting to develop a jurisprudence that accounts for the role of racism in American law and that work toward the elimination of racism as part of a larger goal of eliminating all forms of subordination. (p. 1331)
The CRT framework for education is different from other CRT frameworks because it simultaneously attempts to foreground race and racism in the research and challenge the traditional paradigms, methods, texts, and separate discourse on race, gender, and class by showing how these social constructs intersect to impact on communities of color (Solórzano et al., 2000). As applied to education, the CRT model consists of five tenants focusing on: (a) the centrality of race and racism and their intersectionality with other forms of subordination, (b) the challenge to dominant ideology, (c) the commitment to social justice, (d) the centrality of experiential knowledge, and (e) the transdisciplinary perspective (Solórzano, 1997, 1998; Solórzano et al., 2000).

Furthermore, CRT challenges the traditional claims that educational institutions make toward objectivity, meritocracy, colorblindness, race neutrality, and equal opportunity (Solórzano et al., 2000). Critical race scholars argue that these traditional claims act as a camouflage for the self-interests, power, and privilege of dominating groups in U.S. society (Solórzano, 1997).

As applicable to Black women administrators, renowned critical race theorist Crenshaw acknowledges the interaction of race and racism as they intersect with gender. As Crenshaw (1989, 1993) states, although race and racism are at the center of critical race analysis, we also view them at their intersection with other forms of subordination such as gender and class discrimination. This is significant due to the intersecting identity of Black female administrators leading within California community colleges. The experience of oppression such as racism or sexism has important aspects for developing a CRT analytical standpoint (Ladson-Billings, 1998). Critical race theory places emphasis
on marginality and attempts to tour toward advantageous perspectives to build a concrete advocacy on behalf of those oppressed by race and other factors to include gender, economics, and class (Bell, 1995). Additionally, CRT advances a strategy to the foreground, accounts for the role of race and racism in education, and works toward the elimination of racism as part of the larger goal of opposing or eliminating other forms of subordination based on gender, class, sexual orientation, language, and national origin (Solórzano et al., 2000).

Critical race theory recognizes that the experiential knowledge of people of color as legitimate, appropriate, and critical to understanding, analyzing, and teaching about race subordination (Solórzano et al., 2000). Critical race theory acknowledges the lived experiences of people of color through various methods including storytelling, family histories, biographies, scenarios, parables, cuentos, testimonios, chronicles, and narratives (Bell, 1987; Delgado, 1995). Stories by people of color can catalyze the necessary cognitive conflict to jar dysconscious racism (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Critical race theory scholars use parables, chronicles, stories, counterstories, poetry, fiction and revisionist histories to illustrate the false necessity and irony (Ladson-Billings, 1998). Counter storytelling is a means of challenging the beliefs of the majority and giving marginalized groups an opportunity to communicate their experiences in their own words (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Tate, 1997). The voice component of CRT provides a way to communicate the experience and realities of people of color (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1998). In CRT, writing is characterized by frequent use of the first person, storytelling narrative, and the unapologetic use of creativity (Bell, 1995).
**Black Feminist Thought**

Black feminist thought has been used in multiple studies involving Black women in roles of education and institutional leadership, and can be used to frame the lived experiences of Black women administrators within the California Community Colleges system. First authored by Patricia Hill Collins (1986) to differentiate traditional feminist theory from the experiences of women of color who also contend with racism (hooks, 1989), Black feminist thought is based on the ideology of African American women’s use of marginality to reflect and incorporate the facets of self-definition and self-valuation to be effective change agents in society who can defy oppression (Collins, 1986; D. King, 1988). This theory provides a voice and rationale of African American women’s views of the world and how women overcome oppression and stereotypes.

Black feminist thought is appropriate for this study as it intends to bring voice to the lived and common experiences of Black female administrators. Because of their limited access, African American women’s stories are often unknown and untold, which, in turn, has adversely impacted their ability to completely understand their place, value, and contributions within a domestic and global context (Collins, 2009).

Black feminist thought acknowledges the intersections and impacts of race, gender, class, and politics on the lives of African American women (Collins, 2000). According to Collins (2002), at the core of Black feminist thought is the concept of standpoint, which suggests that the inherited struggle against racism and sexism is a common bond among African American women. Collins (2000) asserts that while all African Americans experience racism, they do not experience or respond to racism in the same way due to the diversity in class, age, religion, and sexual orientation. To better
understand and conceptualize the experiences of Black women administrators as it applies to intersecting identity, Howard-Hamilton (2003) summarizes Collins (2002) three themes in Black feminist thought:

First, the framework is shaped and produced by the experiences [B]lack women have encountered in their lives, even though others have documented their stories. Second, although the stories and experiences of each woman are unique, there are intersections of experiences between and among [B]lack women. Third, although commonalities do exist among [B]lack women, the diversity of class, religion, age, and sexual orientation of [B]lack women as a group are multiple contexts from which their experiences can be revealed and understood. (p. 21)

Applied to California community colleges, Black feminist thought is important in assisting Black women administrators to effectively deal with the wide array of microaggressive indignities such as racist attitudes and behaviors that are encountered in their daily campus and district experiences (Howard-Hamilton, 2003).

**Intersectionality.** Legal scholar and critical race theorist Kimberlee Crenshaw is credited with originating the term intersectionality (Cole, 2009). From the very beginning, intersectionality was introduced as intersection in the American sense of the word to denote ways in which people of color cross gender (Crenshaw, 1989). Intersectionality suggests that multiple identities intersect to create a different identity, excluding the singular identity, and acknowledging the created compound identity as the whole. The contributing elements of the compound are various and may include gender, race, social class, ethnicity, nationality, sexual orientation, religion, age, mental disability, physical disability mental illness and physical illness. To visualize the
intersectionality of Black women and their multifaceted vulnerability when crossing race, gender, ethnicity and other elements, one can imagine an accident happens in an intersection, it can be caused by cars traveling from any number of directions and, sometimes, from all of them. Similarly, if a Black woman is harmed because she is in the intersection, her injury could result from sex discrimination or race discrimination (Crenshaw, 1989).

According to hooks (1981, 1989), Black women are in an unusual position in society. Black women are bound by a dual identity that intersects and marginalizes their very existence to a point of displacement within society in a unique way unlike that of any other marginalized or minoritized population. Research on Black women in leadership describes the challenges and opportunities they confront in the field of education as they symbolically and materially challenge social injustice at the intersection of race and gender (Alston, 2005; Bloom & Erlandson, 2003). Based on the duality of the identity and intersectional junctures, Black women within higher education are often tasked to perform multiple duties within an institution and are required to perform at higher levels of performance. Moreover, research on African American women as leaders is often subsumed within feminist literature (Stanley, 2008), and does not contribute to the understanding, or lack of understanding, of the intersectionality of race and gender that African American women face in their leadership development (Davis & Maldonado, 2015).

The combination of race and gender for African American women still hinders the potential for their ascension to senior-level positions (Davis & Maldonado, 2015). With the intersections of their identities marginalized by race and gender, Black women risk
experiencing deceleration in their career trajectories (Holder et al., 2015). The leadership capabilities of Black women abound within their lived experiences of their intersectional identities that provide them with bicultural adaptive skills and abilities. Black women, by virtue of their biculturalism in being members of two identity groups, cultivate sophisticated adaptive skills that have been proven to be a critical component of effective leadership (McGlowan-Fellows & Thomas, 2004). They bring rich perspectives that are vital to succeeding in complex global economic systems.

Race and gender are interlocking social constructs and are not separated entities that intersect, but are completely bound to one another, incapable of being separated (Collins, 2000). African American women are subject to “gendered racism” (Harley, 2008). The dual and inseparable identity creates a breeding ground where microaggressive attacks abound for these women in multiplicity and impact the leadership development of Black women. Research on African American women as leaders is often subsumed within feminist literature, and as such does not contribute to the understanding, or lack of understanding, of the intersectionality of race and gender that African American women face in their leadership development (Davis & Maldonado, 2015; Stanley, 2008).

**Microaggression Theory**

Microaggression theory (Sue, 2010) is a philosophy that frames contemporary discrimination in the United States and many other parts of the world. Significant research has been conducted investigating the themes, impacts, and responses of microaggressions for variety of racial and cultural groups including African Americans, Asian Americans, Latinx, Native Americans, multiracial groups, women, oppressed
sexual orientation and gender identity groups, intersectional identities, persons with disabilities, Muslim Americans, Jewish Americans, and those with mental illness (Torino et al., 2019).

The original taxonomy for racial microaggression created categories of relationships among racial microaggressions (Sue, Bucceri, Lin, Nadal, & Torino, 2007). The taxonomy included the categorization of racial microaggressions as (a) microinsults, which are often unconscious; (b) microassaults, which are often conscious; and (c) microinvalidations, which are often unconscious (Sue, Capodilupo, et al., 2007). The authors of the original taxonomy (Sue, Capodilupo, et al., 2007) also expand the taxonomy to further exemplify the manifestations of microaggressions to include: (a) ascription of intelligence—assigning a degree of intelligence to a person of color based on their race; (b) second class citizen—treated as a lesser person or group; (c) pathologizing cultural values/communication styles—the notion that the values of communication styles of people of color are abnormal; and (d) assumption of criminal status—presumed to be a criminal, dangerous, or deviant based on race. Additionally, the authors summarize the manifestation of microinvalidations as: (a) being an alien in their own land—belief that visible racial/ethnic minority citizens are foreigners, (b) colorblindness—denial or pretense that a White person does not see color or race, (c) myth of meritocracy—statements that assert that race plays a minor role in life success, and (d) denial of individualism—the now of personal racism or one’s role in its perpetuation. Finally, Sue, Capodilupo, et al. (2007) surmise those environmental macrolevel microaggressions manifest in the forms of microinsults, microassaults, and
microinvalidations through racial assaults, insults, and invalidations, which manifest on systemic and environmental levels.

Recently, a refined taxonomy has been developed by the original authors of microaggression theory (Torino et al., 2019). In the revised taxonomy, a new division to contrast with environmental microaggression has been added (personal/interpersonal), but this new division simply labels what was already implicit in the original taxonomy (Torino et al., 2019). Torino et al. (2019) further state that environmental microaggressions have been explicitly broken down into either verbal or nonverbal categories. In addition, behavioral microaggressions have been given a slightly greater specification (e.g., facial, tonal, gestural), and nonverbal microaggressions have been divided into behavioral and nonbehavioral categories. Finally, nonverbal microaggressions that are not behavioral are either “symbolic-expressive” or “situational” (Torino et al., 2019, p. 313).

Microaggression theorists assert that racial microaggressions are brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral, and environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative racial slights and insults to the target person or group (Sue, Capodilupo, et al., 2007).

Microaggression theorists assert that there are four dilemmas of racial microaggression with which recipients of microaggressions must contend: (a) clash of realities, which describes the conflict that arise when people interpret situations differently; (b) invisibility of unintentional bias, refers to the idea that people are socialized with dominant group norms and believes, which results in implicit bias toward various marginalized groups; (c) perceived minimal harm of microaggression, the false notion
that the impact of microaggressions is minimal and such experiences do not cause much
grief or damage in people’s lives; (d) catch-22 of responding to microaggressions,
involves the difficulty in addressing microaggressions, especially given the possible
consequences (Nadal, 2018; Sue, Bucceri, et al., 2007; Sue, Capodilupo, et al., 2007).

**Summary**

Racial microaggressions are subtle, often unconscious, words or actions that
belittle or demean people of color. They may not be meant to be harmful, but the effects
can be pervasive for Black women. Additionally, California community colleges and
districts that retain an environment of microaggressive pervasiveness are left vulnerable
to the attrition of Black women from their institutions.

There is a growing amount of research that is being developed as it relates to
Black students and their experiences with racial microaggressions within college
campuses. However, more research and analysis should be conducted toward the impact
of racial microaggression on Black women administrators within similar educational
environments.

This research study was designed to give voice to the lived experiences of Black
women administrators and the impact of racial microaggressions on their career
trajectory. Black women, education institutions, and society at large may use this
research to further expand the knowledge and understanding of racial microaggressions
and their impact.
CHAPTER 3—METHODOLOGY

This chapter identifies the research methods that were implemented to provide answers to four research questions that guided this study. The areas that are discussed are the research design, methodology, the role of the researcher, participant sampling approaches, data collection and analysis, trustworthiness, and limitations of this study.

The objective of this study was to convey a thoughtful understanding of how racial microaggressions influence the career experiences and trajectories of Black women senior and executive administrators at California community colleges. A qualitative, constructivist grounded theory was facilitated by the researcher to bring voice to and construct the lived experiences of the participants in this study. This methodology has brought about an understanding to the experiences of Black women administrators at California community colleges and the influences of racial microaggressions as it relates to their career experiences and trajectories.

**Qualitative Approach to Inquiry**

Creswell (1998) defined qualitative research as “an inquiry process of understanding based on distinct methodological traditions of inquiry that explore a social or human problem. The research builds complex, holistic pictures, analyzes words, reports detailed views of informants, and conducted the study in natural setting” (p. 15). Qualitative research is centered around building a platform of meaning and understanding of participants. In this section, I discuss characteristics of qualitative inquiry and my rationale for its use in this dissertation study.
Characteristics of Qualitative Inquiry

Distinguishing characteristics of qualitative inquiry include that researchers collect data themselves through: (a) examining documents, (b) observing behavior, or (c) interviewing participant. They do not tend to use or rely on questionnaires or instruments developed by other researchers (Creswell, 2009). Inductive data analysis is also a characteristic of a qualitative research inquiry. According to Creswell (2009), qualitative researchers build their patterns, categories, and themes from the bottom up, by organizing the data into increasingly more abstract units of information. This deductive process illustrates working back and forth between the themes and the database until the researchers have established a comprehensive set of themes. Furthermore, participants’ meanings are paramount in characterizing a qualitative research inquiry approach. In the entire qualitative research process, the researcher keeps a focus on learning the meaning that the participants bring to the research or writers express in the literature (Creswell, 2009).

Finally, in comparing qualitative inquiry to quantitative research, Creswell (2009) describes quantitative research as a means of testing objective theories by examining the relationship among variables. These variables can be measured typically on instruments, so that numbered data can be analyzed using statistical procedures. Qualitative research is a means for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem (Creswell, 2009).

Rationale for the Use of Qualitative Inquiry in the Present Study

I used qualitative inquiry to facilitate this study for various reasons. First, the nature of the research questions that guided the study were best suited through this
approach. As noted by Creswell (1994), qualitative research pursues what and how questions to get a deeper understanding of an observed phenomenon. In the study I asked, “What are the salient experiences of Black women senior and executive administrators who experience racial microaggressions at California community colleges?,” and “How do racial microaggressions influence the experiences and career trajectories of Black women senior and executive administrators at California community colleges?”

Qualitative inquiry also allowed me to explore the topic in detail through interviews. Qualitative interview means that the researcher conducts face-to-face interviews with participants. These interviews involve unstructured and generally open-ended questions that are few in number and intended to elicit views and opinions from the participants (Creswell, 2009). Whereas, quantitative research questions are move interrogative statements that raise questions about the relationships among variables that the investigator seeks to answer (Creswell, 2009).

Lastly, the research process for qualitative researchers is emergent. This means that the initial plan for research cannot be tightly prescribed, and all phases of the process may change or shift after the researcher enters the field and begins to collect data. Such was the case in this study when I engaged participants in additional questions during interviews to gain a clearer understanding and interpretation of experiences and situations that were shared.

Qualitative Research Method and Design

To facilitate the understanding that is essential for the construction of my study, qualitative research methodology and protocol was implemented. As the literature shows, there is a stark gap in empirical research on the experience of African American
administrators within the system of higher education and particularly community colleges. The lack of empirical research conducted to date exacerbates the problem of identifying strategies and solutions to address the barriers and negative experiences of African American female administrators within institutions of higher learning (Gable, 2011; Harley, 2008; Howe-Barksdale, 2007; Jackson & Harris, 2007; Moses, 1997; Turner, 2002). Furthermore, very few studies construct a solidified foundation of understanding for the influence of microaggressions on Black women who serve in senior and executive leadership roles in higher education. This qualitative research study has provided me the opportunity to explore the presence of racial microaggressions and their influence on the experiences and career trajectories of Black women administrators in the California Community Colleges system. In the tradition of a constructivist grounded theory framework, the study will shed light on the social constructions that edify the reality of racial microaggressions experienced by Black women who live with the intersectionality of racism, sexism, and the feelings of isolation, loneliness, stereotypes, limited networks, and the glass ceiling effect toward career ascension.

**Constructivist Grounded Theory**

The constructivist approach treats research as a construction, but acknowledges that it occurs under specific conditions (Charmaz, 2014). Constructivist grounded theory differs from the traditional grounded theory approach in that it acknowledges subjectivity and the researcher’s involvement in the construction and interpretation of data. Social constructivists Lincoln and Guba (1985) stress social context, interaction sharing viewpoints, and interpretive understandings. Constructivists view knowing and learning as embedded in social life (Charmaz, 2014).
When using the methodological approach of constructivist grounded theory, I used a reflexive stance to analyze my research, experience, decision, and interpretation, and how those elements and assumptions informed my research study. A fundamental difference between constructivist grounded theory and traditional grounded theory is the perception of reality. Researchers who adhere to objectivist grounded theory, like Glaser and Strauss, believe that there is an external reality that can be incompletely discovered and described (Charmaz, 2014).

Throughout the research process, the ideal constructivist grounded theorist embraces the “messiness” inherent in the research process (Charmaz, 2009). The belief of constructivist grounded theory is that the researcher cannot develop knowledge from a neutral point of view; they encourage an open and continuous effort to maintain reflexivity during the entire research process (Charmaz, 2009). Constructivist grounded theorists attempt to enter, understand, and describe both the stated and silent meanings of the experiences of the participant of the study. To do this, researchers must “break open” the assumptions of the participants and themselves and examine them (Charmaz, 2009). Throughout the data collection and analysis process, I took notice and thoughtfully reflected upon instances when participants had a noticeable change of emotion during data collection interviews or when there was cautious apprehension in addressing questions that could further expose themselves or others.

Within constructivist grounded theory, the research will provide an understanding of the examined phenomenon of the experiences of participants in the study. The coding techniques used include initial coding, focused coding, and axial coding. During initial coding, coding is done without having preconceived concepts in mind. Initial coding is
kept open ended but it still acknowledges that the researcher has ideas. In the facilitation of my study, I employed the use of initial coding through my interpretation of individual, in-person, semi-structured interviews by actively coding interviews line-by-line from transcripts that were created after each participant interview session. In focused coding, the most significant or frequent earlier codes are used to sift through and analyze large amounts of data. Focused coding requires decisions about what initial codes make the most analytic sense to categorize data incisively and completely (Charmaz, 2014). The strategy of focused coding allowed me to bring clarity to define emergent themes from the extensive amount of data collected throughout the interview process. In the works of Strauss and Corbin (1990, 1998; Strauss, 1987), they presented the third type of coding, axial coding, to relate categories to subcategories. Axial coding specifies the properties and dimensions of a category (Charmaz, 2014). Strauss (1987) views axial coding as building “a dense texture of relationships around the ‘axis’ of a category” (p. 64). Axial coding provided me the opportunity to crystalize the categories and subcategories of the themes that emerged from the data and laid the foundation to bring voice to the participants. Then finally, as part of the employed constructivist grounded theory approach, constant comparison of the data were conducted.

**Participant Sample**

Fifteen women participated in this study. I conducted individual semi-structured interviews. Within this qualitative methodology, specifically a constructivist grounded theory, it was imperative to seek the silent meanings and glean an understanding of the experiences of racial microaggressions on the career paths and trajectories of Black women administrators in California community colleges. According to Guest, Bunce,
Johnson (2006), 12 interviews suffice for most researchers when they aim to discern themes concerning common views and experiences among relatively homogenous people. Based on this notion, 15 interviews exceeded the expectation of gathering the common view and experiences of the Black women administrators in this study. The sample size allowed for data research saturation that canvassed California. I traveled to the Southern, Central, and Northern regions of California to interview each participant individually. I visited each at their college campuses or preferred locations within a professional setting and environment based upon their comfort level.

The women I identified for this study were purposely and strategically selected. They represent the diversity within California community colleges. All 15 of the participants in this study had experienced racial microaggressions both prior to their current roles as senior and executive administrators and while in their positions of authority and leadership as chancellors, presidents, vice chancellors, vice presidents, associate vice chancellors and associate vice presidents within the California Community Colleges system. The individuals in this study represent the diversity of leadership areas within the California Community Colleges system including the areas of instruction, administrative services, and student services. At least two of Maxwell’s (2005) four reasons to use purposeful sampling will be applicable. According to Maxwell, purposeful sampling can first achieve representation based on a sample that has been systematically selected and provides relative homogeneity, which can provide confidence in appropriately representing average members of that population sample. Second, a purposeful sample can capture heterogeneity in the population sample to best ensure that the conclusion represents the rant of variation rather than a few members or subset of the
population. Third, a sample can be purposely selected to permit the examination of cases that are critical for the theories that initiated the study or that have developed throughout the process of the study. Finally, purposeful sampling can establish comparison to shed light as the reason for the differentiation between individuals. The sample for this study was homogenous; a subset of purposeful sampling, I chose people who have a similar trait—that is, Black women who are community college leaders who have experienced racial microaggressions (Patton, 2002). The targeted population for this study was women who self-identified as African American/Black women administrators in senior or executive positions (e.g., associate vice president, associate vice chancellor, vice president, vice chancellor, president, or chancellor) at California community colleges. The women of the study represented the experiences of African American/Black women administrators within the largest system of higher education in the United States, as there are 115 California community colleges serving 2.1 million students to date.

The process of identifying potential participants for my study began with seeking information from professional organizations including the American Council on Education/Office of Women in Higher Education (ACE/OWHE), the A2MEND Women Leadership Institute, Association of California Community College Administrators (ACCCCA), and the Community College League of California (CCCLC). However, the most useful and informative method that yielded the prospective pool of participants was through the review and search of California community colleges and district websites, and social media outlets including LinkedIn and Twitter, which identified potential leads for participants that could qualify and have an interest in this study.
I sought to identify Black women at colleges in the roles of a president, vice president, or associate vice president for the college within student services, administrative, or instructional services. I also sought women at the district level to identify Black women in the role of chancellor, vice chancellor, or associate vice chancellor. When reviewing campus websites, I reviewed the president’s page initially to identify both the president and to view their executive cabinet members, which would include vice presidents. Similarly, when reviewing district websites, I searched for the district chancellor’s message to identify the chancellor, and then I sought to review the chancellor’s executive cabinet, which would include vice chancellors. If the website did not include photographs where I could assume the racial identity and gender of the administrator, yet there was a name that appeared to be that of a female, I would then use the Google search engine. While using the Google search engine, I would enter a name assumed to be female, the affiliated college or district, and view photographs to determine an assumed racial identity and gender.

The California Community Colleges system has 115 campuses within 72 districts located throughout the State of California. As the literature demonstrates, the scarcity of Black women administrative leadership roles is prevalent. Additionally, a challenge in obtaining women for this study was the sensitive nature of disclosing experiences pertaining to race, racism, and inflicted pain thereof. This was also a concern as these conversations could potentially cause harm to the employment and careers of women if some of their stories were revealed. After exhausting all of these measures with a need to recruit additional participants, I employed the act of “snowballing” (Patton, 2002) to gain additional leads for prospective participant samples. I used snowballing by connecting
with colleagues from a statewide listserv of African American/Black chief executive officers (CEOs) and by asking for names of potential study participants from those who accepted my request to participate in the study. Additionally, to provide comfort and confidence for those being solicited through snowballing, I requested participants to consider sending my contact information and information pertaining to my study directly to prospective participants on my behalf. I then followed up with the solicited individuals. Through these efforts, I compiled a list of 32 potential participants, of which 12 were from Northern California, four were from Central California, and 16 were from Southern California. After extensive investigation of the Central California region, I could only identify four individuals assumed to be Black women in administrative leadership roles that would qualify for this study. Out of the 32 potential participants, all were solicited via correspondence to participate in the study. As a Black woman and the researcher for this study, I thought it would be important for me to self-identify as a Black woman by including a photograph of myself and my LinkedIn biography. This was done to provide a level of comfort in considering participation in the research study. Through these efforts, I yielded 15 participants that were interviewed. All of the 15 participants were Black women. The only racial category represented in this study were African American/Black \((n = 15)\). All of the participants were non-Hispanic, non-African, and non-Afro-Caribbean. American born African American/Black women represented 100% of the participants in this study. There was representation of all three regions of the State of California—Northern, Central, and Southern. Over half of the participants served as senior or executive administrators in Northern California \((n = 8, 53.3\%)\), Central California had the lowest representation within this study of two
participants (13.3%), and Southern California had participant representation of five (33.3%). The majority ($n = 11$) were married; the remainder were divorced, never married, or single ($n = 4$). Slightly over half of the women of this study were over the age of 55 ($n = 8$), while others ranged between ages 35-44 ($n = 4$), and the remainder ranged between ages 45-54 ($n = 3$). Participants’ years of service in the field of education ranged from 8 to 36, with a mean of 20 years. Participants’ area of leadership ranged from institutional chief executive officer positions (chancellor or president), and the areas of instructional/academic services, student services, administrative services, institutional development, and human resources. The working titles of the participants consisted of chancellor, president, vice chancellor, vice president, associate vice chancellor, and associate vice president. The participant sample was well educated; most women had completed a terminal doctoral degree ($n = 9$) with either a PhD or EdD, and all earned a master’s and bachelor’s degree ($n = 15$).

Due to the scarcity of Black women in leadership roles throughout the state of California and the specific areas of work for the women of this study, anonymity of participants was at the utmost in discussing and sharing information provided in this study. Participants in this study were provided the opportunity to select a pseudonym that I use to reference their responses. For participants without a preference to a pseudonym, I assigned a fictitious name to them and permitted each participant to confirm the name or to have the name changed to one of their personal selection.

After potential participants were identified, I sent an introductory email correspondence (see Appendix A) with a photograph and LinkedIn profile link of the researcher to identify and reveal the gender and race similarity between myself as the
researcher and the prospective participant. The potential participant received a copy of
the informed consent for the research study attached to the email correspondence. During
the recruitment process, I gathered email addresses of potential participants, and sent an
e-mail notification that provided an overview of my study. Potential participants received
an Informed Consent Form (see Appendix B) and a request to participate in my
dissertation. My recruitment period for participants was 4 to 6 weeks. During that time, I
reached out to prospective participants twice using email and phone follow up requests.
Ultimately, 15 interviews were confirmed. Each confirmed participant completed the
Informed Consent Form and a demographic questionnaire (see Appendix C). They each
self-identified their racial identity as African American/Black. Having representation
from throughout California provided the applicable transferability of my findings to other
states within the United States with similar homogenous populations within educational
systems throughout the country.

Due to the nature of this study, confidentiality of the identity of these women was
held at the highest possible standard. I notified each participant of their rights to
confidentiality and the procedures I used to safeguard their identity and occupational
affiliations both past and present. I provided the participant with their choice to select a
pseudonym to be used during the interview process and data analysis. Those who did not
have a preference, I assigned a pseudonym to them and later informed them of the
assigned name and allowed them to modify the name should they prefer to do so. I
informed the participants that I would be the only one who knew their name and that I
would not share or disclose their information to anyone. I informed the participants that I
would avoid compromising their confidentiality through deductive disclosure. Deductive
disclosure happens when a researcher describes enough identifying details about a person or situation to enable other individuals in the community to identify the participant (Kaiser, 2009). Participants were provided copies of their interview transcripts and were informed they could retract statements or comments from being included in the transcripts. The transcripts were stored on an encrypted file on my personal laptop, and participants’ consent forms and questionnaires were stored and locked in a secured file cabinet in my home office—I was the only person with access to this information. After transcripts were approved by the participants, I reviewed transcripts with my dissertation chair for coding purposes as needed.

**Ethical Issues**

The unveiling of the experiences of Black women in leadership is an intimate act that ultimately exposes experiences that my cause mental, emotional, or psychological discomfort. Exposing such experiences can be detrimental to the career trajectories of these women when incorporating the exposure of racial microaggressions they have experienced at times in which the perpetrators of these experiences are persons in higher authority than they themselves. Sydney Howe-Barksdale (2007) pointed out that exposing the experience of Black women administrators through research is delicate and perilous, “primarily because there is such a high cost in reveling such personal struggles and such personal pain connected to the challenges Black women face as they pursue advancement and promotion” (p. 3). How racial microaggressions influence the career experiences and trajectories of Black women in the California Community Colleges system is a noteworthy study for empirical exploration. Black women administrators are an at-risk population within the community college system as they are a marginalized
community within the educational system. Therefore, it was critical that high ethical standards be taken within this research and that confidentiality was upheld.

In preparation for the facilitation of this research study, the San Diego State University (SDSU) Institutional Review Board (IRB) was presented with the proposed design and data collections instruments for this study. After the review and approval of the Informed Consent Form, each prospective participant of the study signed the form acknowledging their awareness and understanding of the research project and their rights throughout the process. An electronic copy of the form was provided to each participant of the study and the signed original copy was stored by the researcher in a filed, locked cabinet in the researcher’s home office. The approval from San Diego State University signified the compliance of ethical standards throughout the facilitation of this dissertation.

**Data Collection Methods**

To acutely comprehend how racial microaggressions influence the career experiences and trajectories of Black women senior and executive administrators, this study implemented constructivist grounded theory methods where semi-structured interviews were conducted. Prior to the interview process, participants were provided a questionnaire in which demographic questions were asked and information related to their previous work history. I requested a professional resume and curriculum vitae from each participant.

One person-to-person, semi-structured interview was conducted with each of the 15 participants to gain descriptive and detailed information about their career experiences and trajectories as Black women senior and executive administrators at California
community colleges. The projected time frame for interviews was 60-90 minutes; the longest interview duration was 125 minutes, and most interviews averaged 75 minutes. The semi-structured, open-ended interview questions were designed to construct how racial microaggressions have influenced the career experiences and trajectories of these women. The semi-structured interview protocol allowed participants an opportunity to freely share their experiences, career paths, and how racial microaggressions influenced them along their individual journeys.

The purpose of this constructivist grounded theory study was to examine how racial microaggressions influence the career experiences and trajectories of Black women who are senior and executive administrators at California community colleges. The research questions that guided this study were:

1. What are the salient experiences of Black women senior and executive administrators who experience racial microaggressions at California community colleges?

2. How do racial microaggressions influence the experiences and career trajectories of Black women senior and executive administrators at California community colleges?

3. What strategies are employed by Black women senior and executive administrators at California community colleges to overcome racial microaggressions to ensure career advancement and success?

4. How do support networks impact the successful retention of Black women confronted with racial microaggressions within the California Community Colleges system?
Based on the research questions, 20 interview questions (see Appendix D) were developed to elicit insight into the experiences of the women in this study.

Each interview was audio recorded and later transcribed. After interviews had been transcribed, the audio recordings were deleted. Once transcriptions were completed, participants reviewed and approved their individual transcripts and confirmed their pseudonym.

**Trustworthiness and Quality Assurance**

As the researcher, it was important to me to confirm that my interpretation of collected data was trustworthy and an accurate account of information provided by each participant in this study as it related to their lived experiences. In my effort to ensure trustworthiness, both member checking and peer debriefing were conducted.

The selection of the 15 research participants for this constructivist grounded theory study was done through purposive sampling, which enabled me to construct an understanding for how racial microaggressions influence the career experiences and trajectories of Black women senior and executive administrators at California community colleges. Black women are considered to be a vulnerable population; therefore, it is my intention to be very sensitive to the confidentiality of the women in this study.

**Data Analysis**

All interviews were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim for data analysis. Interviews were coded for themes using initial coding, focused coding, and axial coding. Initial coding was closely related to the data with words that reflect action. Focused coding was used based upon emerging patterns derived from initial coding. Axial coding was employed to create a systemic strategy of bringing the data to coherency through
sorting, synthesizing, and organization the collected data. Data were analyzed using constant comparative methods (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). This method allowed me to compare data to search for commonalities and differences.

To organize the data from the 15 Black women, I coded the data in organized chunks (Rossman & Rallis, 1998) using Dedoose, a secured web-based application. This allowed me to analyze data within their context. As a result, nearly 3,000 codes were applied, and 266 duplicate codes were created. A code is a word or short phrase that captures the essence of the data received during the interview process (Saldaña, 2012). Code words or phrases were assigned to transcripts. The data were transcribed, coded, and analyzed, categories were created, and themes emerged based on this process. The themes that emerged based on the experiences of the 15 women who participated in this research study are presented in Table 1.

Within the qualitative analysis of this research study, as the researcher I made all judgments about coding, categorizing, decontextualizing, and recontextualizing the data (Starks & Trinidad, 2007). In constructivist grounded theory, the researcher engages with the analysis as a witness to the accounts of the data. Even as the researcher immerses herself in the data, she must be honest and vigilant about her own perspective, preexisting thoughts and beliefs, and developing hypotheses (Starks & Trinidad, 2007). Seeing that I am a Black woman with professional career interests similar to those of the participants of this study, it was imperative that I separate personal assumptions or experiences that could sway the data. The use of bracketing is one method to identify any preconceptions or personal knowledge (Lopez & Willis, 2004). The use of bracketing was critical to create a distance between my personal thoughts and opinions to become a
Table 1

Emergent Themes and Subthemes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Emergent Themes</th>
<th>Subthemes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“Here We Go Again” – Prevalent Lifelong Experiences of Racial Microaggressions</td>
<td>Early Adolescence and Adulthood Early Career Present Career</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Invalidation of Thoughts, Ideas, Intellect, and Abilities by Others</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Public Shaming</td>
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<tr>
<td>“This is Not for the Meek” – Burden Bearing</td>
<td>Navigating Racial Microaggressions Educating Others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Emotional and Mental</td>
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<td></td>
<td>“ Mediocrity is Not an Option” – Having to Prove Herself</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Nobody Puts Baby in a Corner” – Resulting Influence of Racial Microaggressions</td>
<td>Institutional Attrition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Self-Doubt, Silencing, and Frustration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Recognition of Knowledge of Self-worth, Value, and Identity</td>
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<tr>
<td>“I’m Prayed Up” – Coping Strategies</td>
<td>Spiritual Relationships, Family, and Friends</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Institutional Allies and Professional Networks/Mentors</td>
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</tbody>
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Although in constructivist grounded theory researchers engage in the self-reflective process of bracketing, whereby they recognize and set aside, but do not abandon, their prior knowledge or assumptions (Gearing, 2004), I remained aware of my perspective through writing memos throughout the analysis. Additional reflexive practices include consulting with colleagues and mentors and writing memos throughout the analysis to help analysts examine how their thoughts and ideas evolve as they engage more deeply with the data (Cutcliffe, 2003). Memos also serve the function of establishing an audit trail, where the analyst documents her thoughts and reactions as a way of keeping track of emerging impressions of what the data mean, how they relate to each other, and how engaging with the data shapes her understanding of the initial hypotheses (Cutcliffe,
2000). This process allowed me to bring voice to the perspectives and experiences of Black women senior and executive administrators within the California Community Colleges system.

**Limitations**

All efforts were made to ensure the trustworthiness and transferability of the data that were collected and analyzed for this study. However, one limitation of this study includes being exclusive to California community colleges, so there was no representation for Black women from the state’s California State University (CSU) system or the University of California (UC) system. Although the emphasis for this study centered on racial microaggressions perpetuated by the dominant culture and other racial identities, experience of “intra-racial” microaggressions surfaced several times throughout the study and is a topic that should be explored in future studies relative to racial microaggressions and Black women. Furthermore, I as the researcher, have worked in the California higher education system for over 15 years. I earned a Bachelor of Arts degree in Spanish from an HBCU and Master of Arts degree in education, with an emphasis in postsecondary student affairs. My graduate and undergraduate experiences differ in having attended both an HBCU and a PWI. My career journey as an administrator has been primarily in the areas of student affairs/services, providing leadership within various programs, departments, and services that assist socioeconomically disadvantaged, underrepresented students of color at both 2- and 4-year institutions. As a midlevel practitioner in the community college system I had to take note of personal biases throughout the research process as to not allow my personal thoughts, ideas, or opinions interfere with the data provided.
Summary

The purpose of this study was to examine how racial microaggressions influence the career experiences and trajectories of Black women who are senior and executive administrators at California community colleges. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 15 Black women who served in California community colleges as administrators (i.e., chancellor, president, vice chancellor, vice president, associate vice president, or associate vice chancellor). A constructivist grounded theory methodology was used to uncover the constructed lived experiences of this population. The interviews focused on racial microaggressions experienced during the careers of the participants and how these experiences have influenced their career trajectories. Results yielded include themes and employed coping strategies. Insight from the interviews will be used to inform California community colleges policies, practices, and interventions as it relates to the retention and professional support of Black women as college administrators and those that aspire to be administrators. Due to the homogenous nature of this study, its findings will be transferable to other systems and organizations where Black women serve in leadership roles. Finally, this study will add to the limited existing literature and to the profession of postsecondary education as it relates to Black women.
CHAPTER 4—PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS

The purpose of this qualitative constructivist grounded theory study was to explore the experiences of racial microaggressions and its influence on the careers of 15 Black women senior and executive administrators at California community colleges. As higher educational systems in the state of California seek to recruit, retain, and graduate Black students, the recruitment and retention of Black women in the ranks of administrators are equally significant to the system’s efforts for the students served by the institutions. Through a constructivist grounded theory approach and data analysis based on semi-structured interviews, this study was designed to bring voice to the experiences and influences of racial microaggressions on the careers of Black women administrators who have served in leadership at California community colleges. To fulfill this purpose, I sought to answer the following queries:

1. What are the salient experiences of Black women senior and executive administrators who experience racial microaggressions at California community colleges?

2. How do racial microaggressions influence the experiences and career trajectories of Black women senior and executive administrators at California community colleges?

3. What strategies are employed by Black women senior and executive administrators at California community colleges to overcome racial microaggressions to ensure career advancement and success?
4. How do support networks impact the successful retention of Black women confronted with racial microaggressions within the California Community Colleges system?

Within this chapter, I reveal and discuss the four overarching themes that emerged from the inquiry: (a) “Here We Go Again”—Prevalent lifelong experiences of racial microaggressions, (b) “This is Not for the Meek”—Burden bearing, (c) “Nobody Puts Baby in a Corner”—Resulting impact and influence, and (d) “I’m Prayed Up”—Coping strategies as they relate to racial microaggressions and the lived experiences of the women in this study who serve as senior and executive administrators within the California Community Colleges system. All 15 participants in this study have experienced racial microaggressions both prior to their current roles as senior and executive administrators and while in their positions of authority and leadership as chancellors, presidents, vice chancellors, vice presidents, associate vice chancellors, and associate vice presidents within the California Community Colleges system. I discuss the journeys of these women and their experiences with racial microaggressions as administrators leading community colleges in California.

I am a Black woman. Like the women of this study, I have experienced various forms racial microaggression throughout my life and in my position of leadership within the community college system. For example, during my second year of employment at a college, I recall my direct supervisor requesting me to complete a task that resulted in me producing a document for their review. Upon sending the product of my work to them via email, I shortly received a phone call. With a tone of astonishment, they said to me, “Beverly, great work . . . did you really do that?” My response was simply, “Yes, I did.
Thanks.” After thoughts ruminated in my mind, such as, “Why would you not think I could do such good work, why is there doubt in my ability, has other work that I have submitted been inadequate, why would you call to tell me that in that manner, why is it such a surprise that I produce quality work?,” I felt that my work, educational attainment, and position in leadership was being invalidated and that my intelligence was being insulted.

Shortly after that encounter, my supervisor and I had a meeting; it was our weekly one-to-one update meeting. In this meeting, I had been discussing and explaining a topic. Shortly within my commentary; my supervisor paused and said to me, “Wow, you know, you are just so articulate.” After having had the first experience, I thought to myself, “You have got to say something, however, as a Black woman, I have learned to be conscious of how I engage with others as to avoid the pitfalls of negative stereotypes of Black women, from the style of my hair, posture of my body and the tone of my voice.” Realizing this, I made a conscious effort to soften my facial expression with a gentle smile and in a coy manner I tilted my head and I said to them, “Why would I not be?” Assuming they realized the magnitude and load of their statement, they quickly began to state, “Well, I have worked with people like you from all across the country, very smart, you know, good people, you know . . . It was just a compliment, I mean I think you are a great person. . . .” As they continued to ramble, in an effort to advocate for myself I softly said to them, “I am a director, I am a doctoral candidate, and I have been working in the field for over 17 years, why would you expect me not to be well spoken or articulate?” As their body language became tense, they said to me, “Don’t get upset, I didn’t mean anything by it.” At that point, I reconciled where I was situated in their mind in my role
as a Black woman administrator. Despite my present career ascension and future aspirations, regardless of my academic accomplishments, my intelligence would be questioned, my work would be doubted, my abilities would be negated, and if I chose in any way to express or represent myself, I would be the ever living “angry Black woman.”

While the statements, assumptions, and ascription of my intelligence being intellectually inferior or that I was incapable of producing quality work were inaccurate, that experience took a toll on my self-esteem, self-efficacy, and made me questions my own capabilities. From that experience, I learned to make myself small; I began to doubt my abilities and question my work. I learned to silence myself and to simply exist in my role, which exacerbated feelings of isolation and withdrawal. Through conversations with other Black women, both peers and mentors, I learned that although this situation with a supervisor occurred in an isolated experience, the experience itself was not rare or unique to the experience of Black women administrators. For this reason, this study was unearthed. These are the lived experiences of Black women senior and executive administrators, their experiences and triumphs over racial microaggressions, and their success in the field of postsecondary education within California community colleges.

It was an honor and a privilege to have interviewed the 15 women who chose to participate in this research study. Initially, when preparing to recruit participants for this study, I was intimidated and apprehensive. As discussed in previous chapters, the scarcity of African American women in leadership roles within community colleges would make it challenging to find women who would meet the requirements for participation. Also coupled with this concern is the work load and responsibility of these women who are in positions of leadership within multifaceted and complex organizations. I was concerned
they would not have the time to spend on this effort, as I assumed they would have many competing obligations related to their professional roles within their respective institutions. I was intimidated to approach women of such monumental influence both within their institutions and within the communities that they serve. As Black woman with over 17 years of work experiences in a higher educational setting, I understand the burden and responsibility that is often overwhelming for Black women who serve in positions of leadership at any level. Additionally, the responsibilities of the women in this study extend beyond the occupational positions in which they hold.

As the women of this study assume their respective leadership roles, they know they are likely one of the few, or perhaps the only Black women at that level within the organization. With this awareness, the women of this study forge ahead to serve their institutions and their communities. They courageously accept the fact that they will be one of few or the only Black person or Black woman. A college has only one President, one Vice President of Instruction, one Vice President of Student Services, and one Vice President of Administrative Services, and a district will have only one Chancellor. In essence, when the women of this study assume these roles, not only do they shoulder the isolation of their standing as Black women within the organization, they assume further isolation through the nature of their operational roles in leadership. The challenge of this is the added layer of isolation that comes with both the position and being a Black woman in a senior or executive leadership role. They are islands to themselves and must be equipped to withstand the ripple of harsh tides that are imminent.

I am humbled and honored to share the lived experiences of 15 courageous, dynamic, and powerful women. It is a privilege to bring voice to the women of this study
to express their experiences with racial microaggressions. Their experiences have played a part in the crystallization of who they are as African American women administrators leading institutions of higher learning in California. Their experiences will be part of their life’s tapestry, as they are interwoven in the fabric of their professional lives.

The women of this study allowed themselves to be open, candid, unrehearsed, and authentic when detailing their stories to me. Often, their delivery of re-accounting what they had experienced was done in a manner as if they were speaking to their own daughter, sister, or friend. They invited me into their lives; they painted vivid mosaics of their lived experiences that illuminated situations and circumstances of racial microaggressions both past and present.

The women of this study were willing and eager to share their stories. Initially, I thought it would be a challenge to recruit 15 women to participate. However, within a span of 5 weeks, I had all the participants needed to conduct this study. They were willing to bring to life what many women in their positions and those who aspire to be in their roles have been and will be confronted with in terms of racial microaggressions within professional roles of leadership.

**Counternarrative**

To conceal the identity of the participants of this study, but yet give voice to their experiences, I have included in this chapter a counternarrative comprised of three composite characters who represent the experiences of the larger group through the use of “characters” who represent the group as a whole. These characters are not imaginary; their stories are grounded in the data that were collected during this study. The development of a counternarrative begins with unearthing sources of collected data
throughout the research process, consideration of the existing literature on the topic, and personal and professional experiences of the author (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). The setting for this story takes place at a closing session for a leadership development conference that targets midlevel Black women California community college administrators. Dr. Donna serves as a district chancellor for a California community college district comprised of three college campuses. Dr. Taisha serves as a college president for a Southern California community college, and Dr. Alethea is a vice president for a Northern California community college.

**Moderator: We are very excited to have with us, Drs. Alethea, Donna, and Taisha. We can thank you all for being with us today. Let’s get started. Can each of you provide the audience with your introduction and tell a brief overview of the work that you do within your institutions? Please feel free to share how you arrived to your careers in the California Community Colleges system?**

**Dr. Donna:** It is a pleasure to be with you all today, and it is an honor for me to share my story with such a promising group of aspiring young professionals within the field of higher education. Let’s see, where shall I begin? As mentioned, my name is Dr. Donna, and I serve as the Chancellor for my college district. For over 30 years, I have served our college and university systems of schools throughout the nation as an administrator. However, prior to entering the field of education as an administrator, I worked as a healthcare professional. Having grown up in an inner city on the West Coast, folks, in particular some Whites would assume that there was little expectations of hope and aspirations of a ‘lil Black girl from an urban Black community. However, the support I received from my community was insurmountable and aided me in achieving the goals
that I set out to accomplish. My medical degree is part of my identity. It represents the hopes and aspirations of my family and the community that believed in me. It represents what it meant to my mother, who got her high school diploma at the age of 35. It represents what the community was counting on. I can hear my neighbor old Miss Hady saying, “I always knew that child was gonna be somebody . . . Donna is a smart little thing.”

My career path that has led me to my current role has been traditional, nontraditional and a bit eclectic I would say. Although being a medical practitioner is at my core, while entering into the field of higher education as an educator, I served as an instructor. I was a former Associate Dean of Students. An interesting and exciting time of my life, I had the honor to serve as the Director of Educational Programs for a former President of the United States in the South. Eventually after serving in the role of Director, I returned to California and stepped into senior roles of administrations within the community college setting, which has ultimately led me to two presidencies and ultimately my current service as Chancellor.

Dr. Alethea: Greetings everyone, my name is Alethea, and I serve as a vice president at my college. My career journey is a little unorthodox. I am a GED recipient. I started my exposure to the community college in my local neighborhood. My mom was going to a career technical training program at Next Community College (NCC), and I was in pre-K on the same campus. I returned years later to get my GED (general education diploma) there. I later earned my associate’s degree and then I transferred to an out of state university. After completing my bachelor’s degree, I ascended to a master’s program and my mentor told me to keep going. And like Dr. Donna, the support of my
community and mentors was critical in my development and pursuit of both higher education and within my career.

My career began with me working in the financial industry outside of the state of California. After making the decision to return to California, I entered the field of education working as an accountant in the K-12 system. Because of the experience I had at my NCC and the reputation it had within the community in which I grew up, I decided to pursue opportunities at that institution. It was an important and personal decision for me to make. The college meant so much to the community and to my parents, it represented a beacon of hope for low-income people and I wanted to be part of the journey to support an institution that had supported me, my family, and the Black community.

At the time, the institution was having challenges. When others heard that I was considering opportunities at the college, folks would ask, “Are you sure you want to go?,” and so my response was, “Well obviously they’re looking for solid individuals that can bring their skillset there to help the college get back on track.” For me it was personal. I thought, I have good skills and I thought I would be able to bring to the college something it needed. I felt I needed to do it for my community and I have no regrets. After my time at NCC, I went on to work at several other colleges within the state, which has led me to my current role where I oversee and support the areas of information technology, facilities and operations, and our fiscal departments for the college.

**Dr. Taisha:** Hello everyone, my name is Dr. Taisha, and I started my career in higher education as a community college counselor for a grant-funded program within the
college. Eventually, I ascended to a dean of counseling and special programs and then to a vice presidency. I briefly stepped away from the community college system to work with a Fortune 500 company. After about 2 years, I realized that my heart was with our community colleges and so I returned after obtaining my current vice presidency. I value the notion that my work contributes to the greater good of marginalized communities. Although this work can be relentless, I delight in seeing the success of our students.

**Moderator:** Thank you, I will go to the next question from the audience. From your perspective, how would you describe what it is like to be a Black woman community college leader?

**Dr. Alethea:** I’m going to say this in two ways; you have being Black and then you have being a woman, so you have those two variables. By virtue of being Black, you have to be affirmed in who you are, because if you’re not affirmed in who you are, it is very easy to let things pass by you or to let things happen around you. I have an incredible amount of presence, and I have always had that. So, as a Black woman, I have to work in the system and be affirmed in who I am and not be afraid to be who I am.

I will also add that being a Black woman community college leader in California, it is a unique experience. It can be very rewarding, it can be taxing, it can be very exhausting, it can be a slew of racial microaggressions. On certain days, it is a daunting task, but it is also an amazing opportunity. When you recognize that you are the face of the institution advocating for students, and most of those students look like you, when you’re talking about pathways to success or pathways and access to education, this a part of a process where you’re really advocating, you’re really advocating to make sure that the student has what they need to be successful; it is gratifying yet burdening. As Black
women, we carry a heavy load. When we walk into a room, the stakes are higher and so are the expectations. We don’t only represent ourselves, we represent an entire race. It is a heavy load to bear.

**Dr. Donna:** That is a loaded question (laughter). I would say that it is extremely challenging to be a Black woman leading within the California Community Colleges system. It is extremely challenging in my experiences. I find that Black women in education, in particular those of us in administrative, teaching, or frontline roles bring our whole selves to these positions. We consider ourselves to be shepherds of change, creating a pathway for our community. It doesn’t mean that we don’t want to serve other students, we just recognize the inherent barriers for our community and recognize the opportunity to potentially change some of that.

For me, I think the most difficult part is managing the stereotypes that are associated with who we are and what we bring to the table. I can run through the most generic ones; such as, we are loud, aggressive; anytime we express ourselves it’s taken as we’re trying to attack people. So I find that we are in this space where you are trying to pick your words very carefully. We try to be careful when we talk about a topic that is related to communities of color, in particular the Black community, because automatically that’s a sensitive subject. We are constantly having to negotiate what is appropriate in the environment and sometimes suppressing or silencing ourselves. For me, the unfortunate part of that is that it’s likely the very voice that needs to be heard to change the outcomes for students and the experience of people of color.

It is definitely challenging. I find myself trying to package things in ways that don’t feel threatening to those that reflect dominant culture believes and value systems.
Sometimes, especially early in my career, I found myself occasionally second guessing how I got in the spot I was in, whether it was solely based on my own laurels or was I being a tokenized individual. Also, for me add the complexion on top of that. Being of a lighter complexion I sometimes think of my sisters that are darker skinned and my brothers that barely ever get a shot at these opportunities because of complexion. I question at times, am I more palatable because of how I look? Am I more palatable because of how I choose to express myself in a way that is less threatening for others? Am I less threatening because they know my mother is a Caucasian woman?

So all of these things come into play, and what I try to do is use what I believe maybe a slight advantage or a slight benefit that I get because of the package that I come in, to challenge our system. It’s a lot of hard work being a Black woman in these roles; to be the one to speak for all of the experiences of people that look like you, especially given that we are a very diverse people and those experiences aren’t necessarily the same. It’s a hard place to be, and it certainly questions our authenticity in those moments.

**Dr. Taisha:** I think that as a Black woman leading within the California Community Colleges system, I have to accept that I will contend with having to counter the stereotypical narratives of what the dominant culture perceives to be the identity of a Black woman. When I was younger and on the job market, I was a little feisty, but after a while, I had to tone it down. I felt that I had to give off the impression that I was a “professional” in the world and that I was “friendly and approachable.” I have consciously made sure that in any work-related setting I walk into that I am smiling. Because, as a Black woman, I could be thinking of something and have what I consider to be a pensive expression and others would assume that I am angry or upset. As a Black
woman, if I am not smiling, they think, oh wow, “She’s mad.” So I call it “the routine.” I keep a smile on my face whenever I walk into a room. As pleasant as smiling may seem, it can also drain you too. The mere fact that I have to be conscious of it at all times is a strain.

As a Black woman in leadership with our California Community Colleges system, I am grateful and honored to have been provided the opportunity to play such a significant role in the lives of the employees within the organization and ultimately our students. But this work is definitely not for the faint of heart. I have had experiences where I have been told that I need to know my place; I can’t imagine that being said to a White man. I have been told I don’t have the right to make certain decisions, when in fact it is very clearly in my authority to do so. I have been threatened, I have been bullied. But what keeps me motivated is the fact that I have an unwavering feeling that God put me in this position and I need to do it in a way that He is able to say well done; I recognize that when He says it is time for me to leave, that’s when I will leave, not when anybody else says; but when He says its time. As a Black woman, it can be a very lonely journey, but I am used to it.

**Moderator:** As we wrap up the question and answer portion of today’s session, would each of you surmise a bit of your personal advice based on your experiences for Black women who have aspiration in ascending in their careers in the California Community Colleges system in how to deal with racial microaggressions when they are confronted with them?

**Dr. Donna:** I will start; my first bit of advice is to understand what a microaggression is so that you can recognize it when it happens. Secondly, do not ignore
it. I think about how best to address it and then do so. Sometimes I may not do it right in that moment; I may choose to find a better time to do so and a better setting. As a Black woman in leadership within the California community college, I have found that it is important that I embrace my voice. Embrace your voice and be who you are authentically. Don’t let anyone sway you into thinking that you didn’t get to the positions you are in other than your due diligence. Stay strong, be authentic, and use your voice for good, and if it means challenging others and dealing with the consequences, for me that is just what I will have to contend with.

I would also advise that you have to build some capital within your organization; you can’t just come in acting like a fool. They won’t allow people like us to come in and just act a fool. So it becomes about how you develop authentic relationships based on a mutual trust. It is about having conversations and being honest about who you are. I understand that people will not always like what I do, or the decisions that I make, but they can trust what I’m going to say and they can trust that I would make haphazard or capricious decisions around the work that we do. I strive to be consistent in that regard. So that consistency, those relationships, will help people see you for the person that you are versus the person they believe you to be. It is very important to normalize who you are. Additionally, I would share that I had to learn that my title is my title, and what I mean by that is I’m not here to make friends, so I had to embrace that. You will need to embrace that as you develop in your roles and create a vision for your institution. Maintaining that voice and the authenticity is important to me

Dr. Taisha: When it comes to advice on microaggressions, I would say how you address it or approach it depends on what the microaggression is because you know some
are more egregious than others and some you know you just can’t let go. In responding, it also depends on the context, the audience, and who is presenting the microaggression. You have to be careful calling your boss out in front of other people. I think it is really important to be very mindful of how you draw attention or call things out. You have to be really meticulous and mindful about your interactions. We are often the ones who are key to making everything about race, but race does matter, it definitely does, and so does gender, but you have to be able to articulate it and you have to choose your battles. As a Black woman, I can’t always be calling it out, because if you become that person who’s always calling it out and if it is just about you then the behavior of the perpetuator loses focus. I will also add that I feel like I have built a shell and there are a lot of things that I just shied myself off from. You need to create your own barrier to become impenetrable. You need to layer on some thick skin.

**Dr. Alethea:** The first thing that I would say, is to be crystal clear about who you are and what you stand for. If you have that understanding of self, you will be better grounded to withstand the tides of this work. To arrive to a grounded place, you get there through lots of different ways, you get there through all the work that you do, you also get there through self-reflection. You get there through looking to see what you want to be, and investing in yourself. You get there through professional development, the psychological health, the physical and mental support, through your moral strength that you have; those are always to reach your place of grounding and clarity. You have got to be clear about who you are.

The other advice would be, know that racial microaggressions will happen; be prepared for them. The first time you have some kind of microaggression where someone
calls you the angry Black woman, you know that is going to happen, so be ready for it. Talk it through with people, do “what if” scenarios, observe other people. I paid attention to one woman, I didn’t necessarily always agree with her or what she was doing, but I always saw how successful she was in prevailing so I paid attention to her. I paid attention to how she used her voice, how she postured herself, how she moved her hands, what she did when she sat down; I paid attention to everything about her. Then I took what I needed, and left the rest. I hired a coach, because when I stepped into senior leadership, I knew I was going to curse somebody out, because I loved to curse (laughter). So, I saw this woman, she was elegant, diplomatic, and I said I want you to coach me. We need to understand that as Black women, we don’t have the luxury of mediocrity. We must invest in ourselves. You must invest in you because you are worthy and be unapologetic about it.

The other thing I would advise Black women in leadership roles is to not be afraid to make decisions. A lot of times, we as people and particularly women are uncomfortable with what we perceive as power. Power is nothing but the ability to influence, and quite frankly, I could do this boss thing All Day Long! It is what I love. It is the ability to influence. Now you all don’t think I sit here and I tell everybody what to do; I draw on the relationships that I have and the credibility that I have with the faculty. It is because people support me that I am able to be in this position. They respect me because I respect them, they support me because I support them, and they will love me because I love them. I don’t think that I am all high and mighty, I am just not afraid to be in the position where I can mobilize resources, where I can make decisions.
As Black women, you need to get comfortable with the ability to influence. That means being comfortable with power, whether it is positional power, personal power, whatever it might be, get comfortable. Commonly, what happens is you may find yourself in positions where you can move major things and drive change, but you don’t use the power you have to get to the destination. That’s like having a car but not turning it on, as if you are pushing the car down the road without turning on the engine. Turn on your power!

Finally, I will end with this, be sure to connect with a mentor. Keep in mind that there are mentors that will show you how to develop a schedule, to do the day-to-day things related to your job. However, I am talking about connecting with a mentor who is going to give you the hard and dirty, the stuff that teaches you how to pull up your sleeves to get through this work that needs to be done. Find that person. The person where you develop a level of trust that where you can tell them the crap you are going through, or the issues at hand. Find that person, and become close with them.

Moderators: Drs. Donna, Althea, and Taisha, on behalf of our group I would like to thank you for being candid in sharing your experiences and advice with us today. You are all appreciated for the work that you do to enhance the California Community Colleges system, your services to students, and for your contributions in developing future Black women professionals such as yourselves. We thank you.

**Results**

The internal fortitude and courage of the 15 women of this study transcend their experiences with racial microaggressions and has impelled them to be trailblazers and pillars within their institution and communities. This chapter describes the results of their
stories and experiences in correlation to the research questions and based on the theoretical framework surrounding the student as noted in Tables 2 and 3.

**“Here We Go Again”—Prevalent Lifelong Experiences of Racial Microaggressions**

As defined, racial microaggressions are common occurrences in the lives of people of color, and Black women administrators within this study are not immune to being recipients of these indignities, whether they be intentional or unintentional. The findings of this study demonstrate the lifelong pervasiveness of racial microaggressions that have been experienced by the women of this study. Participants in this study commonly experienced racial microaggressions throughout their careers, and presently experience them as senior and executive administrators within California community colleges and districts. This study also reveals that they are equipped to recognize, navigate, and address racial microaggressions within the community college system to continue to advance their careers and professional mission in services to students and the communities in they serve.

Women in this study understand that encounters with microaggressions are impossible to avoid because they are Black Americans. As Wura commented, “You can’t breathe without experiencing them, as a matter of fact you will experience them multiple times of the day. . . . Being African American in the United States you are going to experience them.” As women who ethnically identify as Black, they are situated in the Table 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Emergent Theme</th>
<th>Corresponding Question</th>
<th>Corresponding Theory</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“Here We Go Again”—Prevalent Lifelong</td>
<td>Question 1, Question 2</td>
<td>Microaggression theory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experiences or Racial Microaggressions</td>
<td></td>
<td>Black feminist thought</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Critical race theory</td>
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duality of their intersecting identities as Black and as women, yet their race precedes their gender identity in knowing that by virtue of being Black people, racial microaggressions are part of their daily existence in a post racial American society. Wura’s comments and sentiment are congruent with many of the women of this study. Racial microaggressions are part of the everyday lives of Black Americans and, in particular, Black American females.

Through lifelong experiences with racial microaggressions, the women of this study are keenly aware of the presences of racial microaggressions and how they arise throughout the day. As Natasha shared, “It is very subtle, but it is subtle and then it is overt. It is subtle in small phrases, small statements, and then it becomes overt when they keep repeating it and repeating it.” The nature of microaggressions are subtle. The manifestation of them may arise in small gestures and commentary; however, it is the collective summation of the subtle slights that transform the covert subtleties of microaggressions to overt manifestations of their pervasiveness. Wura shared:

Table 3

*Contextualized Findings of Racial Microaggressions*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subtheme</th>
<th>Message (Microaggression)</th>
<th>Underlying Message</th>
<th>Data Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“This is Not for the Meek”—Burdening Bearing</td>
<td>Question 1, Question 2,</td>
<td>Black feminist thought</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Question 3</td>
<td>Critical race theory</td>
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<tr>
<td>“Nobody Puts Baby in a Corner”—Resulting</td>
<td>Question 1, Question 2,</td>
<td>Black feminist thought</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>and Influence of Racial Microaggressions</td>
<td>Question 3</td>
<td>Microaggression theory</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“I’m Prayed Up”—Coping Strategies</td>
<td>Question 1, Question 4</td>
<td>Black feminist thought</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Microaggression theory</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ascription of Intelligence (Designating a limited level of intellectual capacity of Black women based on their race)</td>
<td>Black women are not intelligent enough and should be relegated to service roles</td>
<td>By virtue of their race, Black women lack academic preparation or abilities to teach or educate others in particular Whites.</td>
<td>“They just didn’t think we were prepared and the white kids had only seen us in subservient roles.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assumption of Criminality (Believing that Black women engage in criminal or illegal behaviors because of their race)</td>
<td>Financial resources of the institution must be secured when under the leadership of Black women</td>
<td>Black women are not to be trusted with finances of the institution as they have the tendency to steal and cannot be trusted</td>
<td>“We had White folks in this position for years. Once I got into it they decided we needed to have a safe.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pathologizing cultural communication styles (assuming the communication styles of Black women are subpar to the dominant/White culture)</td>
<td>Black women are not capable of speaking clear and concise English</td>
<td>Black women do not speak in a grammatically correct manner and it is difficult to understand their communication style</td>
<td>He said to me, “when we were on the phone I didn’t think you were Black, you sounded so articulate!”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Public Shaming (the act verbalizing demeaning slights toward Black women administrators in the presence of others placing her in a stance of verbal self-defense or causing shame, and embarrassment through insults) | Verbal slights that demean and belittle Black women administrators are acceptable behaviors with little to no reprimand regardless of one’s role in the institution | Black women in leadership roles should be reminded of their place of subservience and the notion of their position of authority does not negate them from being publicly demeaned or belittled or shamed | “While we were at the table, he [a subordinate] said to me in the presence of others—little Black girl thinks she is going to change the district”.
| Second-class citizen (The sentiment that Black women are not native to the field of education nor the institution) | Black women do not belong in educational environments and cannot serve as leaders within systems of higher learning | Affirmative action, equity, social justice, and diversity movements are the only reason why Black women are in leadership roles and positions of authority | “When I introduced myself as the Vice President, she said wow, that is shocking.” |

(continued)
Table 3 Continued

**Contextualized Findings of Racial Microaggressions**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subtheme</th>
<th>Message (Microaggression)</th>
<th>Underlying Message</th>
<th>Data Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Black women are unprofessional and cannot be accepted as equal counterparts or leaders within an institution</td>
<td>Black women are not professional in their appearance and are attitudinal in their disposition</td>
<td>Stereotypes and characterizations of Black women are true and relevant, they are loud, angry and ghetto by nature</td>
<td>“On one occasion she [White colleague] told me—that I couldn’t expect to be taken seriously with those ridiculous braids in my hair and that I’m just another stereotype of an angry Black woman driving a Mercedes.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foreigner/intruder to the field of education</td>
<td>“As a Black woman, you must have been hired because of your race and gender”</td>
<td>Black women as dual minorities are hired to meet diversity needs of an institution and not based on their ability to serve as leaders or educators</td>
<td>“They assume that the only reason I’m here is because I am Black, not factoring or taking into consideration my education, qualifications or the hiring process.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The term microaggression makes it seem like it’s just little; it’s just little cuts that nip at you, they’re actually not little. They are big. They occupy your psychological space; they distract you, because part of it is maintaining your integrity. I don’t mean integrity like your dignity. I’m talking about keeping yourself together.

Wura’s commentary illustrates the magnitude of the culminating impact of life long incessant microaggressions and the mental energy exerted by Black women to maintain their composure while being psychologically shifted. Women in this study expressed the required agility that is needed to remain focused while experiencing racial microaggressions both in their daily lives as Black women and more so in their professional lives as Black female senior and executive administrators within the California Community Colleges system.
Early Adolescence and Adulthood

While interviews were being conducted with participants of this study, the women brought to light not only to their experiences of racial microaggressions as working professionals, but the racial microaggressions they experienced in the early stages of their lifetime. Depending on their ages, these childhood experiences they shared were between 20-50 years ago.

The pervasiveness of racial microaggressions in particular in their manifestations as microinsults and microinvalidations are not new or unique experiences for the Black women in this study, on the contrary, they are common experiences that have continuously resurfaced throughout their lifetime. Sylvia recounted her experience with a high school teacher who doubted her ability to be accepted to an affluent PWI in her home state. The teacher referred her to apply to a school that was thought to be “easier” for admission and one with perceived lesser prestige than the PWI. This was in spite of the fact that Sylvia had a strong academic standing while in high school and had proven herself to be academically prepared for the institution of her choice. Sylvia recounted the story and shared:

I graduated number 50 in my class of 500, so I was a pretty good student and had some really good skill sets. My high school counselor said to me that I was not good enough to get into [PWI] . . . [it was] an insult to me that I didn't have the capacity, the mental capacity, the fortitude to get into [PWI].

Sylvia’s recollection of this experience accounts for the lived experience of Black women where perpetuators of microaggressions can be individuals who are situated as persons of authority or influence in their lives. In this illustration, unlike the relationship between an
employee and supervisor, the counselor served in a role of authority and influence. The counselor’s commentary proves to be a microinsult in the form of an ascription of intelligence assigning a lesser level of intellectual capacity to meet the academic standards of a White academic institution. As Sylvia alludes, this caused a moment of self-doubt in which she questioned her abilities and capacity despite the fact of her prominent academic standing amongst her peers.

Although these experiences can cast a shadow of doubt on the recipient of the microaggression, many women in this study have used these experiences to empower them to defy and dispute the beliefs of the perpetrator of unconscious microinsults and microinvalidations. Sylvia expressed her immediate sentiments and subsequent actions, and stated:

I was devastated. I was devastated because I'm 17, 18, years old . . . a person of authority just told me that I can't, when my mother, my mother has told me all along that I can and I will and I damn well better.

Similar to Sylvia, Asha stated:

I was puzzled when I was a freshman in college when I was struggling with the class and I went to my professor. I went at his office hours and said I’m here to talk to you about what you were teaching in class, and he kind of looked at me and he said what he doing here? I said, well I’m here to ask—he says, no, why are you here? I am not going to help you or anybody that looks like you. I was like, oh, okay got it. I was flabbergasted.

While the experiences of Sylvia and Asha are similar in that they both occurred during their adolescent years and the perpetrators were individuals that held levels of
authority in the realm of their educational lives, Asha’s experience differs in that the microaggression she experienced also encapsulated the element of a direct, deliberate, and conscious microassault. The professor’s verbal commentary was an avoidant behavior that was purposefully discriminatory against not only Asha, but all people who “look” like her. In this instance, those people are Blacks, both men and women. This representation of the old-fashioned manifestation of racism is rare in a post racial America; however, as experienced by Asha, they do occur and are experiences of young Black women in their development to adulthood.

Both Asha and Sylvia used these early experiences to propel them to achieve their intended goals despite the perpetuation of racial microaggressions from persons of authority and influences in their early years. Sylvia expressed:

And of course . . . you're too young to put on the boxing gloves and fight so you take it, but my subtleties were that I'm gonna do it myself. I don't need your help, I'm gonna figure out how to get to [PWI] on my own. And I did . . . I was absolutely devastated, but then I got determined.

The subtly violent infliction of microaggressions can create a combative subconsciously internalized response from the recipient, such as Sylvia’s, in her desire to fight back. Yet in situating herself in a submissive stance due to her younger age and position within the relationship as a subordinate to the counselor, she refocused her energy and used it to contradict the negative ascription of intelligence assigned to her by the counselor. Although jolted and devastated by the experience, as with other women in the study, she did not allow the encounter to stifle her pursuit and personal goals.

Likewise, based on her experience with her professor, Asha redirected her sentiments to
propel her motivation to succeed despite the avoidant and purposeful discriminatory verbal commentary made by her college instructor. Asha recounted:

I was flabbergasted, shocked but it made me more determined. I made it a point of making certain that I never needed to ask that professor another question and he would have to give me whatever grade I earned because there would be no question. That’s how I typically respond to that sort of thing. I’m going to show you that I really don’t need you, I can figure this out on my own.

Although Asha used this startling experience with her professor to reinforce her determination to succeed within the academic setting, this early experience also demonstrates an introduction of the withdrawal of interaction with an institutional authority. Later in the chapter, I will address the impact of relationships with perpetuators after experiences of racial microaggressions.

Because of their early experiences of racial microaggressions, the women of this study obtained an acute skill in identifying the subtleties of racial microaggressions. Natasha commented:

Now I know what it [racial microaggressions] is because growing up in this skin, my entire life you recognize when you experience it [racial microaggressions] enough, I don't care how subtle it is, you recognize it [racial microaggressions] enough you can say, this is what it is.

Natasha’s affirmation of her development as a Black person, asserts her racial identity and places an emphasis in the experiences of racial microaggressions being more so driven and identifiable because of her racial identity.
The early experiences of racial microaggressions leave a lasting impression with Black women, and remain part of their fabric of life. When asked how long these experiences remained with her, Wura poignantly stated:

For the rest of my life. It doesn’t mean that I am going to be mad for the rest of my life. But when you have these [racial microaggressions] things happen they influence you forever. . . . It is part of my life story now.

Wura’s comments affirms the lasting impression the racial microaggressions impose on the life experiences of Black women. These experiences that occurred while in their adolescence and young adulthood preceded the experiences in their professional careers and provided a foundational platform for future experiences that would inevitably become part of their life’s tapestry.

**Early Career**

As the lives of the women of this study progressed through adolescent high school years through their academic studies at colleges and universities, they may not have known that those experience would lay the foundation for future experiences as they entered the work world as new professionals. When discussing her early career, April described an experience of one of her first professional jobs prior to entering the community college system. She shared:

I worked for an attorney's office and I was on the phone with an attorney taking information for discovery. . . . I was on the phone with an attorney, gathering information from him and he was coming into meet with one of our attorneys in the office. And when he came in he was shocked to see that I was an African American woman and his comment was I had no idea that you were a Black
woman on the phone. You didn't sound like a Black woman. And I said oh well what does a Black woman sound like? And he says, well, you articulate very well. The first dilemma of racial microaggressions, *clash of realities*, is exemplified in April’s early experience and is confirmed by other women in this study. The seemingly innocuous and possibly well intended compliment from the perpetuator could be perceived by the attorney as a positive affirmation of her ability to speak clearly and succinctly. However, for April as a Black woman, this experience is perceived as a negative commentary, a microinsult in its denigration of her racial identity as a Black woman expecting that her level of verbal communication would be subpar due to her race and gender. Also, the fourth dilemma, catch-22, is highlighted in April’s early experience. Understanding her role as a clerk within an attorney’s office, her decision to address the microaggression through inquiry could have placed her employment in jeopardy. Furthermore, the perpetuator’s comment is representative of a microinsult in its pathologizing the communication styles of Black people as abnormal or noncohesive.

During the early careers of the Black women in this study, perpetuators of racial microaggressions were also experienced by individuals who were subordinates in their professional engagements. In the field of education, although a course instructor or a campus administrator does not supervise students in a work related capacity, students are considered as subordinates in the student to educator relationship. Faith shared her recollection of an early experience within her career at a California community college where the perpetuator of the racial microaggression was a student, and shared:

I was actually running a workshop on study abroad, and actually talking about a couple of countries that students might be interested in going to and these are the
reasons why and so forth and so on, and I remember a student challenging me, what do you know about that? Like you're from the ghetto, you don't know anything about that. What experiences have you had? And who gives you the right to tell me this is what I can expect to experience when I go abroad?

When asked how she responded to the student’s interrogation, Faith says, “I can't remember exactly, I just remember how I felt and I just . . . the word that comes to mind is strong, I felt raped.”

Faith’s early career experience of this environmental microaggression perpetuated by a subordinate student may have been intentional or unintentional. In either case, the microaggressive communication was a derogation of her racial identity and nullified her knowledge as a person of color who had experiences that were valid and noteworthy of sharing within this academic situational setting in her role as an academic authority.

Although Faith could not recall what her response was to that student, she did recall how she felt. During the interview, I noted the change in her tone, as she expressed the vulnerability of the feeling of being raped and publicly exposed in this early experience.

In the early career of Faith and April, their experiences highlighted instances where the perpetuator of racial microaggressions were either superiors or subordinates. In the following experience of Natasha, she shared a situation that was also common among the women of this study where their early experiences occurred through colleagues who were their professional peers. Natasha recounted:

I was the Vice Chancellor. . . . One of the members of the board of governors had asked for some information related to a bill or budget . . . And I provided it to them. . . . I didn’t think it was a big deal . . . [my colleague] he got in my face and
said, you know, I don’t know why you gave them that information. . . . That information should have been shared with me first before you just handed it over, and it was really aggressive. . . . I didn’t understand why he was getting this visceral reaction to me sharing information.

Natasha continued:

It got to the point where the chancellor called a meeting . . . the chancellor was just trying to say look I’m trying to get my hands around this, what seems to be the issue? I said, I really don’t know what I’m doing but it seems as though every time I try to do certain things that he’s thinks are his area I get a lecture from him. . . . I chose not to take him on because I knew if I had that it would be about me taking him on not about his behavior.

Natasha further elaborated:

I remember he was steadfast in that he had not done anything wrong, and so obviously, folks were over reacting and I was the only Black person in the room and everybody else in the room was White, and so once he just said, I don't think I have done anything wrong, it was dismissed. I knew then and there where I stood and what my place was.

In Natasha’s example, three of the four dilemmas of microaggressions are represented in this scenario that is reflective of salient early experiences of Black females within this study. First, the clash of realities is present because her colleague viewed his behavior as being void of any negligence or malicious intent, whereas Natasha sees his behavior as hostile and aggressive and his verbal commentary a rude manifestation of a microinsult to her ability as a vice chancellor to provide pertinent information at the
request of a member of the board. The second dilemma that is present is the *invisibility of unintentional bias*. The response of her peer affirmed his denial of his behavior and the acceptance of his affirmation by the other colleagues that were present in this meeting coordinated by the chancellor further exacerbated the formation of an environmental microaggression. This, in turn, culminated in the final dilemma represented in this scenario, which was of Natasha’s catch-22. As a Black woman, she sat at a table in the presence of others, yet she was isolated; she was the only Black woman at the table and with the dismissal of the behavior and treatment of her peer. A response from her could have been detrimental to her continued experience within the organization. From this experience, Natasha took notice of her positionality within the organization and her vulnerability within that environment.

**Present Career**

Ideally, it would be thought that as the women in this student excelled in their educational pursuits and career attainments, their experiences with racial microaggressions might dissipate. However, the findings of this study reveal that there is a high propensity for Black women senior and executive administrators to be recipients of racial microaggressions, specifically in the forms of microinsults, microinvalidations, and environmental microaggressions that intersect with microassaults, microinsults, and microinvalidation at systemic macrolevel. The women of this study are aware that their identities are situated at an intersecting juncture as both Black Americans and as Black women. By virtue of being Black and Black women, they are targets for the perpetuated subtle indignities of racial microaggressions as they reveal themselves in the form of microinsults, microassaults, and microinvalidations regardless of their positions within
the California Community Colleges system. They find their racial identity to be in question, their gender affiliation to be in question, and ultimately the capability to serve in leadership roles to be in question. “I’m working while Black and I’m working while Black female and so therefore my ability to lead or credibility gets called into question every single day,” stated Natasha.

Although the women have earned their way to the high ranking positions that they hold within these institutions of higher learning, the pervasiveness of racial microaggressions are part of their day to day experiences as senior and executive administrators within the community college system. All 15 women in this study expressed experiences of racial microaggressions in their current roles as chancellor, president, vice chancellor, vice president, associate vice chancellor, and associate vice president. In the experiences of the women in this study, although microaggressions are considered to be “subtle” and generally covert, the culmination of multiple racial microaggressions alters the subtleties of the aggressions. Despite their experiences of the barrage of racial microaggressions that are experienced daily by the women in this study, they have developed the skills to progress and excel within their field and block out the distraction of perpetuated racial microaggressions.

While the women in this study hold the highest positions within their institutions, their positional power of authority does not thwart the pervasiveness of the indignities of racial microaggressions that surface as microinsults, microassaults, and microinvalidations that would not be inflicted upon men of the dominant culture. As Wura, a campus CEO reflected:
Just the other day I was talking to the Vice Chancellor of Student Services on the system level. [They] proceed to try and to describe to me, and explain EOPS and the history of TRiO and how it’s funded. You don’t have to tell me that, I don’t know if you just assume I don’t know, I don’t know if you got to be in this President’s position by not knowing those kinds of things, I don’t know if you would describe that to a White man . . . That happens regularly . . . There have been lots of times where I have felt intellectually insulted.

Similarly, Asha shared, “In my role as a Vice Chancellor. I have been told that I need to know my place. I can’t imagine that being said to a White male, I can’t imagine that.”

Wura and Asha both provide examples of microinsults that either assigned a degree of intelligence to them based on their race or gender or conveyed an element of rudeness that was demeaning and caused them to question their experience in comparison to dominant culture within their institutional positions of leadership.

In addition to racial microaggressions being perpetuated by individuals of dominant culture and other ethnicities toward Black women administrators within this study, there is also the susceptibility for “intraracial” microaggressions that they experience from other Black Americans within their work environment. Recalling a recent experience, Justice recounted:

Most recently and probably the most hurtful, I was working with a very affluent vice president who is a Black male, and he was working with one of his Latina faculty members, and he basically said to me in front of that faculty member, “Lil Black girl thinks she can go down there and change the district” and laughed about it. . . . It isn’t necessarily only the things that you’re getting from your
White counterparts but it is also this notion that there is a competitive undercurrent; and there are these limitations of what’s available to us and I am unwilling for you to take my spot. So, I say things to keep you from being eager or assertive enough, or ambitious enough to take my spot.

Similarly, Faith recollects an experience involving a Black male faculty member who served at the same institution:

I get microaggressions from African Americans here. When I first started here, I remember walking across campus from the student center we had one African American full time faculty member, Dr. “X,” . . . You could look around there was nobody around it was just he and I . . . So when we met he said, we’ll see how long do you last. That is what Dr. “X” said to me. . . . I was shocked out of my mind, I kept walking, and it was like, no hi, how are you doing? Welcome to [California community college]. Who are you? Are you the new one? He obviously knew who I was. He just said, will see how long you last.

An added layer of intraracial microaggressions emerged particularly with Black women administrators who are viewed by other Blacks as having a lighter, less-melanated skin complexion. Shayla asserts her skin tone as being “the lighter shade of Black.” When asked to elaborate further on recent experiences of intraracial microaggression, she shares:

I’m experiencing that right now with a group of [Black] people that just put up barriers to me getting information, they just locked me out of the system, and they just decided I’m straight up not going to help you. I’m just not going to do it
because I don’t like the way you look. . . . They find ways to inform me of that in a very direct or subtle ways.

Based on the recent and distant experiences expressed by the three women, Black women senior and executive administrators also contend with microaggressive manifestation from other Black people within the organization. For the women of this study, their service as administrators within the community college system is often impelled by their desire to be of services to the Black community both within and outside of their institutions. Women of this study expressed the emotional pain that is added when intra-racial microaggressions occur within the race. The nature of racial microaggressions often consist with an element of surprise; however, the women of this study are aware and affirm that racial microaggressions are part of the daily existence as Black women administrators. With this acceptance and awareness, they are more so prepared to brace for the daily experiences of racial microaggressions. However, there is more of a paralyzing element of surprise when microaggressions are inflicted upon other Black people, which causes greater sadness, disappointment, and at times confusion.

In their current roles as senior and executive administrators, these women have experiences where their ability to lead and make decisions are often questioned and their authority is imposed upon by others within the institution. Natasha, a college president, shared a current situation as she seeks to add to a member of her presidential executive cabinet:

We are in the process of hiring a vice president of instruction right now and I have had faculty and staff come up to me and tell me who they think this person should be . . . but what is very interesting is, it has been done in a manner that will say,
well you know we want you to be successful, so to ensure that you’re going to be successful you really may want to go with this candidate because if you don’t and the faculty get too upset, we just, you know we don’t want that to reflect on your leadership. . . . So it is very interesting how involved folks will become in areas that are clearly within mine.”

A college president such as Natasha, in her role as the campus CEO, has the positional authority to determine who will serve as the Vice President within her executive cabinet. Although the intentions of subordinate faculty and staff may be well intended, they also may not be. However, despite the intentions they may have for providing their suggestions, it is ultimately the choice selection of the president, and in this case, a Black woman president to choose who will serve in this role. The faculty and staff interaction with Natasha illustrates the current pervasiveness of racial microaggressions in the manifestation of environmental microinsults and microinvalidations despite her role as the campus CEO. As Natasha alludes, Black women administrators may find it remarkable that others, including subordinate employees, will take the liberty to inform or guide the direction of their leadership. Other individuals within the organization will use their privilege to attempt to guide and direct the decision of Black women administrators. These acts demonstrate an insult to the position of the Black woman, her position, and her leadership. These behaviors also are an invalidation of the Black woman administrator’s ability to lead the organization.

While in their current roles, the women of this study were often recipients of doubts of others in their ability and their intelligence as people found it surprising that these women hold their positions in leadership within the community college system.
Erica reflected on feedback that was shared with her after obtaining her new role as a Vice President and the expressed perceptions of how others viewed her during her first few days on the job. She shared:

You know when you are the new person everyone is looking and trying to assess who you are. One of the comments [that came back to me was] . . . I heard, “. . . a lot of people think you are really great, they like you, they think you are nice and smart.”

Other women in this study, such as Erica, have a multiplicity of experiences in their present roles with the ascription of their intelligence assigned by others with the expectation of them being less intellectually capable and astute. Additionally, the reverberating feedback of being liked or likable lends itself to the microaggressive connotation of being an acceptable Black woman administrator who has not presented herself to be a stereotyped caricature of a Black woman who is either, angry, sassy, or too bossy such as the stereotypical “Sapphire.” As our interview continued, Erica stated, “I think as an African American woman, people see you and they definitely have stereotypes. You have to give off the impression that you are friendly and approachable.”

Women in this study have expressed their efforts to contradict stereotypes as an aversion from racial microaggressions that are subliminally motivated by stereotypes of Black women, Erica further shares:

I have consciously made sure that in any setting I come in, I am smiling. For a Black woman if you are not smiling they think oh wow “she’s mad” for me, I call it “the routine.” It has worked to my favor. I realized that this is the approach that
we need to take. Not to say that it is not sincere, but I just feel that others don’t have to do that.

Erica’s expressed sentiments are representative of other women in this study. At times, they may choose to alter the presentation of themselves to contradict the imposed bias and stereotypical categorization of Black women, which also results in racial microaggressions that can include not only the ascription of intelligence, but also the categorization of the Black women as a collective.

**Invalidation of Thoughts, Ideas, Intellect, and Abilities by Others**

A common experience of the manifestation of racial microaggressions within the college system for the individuals interviewed in this study is the invalidation of their thoughts, ideas, opinions and at times even their work. Based on the participants of this study, those that have over 20 years of experience within the community college system are evenly divided between whether their experiences of microinvalidations have decreased or increased as they have ascended within their career trajectories. However, this study confirmed that the experiences of microinvalidation persist. Wura, presently a college president, shared:

As a Vice President of Instruction and throughout my career . . . It would happen where I would say something and someone would say the exact same thing, and no one could hear it from me. . . . You know, how they don’t see Black people in the crosswalk. Sometimes they can’t hear it when we talk.

As expressed by Wura, microinvalidation can manifest itself in the form of invisibility and the muting of the thoughts, ideas, and opinions of the Black female administrator.
From these experiences, women in this study developed strategies to leverage their power of influence to funnel their thoughts and ideas through non-Black members within the organization. Wura shared:

One time I was the Vice President of Instruction sitting on the VPI Council and we were trying to do things to let people know about the predatory nature of the proprietary schools. I felt like the CIOs [chief information officers] needed to make a statement. I spent 20 to 25 minutes at this meeting trying to convince colleagues that we needed to have a spine and say something. Then, [Name of Colleague] a White male, a CIO from another college spoke up and said . . . “we really need to warn students about the predatory nature of the proprietary institutions.” . . . Then all the White people started to get right on it. I’m like isn’t that what I just said? And [Name of Colleague] said to me, “but they can’t hear it from you Wura.” And we strategized . . . okay “[name of colleague], then you say this . . . because they aren’t going to hear it when I talk.”

Employing the strategy of leveraging relationships to counter acts of microinvalidation of their thoughts and ideas, several women within this study recognized this as a measure to bring their ideas, thoughts, and opinions to the surface when they are actively being invalidated, muted, and made invisible. As Justice eloquently stated:

We are savvy individuals so every idea I got, I can move it through you if I want to, and I know that I will have success, I shouldn't have to, I shouldn't have to contort to the system to get that done, but for me if it comes down to students and it is something we really need I will go through you all day long.
In essence, the employed strategy is one that several women in this study referenced as a method used to move their agendas forward for the greater good of students and the institution. This effort also serves as a counter action of microinvalidations that negate their thoughts and experiential contributions.

What rests at the forefront of their efforts to contort to the system of filtering their thoughts and ideas through someone of the dominant culture is their persistence in getting their agendas moved forward for the benefit of students and the communities in which the colleges serve. In Sylvia’s example, she explained her experience:

I had such struggle with getting the district office top level administration to understand . . . there was always this push back, always something. It wasn't until I was nearly ready to leave that [they] recognized the value of the [idea] . . . now they talk about it like it is a revelation.

The microinvalidations of the thoughts and ideas of the women of this study are often coupled with microinsults of having the thoughts and ideas in which they have expressed to be dismissed, ignored, or challenged. Several women within this study expressed experiences where their thoughts and ideas were brought to fruition and times when credit for their work was taken by others. Justice highlighted the irony of ideas that she has shared with her constituents within the district that were either dismissed or ignored to be given credence at a later time. Justice shared:

I would say that there are many times that my ideas are challenged and quite frankly the irony for me is most of them that have been challenged you [are] turned around and much later you [they] implemented what the hell I've said. And for me that is the irony of it.
Shayla observed, “I find that people will pick up an idea that I have and will take it for themselves.” April further shared:

I have felt like other people have taken credit for some of my work and have gotten credit for some of the things I have done, and it really bothered me. . . . I felt like it was an entitlement like that individual felt like they were entitled to.

Overwhelmingly, Black women senior and executive administrators in this study experience blatant microaggressive invalidation of their thoughts and ideas, which are nullified and negated; inadvertently, the insult is more so afflicted when coupled with the ascription of their intelligent being relegated as subpar. However, embedded within several of the in scenarios expressed by women in this study, is a calculated gameplay in which Black women administrators prove to be more adept at engaging in the navigation of the microinvalidation of their thoughts to arrive at the end result of influencing others to achieve their intended goals.

**Public Shaming**

With modern day technology, public shaming happens through various mediums beyond the scope of work-related meetings with various members’ college or district communities present. The public shaming of women in this study occurred during meeting sessions, via social media platforms, and in email correspondence where various parties were present to unknowingly witness the perpetuation of racial microaggressions toward Black women administrators in an open forum.

In the case of Black women administrators in this study, public shaming is an act that attempts to enforce control or dominance. Public shaming serves as a reminder of the power structures and the authority that others have over the livelihood and career of
African American women administrators. The use of such tactics by the dominant culture within the higher education system may be unintentional; however, when discussing the Black woman in America, one cannot separate the history of the Black woman within the United States. Public shame is part of the experience of a Black American woman. The idea of being ashamed of oneself is not a popular thought or idea, however, subliminally there is a culture of shame from which Black women may choose to consciously separate themselves.

Some of the women the women in this study have been left vulnerable when confronted with acts of microaggression that involve the element of public shame, as they are exposed in the presence of others. Faith shared an experience she had that left her with a sensation that most people fear; while aspects of her story reflect stereotypes of being a Black American, the experience of being interrogated by a student in a classroom setting rendered her to recall not what she had done to respond to the student in that moment, but to recall how she felt in that public setting. Faith recounted, “I remember how I felt. . . . I felt raped . . . that is how I felt.”

Equating the act of public shame to the act of rape demonstrates the violation, indignation, and lack of regard for Black women administrators in open setting, which reflects environmental microaggression within the college community. In this instance, the environmentally microaggressive climate was upheld by a student as a subordinate to the administrator.

Asha detailed an experience in which public shaming was coupled with the underlying stereotype of the angry Black woman through electronic email correspondence. She described:
There was a VP that for whatever reason, she didn’t like me. . . . She sent an email one day which suggested that she was afraid of me . . . she didn’t like the way that I was communicating with her. [I was communicating] via email, factually based, very professional. She said that I was—and that’s essentially how I communicated it; matter-of-factly, “Here’s what government code says, so while I understand your perspective it’s essentially not correct.” She wrote an email and she included all of the VPs even though none of them have been involved, she sent it to the president of the college saying that she was afraid of me because I was being overly aggressive with her and that she didn’t appreciate the manner in which I was communicating with her; and how dare I think I can communicate with her in that way.

The underlying intent in a situation such as this was to openly expose and potentially jeopardize the career of Asha, which was done in a purposeful manner and can viewed in this regard as a microassault on her career. The stereotype of the angry Black woman is one that was reiterated several times throughout interviews conducted with participants in this study. Easily accepted characteristics of Black women are that they are angry, hostile, and aggressive. As expressed in the email correspondence discussed by Asha, the connotation that is connected with Black women as being aggressive is linked with the desire to confirm that they invoke fear, can be dangerous, and must be approached with caution under the protection of the presence of others. This assumption of criminality then becomes a stigmatizing personality trait that is assigned by the perpetrator to the racial microaggression.
When Justice shared her account of a meeting with her supervisor and other colleagues in which she voiced her opinion on a pending decision that would affect all of the colleges within their district, the open and public response from her supervisor invalidated her thoughts, ignored her opinion, and shamed her in the presence of others, including all of the district colleges’ Vice Presidents of Instruction and Student Services. Justice recounted:

My direct supervisor is sitting across from me at the other end of the table. . . . At the point which I got through expressing that [my thoughts], my boss looked at me and chuckled and said as if I don’t know that already. He then laughed with some folks at the other end of the room and carried on the conversation.

Justice continued to assert herself within the discussion. She inquired further with her supervisor and meeting attendees to clarify and address the issue at hand. The response she received from her supervisor in the open meeting session was, “I’m sure that if you put on your innovative hat, you can come up with a solution; you always have the answers.”

Justice insightfully dismantled the experience. She revealed the weight of those comments. She shared the culmination of the statement made as was weighed down by other occurrences of microaggressions throughout the working relationship between her and the supervisor, and the racial microaggressions associated with the stereotype of being a Black woman. Justice explained:

There is this notion that somehow because I’m vocal, I am well versed, that I have ideas about topics, that somehow I am a know it all. Somehow I come to the table
and because his perception is that you talk a lot, speak loud, you do all that and it
doesn’t make you right; and at the end of the day the buck stops with me.

Her interpretation sheds light on public shaming perpetuated by dominant culture within
the higher levels of the community college system to reaffirm dominance and superiority
over Black women administrators, despite the senior and executive positions they hold
within the organization. Public shaming of Black women administrators within the higher
educational system is exerted as an environmental racial microaggression intended
restrain and restrict relinquishing full control to Black women leading within the
organization. Even though there are moments where women of this study have felt
violated throughout their career trajectories and at present, they still persist and overcome
the challenging and oftentimes frustrating occurrences of microaggression that are part of
their everyday lives as administrators within the college system.

“This is Not for the Meek”—Burden Bearing

The burdening weight of navigating racial microaggressions, educating others,
and absorbing the mental and emotional toll of racial microaggressions is a load that is
carried by each of the women who participated in this study as experiences of racial
microaggressions do not evade them in their roles as senior and executive administrators.
There is a complex system in operation when these women are confronted with racial
microaggressions while performing in their roles as district and college administrators.
They first experience the racial microaggression, assess the racial microaggressions,
decipher whether it is rooted in race or gender, then decide if, when, and how to address
the perpetuator of the racial microaggression.

Black women administrators often find themselves in a conundrum where they
are the recipient of racial microaggressive attacks and then bear the sometimes self-
imposed responsibility to educate the perpetuator of the attack, teaching others to be culturally competent or sensitive in their acts of engaging in racially microaggressive behaviors.

**Navigating Racial Microaggressions**

Each participant of this study has encountered, addressed, and demonstrated the ability to navigate through their experiences of racial microaggressions. The navigation of racial microaggressions take root and form a foundation of mental occupancy that are housed in the thought processes of Black women administrators as they decipher how, when, and if to address racial microaggressions as they arise within their working environments. The women in this study demonstrate agility in traversing through an intricate maze of thoughts as they are confronted with a racial microaggressions and choose whether or not to address them. As Natasha shared, “If you are skilled, you learn to move through this, process of a lot of noise and distraction, and still do what you need to do.” As Natasha illustrated, racial microaggressions can serve as distractions, and women in this study demonstrated their ability to maneuver through them to meet their intended purpose of service to their institutions and the students in which they serve.

In deciding if they would move forward in addressing a racial microaggression, the women in this study often considered the status of their employment and if addressing the racial microaggression could cause an adverse impact on the positions they hold in leadership. As Rhonda shared:

> You have to deal with situations, situation by situation and you have to assess the cost and benefit of what you're going to say, when you're going to say it and who you are going to say it to. You don't want to jeopardize your career by saying
something to the wrong person . . . if it is somebody that you think may hold your position hostage or do something harmful to you.

The act of confronting a racial microaggression for the women in this study carries an additional weight that could have lasting effects on their careers. As Rhonda expressed, her consideration in when, how, and to whom to address racial microaggressions reinforces the fourth racial microaggression of the catch-22, in which the women of the student contend that addressing microaggressions at times may need to done with caution. As discussed in Chapters 1 and 2, Black women administrators are a vulnerable population within higher education systems as they are part of a marginalized community by virtue of being Black and being women. When confronted with addressing racial microaggressions when the perpetrator maybe a supervisor or a person in higher authority, there is an added burden of the possibility of the loss of employment should they choose to address racial microaggressions that have surfaced.

**Mental “Self-Talk”**

The women of this study make calculated decisions in how to proceed in addressing racial microaggressions within the environments that they work. There is a great deal of mental jargon that takes place shortly after experiencing a racial microaggression. Many of the women in this study identified this personal mental conversation as “self-talk.” In some instances, the self-talk that the women of this study engage in appears to be a mental checklist of questions that they use to decipher how to approach the racial microaggressive comments or actions with the perpetuator of the microaggression. Justice expressed a series of questions in which she personally
evaluates in deciding if, when, how, and why she may address an imposed microaggression:

I typically process internally first. . . . What do you [I] hope to gain by engaging in this conversation? Do you [I] hope to just give this person their package back to them, the burden that they placed on you? Do you [I] hope to transform them? What is your [my] goal? If you [I] hope to change them, do you [I] have the capacity? And how much do you [I] want to pour into that effort? . . . And then I think I try to wait for the right moment.

In Justice’s mental interrogation method of self-talk, her questions to self are fourfold. First, she engages in the attempt to internalize her personal desires by questioning if addressing the situation will be a gain or a loss to her. Her self-inquiry probes her possible intention to unload and return the burden of bias inflicted upon her by the perpetuator and not have their bias become part of her personal load. Second, she poses personal inquiry for the potential benefit of the perpetuator of the microaggression in questioning if she has hope of transforming or helping the individual to change additionally, she questions her ability to do so. Third, her series of self-imposed questioning is a reflective analysis of whether or not she may have the energy to endeavor in addressing the microaggression and aiding the perpetuator. And finally, the fourth element of her self-talk is calculating the timing of addressing the racial microaggression if she chooses to do so. In alignment with many of the women in this study, timing is important and the space in which microaggressions are addressed.

Other woman in the study such as Erica shared the burden of questioning the long-term impact of the working relationships with the perpetuators of the racial
microaggressions and the burdening responsibility to address stereotypes of Black women. Erica’s self-talk questions included, “Will I be working with this person often? Or is it just a throw away comment?” Erica continued to share:

There is also the question of how do I proceed as far as being here? Is this going to be a reoccurring thing? Or is this going to be a onetime encounter with somebody that I know I am not going to see again? Then taking that information and just keeping that in my back pocket. . . . I think it’s because of a lot of the negative images about Black women, it is really engrained in a lot of people to think that we are this sapphire, and we are going to go off at any moment.

In Erica’s self-talk, she and other women in this study contend with the catch-22 dilemma in questioning what the aftermath would be if she chooses to address the microaggression. Her inquiry also probes the possibility that if the incident of the experienced microaggression is not addressed, it will be a continual experience with the perpetuator. Additionally, Erica attributes the stereotype of the angry Black woman in her mental decision processing as to how she chooses to address the racial microaggression and mitigate the possibility of upholding the imagery of “Sapphire,” the angry Black women. In the context of the stereotypes of Black women, the weight of how, when, and if they should address racial microaggressions as they are presented is done with caution, since they also are cautions not to uphold the stereotypes that the dominant culture associates with the personality and characteristics of Black women.

The burden of the myriad of questions that the women of this study pose before addressing racial microaggressions often are dependent on many factors that include the personal value in which the woman places on the necessity to carry the burden of
addressing the microaggression or releasing it. Michelle mentions her self-talk questions can include:

How much does it mean to me . . . it depends on the audience, it depends on the circumstance, it depends on what the aggression is because you know some are more egregious than others and some you know you just can't let go. . . . It depends on the context, it depends on the audience, it depends on who is presenting it, who says it.

As illustrated by Michelle’s commentary, the mental agility that takes place during the process of self-talk for the Black women senior and executive administrators of this study also considers dependent factors such as the audiences, circumstance, context and the type of microaggression that is inflicted. Regardless, there is an extreme level of caution that the women must contend with that others are often times not aware of at all when dealing with racial microaggressions within the community college educational setting.

Women in this study also expressed the enormity of microaggression despite its terminology that eludes to the aggressive acts as being a small aggression that is experienced when the culmination of the microaggressions in the form of microinsults, microassaults, and microinvalidations take on a grand existence that occupies psychological space within Black female administrators. As Wura shares:

So even though it says it’s micro, it’s not, it’s big, it’s big! It is coupled with a sense of injustice. If you look at that sense of injustice, and put that on top of it, then you put the microaggression on, that’s the pain, the invalidation. Then you put on the things you are going to navigate around . . . am I going to let that
stand? . . . why is this man doing this. . . . Am I going to be the angry Black
woman? Or am I going to be a team player?

Wura further elaborates on the mental burdening of contending with racial
microaggressions and choosing to address them or not. In her reference of an experience
she had at an executive retreat, she concluded the continued impact of mental energy
exerted both during and what lingered after being triggered by a microaggression. She
continued:

Then the whole issue about what is just and not just. You put that on top of it,
what’s fair what’s not fair, what’s right what’s not right. Put that on top of it. Hell,
we are just talking about what chart were going to pass out to the board of trustees
in order to have this discussion. But by now that thing is loaded down. So that’s
why it stays with you, I’m still mad about it. It is still with me, and the retreat was
2 weeks ago.

Additionally, as expressed by Wura, the mental burden of having to rigorously question
why the microaggression occurred, why is the perpetuator inflicting the aggression, how
should it be addressed, and should it be addressed all carry a burden, and may lead to a
lasting frustration that is experienced by Black female administrators.

**Educating Others**

The women in this study recognize that others generally may engage in
perpetuating racial microaggressions unintentionally. With this understanding, Black
women administrators often assume the burden of teaching others who are less culturally
component or insensitive to the racial microaggression that they inflict. Abigail sheds
lights on her burdening navigation as a “teacher” to perpetuators of racial
microaggressions and her internal struggles in identifying teachable moments for the committer of racial microaggressions, when confronted with racial microaggressions within the profession, Abigail states, “Usually [I’m] more of a teacher. . . . I've learned how to be more of a teacher in a professional way without having to lash out.” As shared in the early sections of this chapter, experiences of racial microaggressions have been a continuous experience for the women in this study. Therefore, just as Black female administrators have learned to accept the engagements with microaggressions as part of everyday life, they have also learned that they have been burdened with the decision to choose to be teachers and educators to the parties that engage in microaggressive actions.

Due to the intersecting identity of Black women in the United States, the women of this study have lived the experience of being part of a marginalized group. When choosing to use occurrences of racial microaggressions as teachable moments they exhibit a level of empathy and sympathy in doing so. As Justice shared:

I never want to marginalize anybody because I know what it is like to feel marginalized. I don't want to embarrass people when I can avoid it because I know what it is like to be embarrassed. I don't want to demean or dismiss or malign, I don't want to do any of those things . . . especially if I'm hoping for some type of change.

The dilemma of invisibility of unintentional bias is a caveat of unintentionally racial microaggressions. When a Black woman administrator such as Justice chooses to accept the burden of engaging in a response to a microaggression as a teacher, like many of the women in the study, she proceeds with caution and a sense of empathy due to the potential unintentional bias that may have led to the microaggressive deed.
In Abigail’s current role as a Vice President, she has the rare opportunity to have a CEO/President who is also a Black woman administrator as her direct supervisor as the college President. Abigail finds that this relationship allows her to have an intimate level of mentorship and an opportunity to receive feedback on perceptions that she may have in deciphering whether or not to accept the burden of educating others of their microaggressive actions to bring awareness to them. Abigail reflects on a meeting with campus administrators and faculty and shared:

I find myself as an African American woman in leadership struggling in that balance, when is it a teachable moment? And I've been asking [CEO] this, when is it a teachable moment and when is it a moment of you [they] should know better? . . . Like you [they] should be ashamed. And I'm still trying to find that balance, right, because just because I get triggered, maybe it is a teachable moment.

In educating others of their acts of inflicting racial microaggressions, timing and safety is generally taken into consideration before women in this study choose to do so. After being hired for a position within an organization, Asha recollected her interviewing and screening process and noted that when she observed the new work environment and the hiring process, she realized that she had undergone a more rigid interview and screening process than others. In her case, she was interviewed several times by various entities within the organization. Additionally, shortly after being hired, she assumed the burden of transposing an experience that occurred during the process to a teachable moment. She shared:
I was interviewed by the recruiter, I was then interviewed by the recruiter and her supervisor, I was interviewed by the actual unit in HR and then I was interviewed by the director of HR. When I was interviewed by the unit what the manager of that unit said to me blew my mind; after the interview we were shaking hands and they said—well you’re certainly going to hear back from us, it was just so nice to meet you were so articulate—And I just said, thank you and went on about my business. What would you expect? I am highly educated, why wouldn’t I be articulate? That’s what I thought in my head, but my mother did not raise a fool so that was not the time to have that conversation with them, let me get the job first and then let me help you learn. I got that job and when I felt comfortable I said to my boss, do you member what you said to me that day? She didn’t remember. . . . I said you said to me that I was so articulate and immediately she understood how inappropriate that was.

It has been reiterated throughout the interviewing process by the women of this study that a primary microaggression that presents itself is the ascription of intelligence that assigns them to be assumed to have lesser intellect and an expected poor vernacular. These assumptions are rooted in the pathologizing cultural expectation that as Black people their communication styles are not normal and should be expected to be incorrect and unintelligible. As referenced by other women in this study, Asha took notice of this occurrence, and when the time became appropriate, she engaged the new supervisor in a moment of awareness. As Asha mentioned, shortly after bringing the incident to the attention of the new boss, they understood the gravity of their action, indicating that this was an unintentional verbal microinsult.
Wura details a similar situation in which she employed a teachable moment with her chancellor who repeatedly referenced a Black person as “articulate.” The incident occurred during a meeting session with several other executive members of the organization present. To ease the moment of educating the Chancellor, Wura used light humor, as she commented:

I, jokingly (because he’s my boss) say “pick another word, pick another word,” and he goes “what, what, why what’s wrong?” I said, “Well when you say articulate, and in particular when you’re talking about Black people then the underlying assumption is that we don’t expect you to be able to speak the King’s English, we expect you must speak Ebonics Like [why-you-be-doing], that kind of stuff. There is some history with that, and there is a load to it, it is loaded. In this act, Wura assumes the burden to address the microinsult at the possible detriment of her position. In turn her Chancellor replied, “’Wura, everything is not always about race!’ Before I even knew I said it, I said ‘[Name], let me tell you something. Everything is always about race!’”

Overall, the women in this study are willing and courageous enough to be educators and self-advocates when assuming the burden to be educators in addressing racial microaggressions. In the incident that Wura shared, all four dilemmas of microaggressions presented themselves in combination with her attempt to assume the burden bearing role as an education or in the moment. First, the clash of realities is depicted in this incident as the chancellor may view their comments as innocuous or well intentioned. Complimenting a person on their speech should be positive; however, in the view of Wura as a Black woman understanding the bias of dominant culture, she viewed
the comment as derogatory to Black people. Second, in the dilemma of invisibility of unintentional bias, when the chancellor was confronted by Wura, they reacted defensively and belittled Wura’s interjection on the reality of the importance of race. Third, the perceived minimal harm of the microaggression is demonstrated by the chancellor’s dismissal of Wura’s statement. Finally, catch-22 was seen when Wura accepted the burden of teaching her superior in the presence of other. As shared by other women in this study, the risk of addressing racial microaggressions can be costly; however, overwhelmingly the women in this study are courageous enough to do so.

“Mediocrity is Not an Option”—Having to Prove Herself

Due to prevailing assumptions as to why and how the Black women in this study obtained their roles and positions within the institution, they often have found the need to prove themselves in their roles and positions as other doubt their ability to perform the prescribed duties, roles and responsibilities. Asha shared:

For me as a Black person, a Black woman; I have to prove everything that I say. If I were a man, I would be accepted at face value. If I were a White woman, not necessarily at face value but I could say it a couple of times and people would accept it. As a Black woman they want me to give proof, you [they] want proof of everything that I say and even then when I give you [them] proof you’re [they’re] going to try to rip it apart. I’ve just grown to accept that that’s my reality.

Similar to the expressed sentiments of Asha, April shared:

As a Black woman I feel like . . . we have to work harder, we need to make sure that our work is 100% acceptable and then some. Good, how good is good enough? It has to be more than good enough because there are people that are
constantly looking at our work to see if we are qualified or how much capacity we have, and it is a point that has to be proven.

April’s elaboration of the notion that as a Black woman they must work harder and prove themselves is an added burden of responsibility that many the women of this study both acknowledge and accept as their realities as Black American women in leadership roles within the community college system. Despite having demonstrated earned academic degrees, a vast amount of work experiences, Natasha, a college president asserts that as African American women the underlying current within institutional culture requires Black women senior and executive administrators to be obligated to prove themselves at all levels of leadership when they are challenged by members of the organization.

You're still going to have people that just want to challenge you. You're still going to have people that are still going to say you need to prove to us that you, deserve the job, forget that you applied and you went through all of the process and you earned it.

Inadvertently, a prevailing reaction to the challenge of intellect and the ability of these women to perform in their roles often impel them to showcase both their abilities and intellectual prowess as expressed by Abigail:

They try to check you in a sense, check your knowledge . . . when I feel like I'm challenged that way, I actually come back even stronger because I'm super bright and super intelligent and so I show that, but very strongly . . . when I'm challenged intellectually, it is all on.

In addition to demonstrating their abilities and intellect through responses in addressing racial microaggressions where they are being challenged several of the
women of the study expressed their reliance in responding with fact based truth and data to defend and prove their case and arguments. Shayla shares:

    As a leader I have learned to trust my ability to deliver the facts. I am a person that seeks first to—I check it twice; cut it once. When I come back with a proposal I typically know my stuff really well, so I have to come to have confidence in my ability.

    Both Shala and Abigail illustrate what has been expressed by many women of this study. Black women senior and executive administrators with the California Community Colleges system understand the need of dominant culture for them to prove themselves, and they welcome the challenge because of their confidence in both their abilities and their intellectual capacity.

    **“Nobody Puts Baby in a Corner”—Resulting Impact and Influence**

    The women of this study share the common experience of racial microaggressions as part of their daily lives. These experiences of racial microaggressions meet the women of this study at the intersection of their strength and courage. Overwhelmingly, the Black women senior and executive administrators who participated in this study chose to be calculated in when and how they responded to racial microaggression; however, they mostly do address the behavior when they are backed in a corner and must do so. Abigail shared that over the course of her professional career, she has grown in her composure in addressing microaggressions with the college environment. Abigail expressed, “Nobody puts baby in the corner, I am unleashed, I am fierce because I choose to be composed, I choose to have a teachable moment, but if you gonna come at me funky, then that is a different story.” When she is placed in an uncomfortable situation, cornered by
microaggressions and the aggressor, she emphasized the importance of maintaining her personal integrity and avoiding any person or situation. She stated that she reaffirms to herself, “Don’t dim your light to make other people feel comfortable.” As the women of this study have reiterated, they understand that addressing microaggressions with the perpetuator may be uncomfortable but in choosing to not address the microaggression they may cause greater harm to themselves while allowing others to remain comfortable in their lack of knowledge of the harm they may have caused.

A common theme for women in this study was their exhibited confidence to advocate for themselves, address microaggressions directly, and build an exterior fortitude against the intrusion of microaggressions. Michelle shared her perspective on her acquired shield from racial microaggressions, “I can defend myself, and I really feel like I have built a shell and there are a lot of things that happen so often you [I] just getting sort of immune to them.” Yvette similarly stated, “You can’t wear your heart on your sleeve, you have to have thick skin.” Rhonda shared, “You need to address them then and there, I may have to take a different strategy or approach in how I address people because people get amnesia or more importantly they don’t realize they are doing them [microaggressions].”

**Institutional Attrition**

Women in this study expressed an overall sense of fearlessness upheld by their constructed protective shields created through their knowledge of self, the belief in their value, and confidence in their ability to move on to other opportunities. The Black female administrators interviewed attest that racial microaggressions adds an additional layer of complexity to their overall all engagement, work related experiences, and interactions.
Ultimately, depending on the general work environment and level of support they may or may not have, Black women administrators may consider institutional experiences of racial microaggressions in their decisions to remain, resign, or retire from a community college or district office. Sylvia affirms:

When you come to the realization or the reckoning that you're going to be okay, then you turn, you create an armor actually. If you are afraid or fearful of what the outcome will be, what will happen to you, will you get a job? Will you keep a job? Will you stay employed? All of these what ifs. If you are fearful of that, then you don't ever develop armor. And you need that armor to be able to say, I'm gonna be okay.

The ultimate impact to the employee and employer relationship informed by experiences of racial microaggressions within an institution is the departure of the Black woman senior or executive administrator. When deciding to leave her previous place of employment, Asha shared:

When you can't effectuate change you, have a decision to make, you reach a fork in the road where you need to decide, do I want to stay here and accept that . . . this is how it is, or do I want to go somewhere else. For me I made a deliberate choice, I need to go somewhere else.

In general, women in this study who have worked over 25 years in the community college system, such as Grace made an intentional decision to retire for several reasons that included the evidence of microaggressions. Grace contends that after a long reign with her career, she would allow it to conclude on her terms without fanfare from the perpetuators or microaggressions. She shared:
I didn't want a public dramatic ending to my career. I was really thinking about how I wanted my career to end and I staged it the way I wanted it to go and I was fortunate I think in being able to do that under those circumstances.

Black women senior and executive administrators at California community colleges who participated in this study largely encompassed an internal strength, fortitude, and pride in the manner in which they serve within their roles and how they choose to address microaggressions, even within the final hours of their employment within the institution.

**Self-Doubt, Silencing, and Frustration**

Several of the younger women in the study expressed recent experiences with racial microaggressions that presented themselves in the form or microinvalidations and microinsults to their intelligence where the perpetuators were persons in higher authority. These reoccurring experiences began to influence levels of self-doubt in their abilities and career potentiality. April expressed:

> It just disheartened me because it almost made me feel deflated, this is as high as you're going to go . . . no matter how many letters you have behind your name, this is just it. . . . I had really settled into a place of complacency.

April continued:

> I started doubting myself, I started doubting myself, for the higher positions, I was doubting myself . . . for a moment, my abilities and my intellect and started second guessing and thinking maybe that is why they didn't offer me the job or put me in an interim position, you know for the moment.
In addition, several of the younger women in the study recollected recent periods of self-doubt. Others such as Abigail expressed her feelings of withdrawal and isolation as a result of some of her experiences that demonstrated microaggressive behaviors. Abigail said, “I shrunk back and I just wanted to hide. I still did the work and kept getting accolades, but I was tired of the hits.”

Similar to Abigail’s response in her feeling of withdrawal and the desire to isolate herself, another form of self-withdrawal that can impact Black women administrators is the silencing effect, when someone decides to withdraw their contributions of their thoughts, ideas, or opinions. Justice disclosed:

There’s this ongoing interaction I’m having with myself at the same time; there is the self-talk . . . you know you want to say that . . . but this isn’t the environment; I you know they need to hear that . . . but they are not ready. So you’re constantly trying to negotiate what’s appropriate in the environment and sometimes suppressing or silencing yourself. For me and I won’t generalize across my community; but we almost to some degree silence ourselves in many instances.

Yet on the contrary, Justice also represented sentiments of the women in this study in their belief that it is their responsibility to not be silent, as it is crucial that their voices be heard in representation not just for themselves but for the communities in which they serve and represent. They do not take it lightly that they are in positions of power and influence, and they choose to consciously not silence their thoughts, ideas, or opinions in moments where they must be inserted. These women will most likely use their voices not as much for their sake, but for the sake of others who they deem as more vulnerable. As Justice shared:
It is a burden, you know, it is a burden if I'm being really, really being honest, it is a burden that I gladly carry, but it is definitely a burden and it is because of the consequences of not carrying the burden. You know when I'm in a meeting and I'm talking about a Black history month and a White man is saying, isn't that a dated term? If I silence myself in that moment, what is the perception or the experience of those that are witnessing that silence? And so I'm always being mindful of those things, so you're always in your head, you have a few conversations happening at once because you're trying to negotiate always, is this the right thing to say, would it be impactful, okay I'm balancing that, skip it I'm going to say it and I'm going to deal with the consequences, and there are always consequences.

Justices statement implies the catch-22 in addressing microaggressions, but the need to be a voice to advocate for students is one that the women in this study hold closely. The experiences of racial microaggressions that lend themselves to self-doubt, withdrawal, and silencing render an overarching theme of frustration for many women in this study. As a Black person, Wura stated:

I say this all the time, when we get home Black people, we be tired. I mean you just didn’t have to be the college president; but you had to be the Black college president. You had to get through the day! We just be tired.

As expressed by Wura, exhaustion and frustration are common experiences of the women of this study; however, they know and understand that incidents that involve microaggressions are part of their daily existence as Black people.
Recognition of Knowledge of Self-worth, Value, and Identity

Inadvertently, experiences of racial microaggression may cause a positive impact on the affirmations of self that resonate with the women in this study. To address racial microaggressions while in their positions of leadership as senior and executive administrators within the community college system, the women of this study had an overwhelming sense of self and a developed identity that shields and arms them in their ability to navigate racial microaggressions. The women of this study were centered and grounded in their identity and their intrinsic motivation and purpose to be of service to their community while in their roles of leadership in the California Community Colleges system. Many of the women of this study expressed the importance of being centered, grounded, and focused on the intended purpose of their service.

In knowledge of self, faith in a supreme being is placed in high regard for many of the women of this study. Grace shared:

> It is just my deeply held beliefs that I know that nothing will happen to me, and I believe this, nothing, I will have no experience that I am not strong enough to stand, I know that in my soul, the deepest part of me, I know that. So when all of this stuff happens, I'm not going to sit and wilt like a little flower now I'm going to let you know.

The recognition and knowledge of their identity is of value in affirming their personal identities as women and to also fortify their ability to perform in difficult roles and to handle adverse situations. Wura contended, “In order to do this work, I had to understand that this is not for the meek.” Women in this study expressed the challenges of the work
that they performed and confirmed that it must be understood that the work is not easy and self-awareness is necessary as Black women administrators.

The women of this study are keenly aware that having knowledge of themselves as women, Black women and administrators is imperative to allow them to persevere in their roles as campus administrators. The confidence and awareness that they have of who they are and what they represent provides them with a shield and armor that prepares them to address the day to day challenges that are posed by their leadership roles and positions within these organization.

The women of this study have an acute awareness of who they are and what their intended purpose is within the organizations in which they lead. The scarcity of Black women within the positions of leadership in which these women hold impel them to be firmly grounded and rooted in their own identity and to value the importance of their voices at the institutional tables where decisions are made that impact the college system at large, particularly the African American student populations and the surrounding communities. As Justice stated, “At the end of the day my decision is to stay strong, be authentic and use my voice for good. And if that means challenging others and dealing with the consequences, that is what I have to do.”

Being affirmed in their identities is an integral part of how the women of the study address racial microaggressions, how others interact and engage with them, and how the women choose to engage in interact with others. As Sylvia shared:

By virtue of being Black, you have to be affirmed in who you are because if you're not affirmed in who you are it is very easy to let things pass by you or to let things happen around you and you suck it up or you don't address it. . . . I'm
gonna catch that ball and I'm gonna throw the ball back. So, being an African American woman, I had to . . . to be aware and to be affirmed in who I am, and to not be afraid to be who I am.

As Sylvia shared, the awareness of self-enabled the women of this study to be confident in addressing both racial microaggressions and the perpetrators of them. Additionally, Sylvia’s sentiments of intentional focus and purpose resonated with the statements of several women in this study. The women in this study recognize the value and necessity of maintaining their identity and their intended focus of service to their communities. Sylvia eloquently referred to this as having your “North Star.” Sylvia shared:

As an African American woman in this work, you have to have a point, you have to have that thing that centers you right back to where you need to be because the forces are all around you and the microassaults and the microinvalidations and the microinsults could easily come in and set you up off course, set you off kilter but you have to go back to your North Star.

For the women in this study, their North Star is represented by their intrinsic motivation and obligation to the Black community in which they serve. Similar to the expressed sentiments of Wura, the task of performing in these senior and executive leadership roles within the system of community colleges is a daunting and difficult task to do successfully. From Sylvia’s perspective, “If you don't have a North Star, you need to find it because this work is brutal, it is ongoing, it is hard, it is relentless and you have got to be that kind of person.” The women of this study exuded a certain level of authenticity and courage.
Some women of this study found that their demeanor and their ability to posture themselves deflected or negated actions of racial microaggression. This observation was more evident in older women who participated in the study. Sylvia shared, “My posturing put people in a place that they just didn't go there with me.” As Sylvia reflected on her growth and ability to voice her opinion and confront racial microaggressions and issues she faced within the system, she articulated her revelation of being satisfied with whatever outcomes may lie ahead. Sylvia expressed:

When you come to the realization or the reckoning that you're going to be okay, then you turn, you create an armor actually. If you are afraid or fearful of what the outcome will be, what will happen to you, will you get a job? Will you keep a job? Will you stay employed? All of these what ifs. If you are fearful of that, then you don't ever develop armor. And you need that armor to be able to say, I'm gonna be okay.

Undoubtedly without armor, the common and frequent experiences of racial microaggressions have the ability to cause deterioration in the self-esteem and self-worth of the Black woman in these roles. The occurrence of racial microaggressions is constant, pervasive, and present at all levels within these institutions.

“I’m Prayed Up”—Coping Strategies

The women in this study each serve in complex, multifaceted leadership roles within in the California Community Colleges system. The Black women senior and executive administrators who participated in this study expressed the challenges of their roles, in addition to the challenge of operating amid the pervasiveness or racial microaggressions. To deal with both the challenges of their positions and their unique
experiences of racial microaggressions. Their coping mechanisms generally consist of their spiritual relationship, their faith in God, and the support provided through family and friends.

**Spiritual Relationships, Family, and Friends**

The findings of this study demonstrate that Black female community college senior and executive administrators are courageous and often bold in their choices to address racial microaggressions despite potential repercussions. Grace proclaimed, “I have a very strong faith and see fear cancels faith so I don't have no fear because I have faith.” Grace asserted the notion that faith provides her with the courage to disregard fear in her actions to serve as an administrator and to address acts of microaggressive behavior.

For many of the women in this study, their spirituality, prayer, and faith served as a venue to release challenging or negative experiences that they may have had to contend with throughout the day. Asha affirmed:

I make a conscious effort to turn it off after I get to a certain point. I pray, and I have a personal relationship with God and I have friends that I can talk to about life. I talk a lot to my sister about the things that I experience because you would think . . . wow, I would never have imagined that something like that could happen.

Similarly, Rhonda proclaimed, “I’m prayed up before doing the act of coming in this building.” In addition to prayer in support of family, friends and loved ones were of significant importance for the women in this study. As April shared:
God is in the center of my life, He really is. And my husband is very supportive. I have a strong family support. My husband, he has really been my back bone. I can go home and I can talk to him about it and he listens.

The availability of loved ones to talk to and about their daily experiences is a cathartic and clarifying necessity for the women in this study. It allows them to release the challenges of the day. As Justice reflects on her relationship with her husband, she shared:

Justice, I talk to my husband . . . he balances me because I can be very passionate and over the top. . . . He brings a lot of kind of clarity situations about how much I should own it? And so you know talking through things, thinking through things.

Dialogue and communications prove to be a critical part of coping for the women in this study. Often times these intimate conversations are between the Black women administrators and those closest to her. Abigail added, “I'm a family girl . . . I have to go home, I take it to my family and I share with them I really do, I take it to my people and just kind of talk.” Similarly, Michelle expresses, “I have a couple of friends that I talk to who are also in positions of leadership that I speak with regularly.” Both statements by Abigail and Micelle illustrate overarching theme that shared innermost discussions that these women have tended to be with members of their personal inner circle.

Additionally, the women in this study demonstrated that the influence of both their spirituality and wisdom of their familial elders play a significant role in their ability to cope as college administrators with boldness and courage, even if it may mean forgoing career status or an opportunity. Justice shared:
My grandma told me don't be afraid of a job, don't be afraid, don't be afraid to lose it, because then you will always stay there no matter whether it feeds your spirit or not, so you have to know when it is not for you, and so that has always been my perspective and I think it is why I always feel a little bit more confident speaking out because if my fate is... you going to let me go, then that is what my fate is and I'm going to have to figure it out from there. We come from survival, so you know, I am going to bounce back, and I’m going to be okay.

Familial and their personal spiritual relationships allow the women in this study to cope with the responsibilities of their employment as college administrators and manage their experiences with microaggressions by perpetuators and within the environments that they serve.

**Institutional Allies and Mentors**

Having institutional allies and mentors within and outside the college or district provides the women in this study and added layer of protections and perspective within their roles as it pertains both to their positions and their experiences with racial microaggressions. The women in this study significantly stressed the importance of allies and mentors. To better cope and maneuver through microaggressions that they contend with as Black women, as Micelle stated, “It is important that you have allies in your work.” Likewise, Natasha expressed, “You need to find people who support you in the role, outside of the role, and so that you have that level of support you need to continue to move forward.” Additionally, Wura confirmed the backing she has as the college president, “I am supported by wonderful chancellor, a board who really supports me and appreciates the work that we do.” Furthermore, Wura contends the importance of having
mentors and support outside of the institution as well, she shares to help prepare for experiences of racial microaggressions that will ensue. Wura urged to:

Know that racial microaggressions will happen so be prepared for them. The first time you have some kind of microaggression where someone calls you “the angry Black woman,” you know that is going to happen, so be ready for it. Talk it through with people, do “what if” scenarios look at other people.

Wura further shared how she addressed obtaining mentorship and coaching. She shared:

I paid attention to one woman, I didn’t necessarily always agree with her or what she was doing, but I always saw how successful she was in prevailing so I paid attention to her. I paid attention to her; how she used her voice; how her posture was; how she moved her hands; what she did, what she did when she sat down, I paid attention to everything about her. Then I took what I needed, and left the rest.

I also hired a coach, because when I became a president I knew that if I didn’t do this (hire a coach), I was going to cuss somebody out, because I loved the curse (laughter). So, I saw this woman she was elegant diplomatic, and I said I want you to coach me.

Like other women in this study, obtaining mentors and being surrounded by people that took confidence in the women’s abilities was a common theme. Faith shared, “I encircle myself or encapsulate myself with people who I know, know that I can do the job, and I'm going to have to start hearing some of that.” Additionally, women in this study expressed that mentors are necessarily other Black women, as Yvette elaborated:

I have mentors that are made up of different ethnic and racial backgrounds who I use, you know, I tap their brains for this scenario or that scenario and feel
comfortable saying, you know this is how I felt or this is this what they meant by this? And they can give me a different perspective.

The women in this study expressed that mentors within and outside of the institutions help them to successfully navigate the challenges of their role and the challenges they face when confronted with microaggressions. As Wura stated, as a Black woman senior or executive administrator, “We do not have the luxury of mediocrity.” Understanding that mediocrity is not an option for the women in this study, they actively engage in investing in themselves and surrounding themselves with supportive mentors to allow their continued success as community college administrators.

Through constant encounters with racial microaggressions, the women of the study have developed an armor of protection that allows them to maintain their roles and positions. It also provides them with the fortified protection of self-worth and self-value that provides them with the notion that based on their knowledges, skills, and abilities they can consciously make the decision to leave positions within an institution as they are not fearful of the outcomes based on their knowledge of self and their abilities.

**Summary of Findings**

This chapter presented the unique experiences of Black women senior and executive administrators and the influence of racial microaggressions at community colleges in the state of California. Through the conceptual framework of CRT, Black feminist thought and microaggression theory the data were analyzed to bring voice to the experiences of Black women administrators. The data were organized with themes and subthemes that arose through analysis and comparison of transcribed semi-structured interviews.
The 15 women who serve as senior and executive administrators provided details of their experiences of racial microaggressions both prior to and during their careers as administrators at California community colleges. Although the women of this study contend with insidious and pervasive experiences of racial microaggressions use coping strategies to aide them in their successful continued journey as college administrators.
CHAPTER 5—SUMMARY, DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS, AND CLOSING

The intent of this constructivist grounded theory study is to explore the experiences and impact of racial microaggressions on the career trajectories of Black women senior and executive administrators at California community colleges. Within this study, it was imperative to seek the silent meanings and glean an understanding of the experiences of racial microaggressions on the career paths and trajectories of Black women administrators in California community colleges. With the mission to distinguish emerging themes, I conducted semi-structured interviews with 15 Black women who have served as senior and executive administrators at California community colleges. All 15 of the participants in this study have experienced racial microaggressions both prior to and during their current roles as senior and executive administrators as chancellors, presidents, vice chancellors, vice presidents, associate vice chancellors, and associate vice presidents within the California Community Colleges system.

This final chapter provides a summary of the study, qualitative method used, the employed data analysis procedure, and a summary of significant findings in this research study. A discussion of the four research questions is provided and an examination of the selected conceptual frameworks that provided the lens for this study. Implications for practice are outlined for California community colleges and Black women who serve in senior and executive positions and those who desire to do so in the future. This chapter is finalized with limitations and recommendations for future research on Black women senior and executive administrators at California community colleges.
Summary of Study

This study materialized from a personal objective to unearth the experiences of racial microaggressions in respect to Black women senior and executive administrators at California community colleges. Through investigative scholarly inquiry, I discovered that although there is a growing body of research related to racial microaggressions toward students of color on college campuses (Nadal, 2008; Solórzano et al., 2000; Sue, Capodilupo, et al., 2007) and some research pertaining to Black women in corporate leadership (Holder et al., 2015), very little research has been conducted in regard to Black women, and specifically Black women administrators within California community colleges. Subsequently, there is a limited knowledge of the experiences and impact of racial microaggressions on the career trajectories of Black women administrators.

Additionally, this study sought to understand, examine, and illuminate the experiences of Black women senior and executive administrators. As we develop the understanding that if their experiences with racial microaggressions are not published, discussed, and addressed, the perpetuation of racial aggressions against Black women administrators will contribute to their attrition from California community colleges. As asserted by Aguirre (2000), Dowdy (2008), and Turner and Meyers (2000), hostile work environments in which Black women work can impede their persistence in academia. This study was conducted to halt racial microaggressions as a contributing hostile factor in the erosion of Black women from California community colleges as institutional administrators.

The significance of this study is that it examines how racial microaggressions influence the career experiences and trajectories of Black women who are senior and
executive administrators at California community colleges. To gain an understanding of the influence of racial microaggressions, the following research questions guided this study:

1. What are the salient experiences of Black women senior and executive administrators who experience racial microaggressions at California community colleges?

2. How do racial microaggressions influence the experiences and career trajectories of Black women senior and executive administrators at California community colleges?

3. What strategies are employed by Black women senior and executive administrators at California community colleges to overcome racial microaggressions to ensure career advancement and success?

4. How do support networks impact the successful retention of Black women confronted with racial microaggressions within the California Community Colleges system?

This study sheds light on how racial microaggressions influence the career trajectories of Black women and coping strategies that they employ. It also contributes to the limited body of research on Black women senior and executive administrators in postsecondary education, and how racial microaggressions influence the retention and attrition of Black women and the environmental climate of the institution.

Qualitative inquiry was used to facilitate this study for several reasons. First, the nature of the research questions that guided the study was best suited through this approach. As noted by Creswell (1994), qualitative research pursues what and how
questions to get a deeper understanding of an observed phenomenon. In the study, I asked, “What are the salient experiences of Black women senior/executive postsecondary administrators who experience racial microaggressions at California community colleges?,” and “How do racial microaggressions influence the experiences and career trajectories of Black women senior/executive postsecondary administrators at California community colleges?”

Qualitative inquiry also allowed me to explore the topic in detail through interviews. I conducted qualitative face-to-face interviews with participants. These interviews involved unstructured and generally open-ended questions that were few in number and intended to elicit views and opinions from the participants (Creswell, 2009). While using the methodological approach of constructivist grounded theory, I used a reflexive stance to analyze my research, experience, decision, and interpretation, and how those elements and assumptions informed my research study.

Throughout the research process, I had to embrace the “messiness” inherent in the research process (Charmaz, 2009). The belief of constructivist grounded theory is that the researcher cannot develop knowledge from a neutral point of view; they encourage an open and continuous effort to maintain reflexivity during the entire research process (Charmaz, 2009). Constructivist grounded theorists attempt to enter, understand, and describe both the stated and silent meanings of the experiences of the participant of the study. To do this, researchers must “break open” the assumptions of the participants and themselves and examine them (Charmaz, 2009). Throughout the data collection and analysis process, I took notice and thoughtfully reflected upon instances when participants had a noticeable change of emotion during data collection interviews or when
there was cautious apprehension in addressing questions that could further expose themselves or others.

The qualitative approach of constructivist grounded theory provided an understanding of the examined phenomenon of the experiences of participants in the study. The coding techniques I used included initial coding, focused coding, and axial coding. During initial coding, coding is done without having preconceived concepts in mind (Glaser, 1978, 1992). Initial coding was kept open ended but it still acknowledged my ideas. In the facilitation of my study, I employed the use of initial coding through my interpretation of individual, in-person, semi-structured interviews by actively coding interviews line-by-line from transcripts that were created after each participant interview session. In focused coding, the most significant or frequent earlier codes were used to sift through and analyze large amounts of data. Focused coding required decisions about what initial codes made the most analytic sense to categorize data incisively and completely (Charmaz, 2014). The strategy of utilizing focused coding allowed me to bring clarity to define emergent themes from the extensive amount of data collected throughout the interview process. In the works of Strauss and Corbin (1990, 1998; Strauss, 1987), they presented the third type of coding, axial coding, to relate categories to subcategories. Axial coding specifies the properties and dimensions of a category (Charmaz, 2014). Strauss (1987) views axial coding as building “a dense texture of relationships around the ‘axis’ of a category” (p. 64). Axial coding provided me the opportunity to crystalize the categories and subcategories of the themes that emerged from the data and laid the foundation to bring voice to the participants. Then finally, as part of the employed
constructivist grounded theory approach, constant comparison of the data was conducted understanding and interpretation of experiences and situations that were shared.

During the data collection process, I audio recorded all interviews. Each audio recording was transcribed verbatim for data analysis. As part of the data analysis procedures, interviews were coded for themes utilizing initial coding, focused coding and axial coding. Initial coding was closely related to the data with words that reflect action. Focused coding was used based upon emerging patterns derived from initial coding. I employed axial coding to create a systemic strategy of bringing the data to coherency through sorting, synthesizing, and organization the collected data. Data were analyzed using constant comparative methods (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). This method allowed me to compare data to data in search for commonalities and differences.

To organize the data from the 15 Black women, I coded the data in organized chunks (Rossman & Rallis, 1998) using Dedoose, a secured web-based application. This allowed me to analyze data within its context. As a result, 528 pages of interview transcripts were analyzed, nearly 3,000 codes were applied, 745 excerpts were identified, and 266 duplicate codes were created. A code is a word or short phrase that captures the essence of the data received during the interview process (Saldaña, 2012). Code words or phrases were assigned to transcripts. After the data had been transcribed, coded, and analyzed, I created categories, after which themes emerged based on this process. The following themes emerged based on the experiences of the 15 women who participated in this research study.

Within the qualitative analysis of this research study, I made all judgments about coding, categorizing, decontextualizing, and recontextualizing the data (Starks &
Trinidad, 2007). In constructivist grounded theory, the researcher engages with the analysis as a witness to the accounts of the data. Even as the researcher immerses herself in the data, she must be honest and vigilant about her own perspective, preexisting thoughts and beliefs, and developing hypotheses (Starks & Trinidad, 2007). Seeing that I am a Black woman with professional career interests similar to those of the participants of this study, I consciously separated my personal assumptions or experiences that could sway the data. The use of bracketing is one method to identify any preconceptions or personal knowledge (Lopez & Willis, 2004). The use of bracketing was critical as I created distance between my personal thoughts and opinions to become a nonparticipating conscious observer to the experiences of the women in this study. Although in constructivist grounded theory researchers engage in the self-reflective process of bracketing, whereby they recognize and set aside, but do not abandon, their prior knowledge or assumptions (Gearing, 2004). I remained aware of my perspective through writing memos throughout the analysis. Additional reflexive practices include consulting with colleagues and mentors and writing memos throughout the analysis to help analysts examine how their thoughts and ideas evolve as they engage more deeply with the data (Cutcliffe, 2003). Memos also serve the function of establishing an audit trail, where the analyst documents her thoughts and reactions as a way of keeping track of emerging impressions of what the data mean, how they relate to each other, and how engaging with the data shapes her understanding of the initial hypotheses (Cutcliffe, 2000). This process allowed me to bring voice to the perspectives and experiences of Black women senior and executive administrators within the California Community Colleges system.
The theoretical frameworks that were comprised in this study were CRT, Black feminist thought, and microaggression theory. The experiences of Black senior and executive administrators are unique, and differ from the experiences of men and women of the dominant culture. Finding and applying theoretical constructs that are appropriate for explaining and understanding the experiences of Black women can be challenging (Howard-Hamilton, 2003). Furthermore, it is important to understand why the experiences of African American women are different from those of other women, and that the experiences of African American men are steeped in the historical progression and ideology of Black people in the United States (Howard-Hamilton, 2003). Selecting appropriate theories for understanding the needs of African American women should be based on their cultural, personal, and social context, which clearly differs significantly from those of men and women who have not experienced racial and gender oppression (Howard-Hamilton, 2003). Both CRT and Black feminist thought address the intersection of the dual identities of Black women. Theoretical frameworks that offer promise for understanding the intersecting identities of African American women and explaining ways in which their needs can be addressed effectively are Black feminist thought and CRT (Howard-Hamilton, 2003).

Utilizing the critical race theoretical framework in this study allowed me to view race and racism as prominent elements within this study. Solórzano et al. (2000) contend that the CRT framework simultaneously attempts to bring to the foreground race and racism in the research and challenge the traditional paradigms, methods, texts, and separate discourse on race, gender, and class by showing how these social constructs intersect to impact communities of color. As applicable to Black women administrators
within this study, renowned critical race theorist, Crenshaw (2002), acknowledges the interaction of race and racism as they intersect with gender. As Crenshaw (1993) states, although race and racism are at the center of critical race analysis, we also view them at their intersection with other forms of subordination such as gender and class discrimination. This is significant due to the intersecting identity of Black female administrators leading within California community colleges.

Furthermore, in alignment with CRT, placing the experiential knowledge of the women in this study was paramount in bringing voice to their lived experiences as Black women. Critical race theory recognizes that the experiential knowledge of people of color is legitimate, appropriate, and critical to understanding, analyzing, and teaching about race subordination (Solórzano, Allen, & Carroll, 2002).

Black feminist thought was used in this study to frame the lived experiences of Black women administrators within the California Community Colleges system. This theory provided a voice and rationale for the perspectives of how the Black women in this study contend with experiences of racial microaggressions. Black feminist thought was appropriate for this study as it intends to bring voice to the lived, unaccounted, and common experiences of Black female administrators. Because of their limited access, African American women’s stories are often unknown and untold, which, in turn, has adversely impacted their ability to completely understand their place, value, and contributions within a domestic and global context (Collins, 2009).

For the purpose of this study, it was critical that I used theoretical frameworks that emphasized the juncture of identities as related to the Black women in this study. Similar to CRT, Black feminist thought acknowledges the intersections and impacts of
race, gender, class, and politics on the lives of African American women (Collins, 2000). According to Collins (2002), at the core of Black feminist thought is the concept of standpoint, which suggests that the inherited struggle against racism and sexism is a common bond among African American women. To better understand and conceptualize the experiences of Black women administrators as it applied to their intersecting identity, Howard-Hamilton (2003) summarizes Collins’ (2002) three themes in Black feminist thought:

First, the framework is shaped and produced by the experiences Black women have encountered in their lives, even though others have documented their stories. Second, although the stories and experiences of each woman are unique, there are intersections of experiences between and among Black women. Third, although commonalities do exist among Black women, the diversity of class, religion, age, and sexual orientation of Black women as a group are multiple contexts from which their experiences can be revealed and understood. (p. 21)

I applied this framework to the Black women in this study at California community colleges, as it crystalized how Black women administrators effectively contend with the wide array of microaggressive indignities such as racist attitudes and behaviors that are encountered in their daily campus and district experiences (Howard-Hamilton, 2003).

The use of microaggression theory allowed me to have a focused view on the detail intricacies of the experiences modern day racism in the form of racial microaggressions that have been lived through by the 15 Black women in this study. Microaggression theory (Sue, 2010) is a philosophy that frames contemporary
discrimination in the United States and many other parts of the world. As shared in Chapter 3, each of the Black women senior and executive administrators of this study are Black Americans with experiences of racial microaggression that are primarily based in American culture and in the context of U. S. historical origins of racism. Microaggression theory is a model of understanding modern and subtle discrimination in the United States and throughout the world (Torino et al., 2019).

In this study, I used the original taxonomy for racial microaggression that created categories of and relationships among racial microaggressions (Sue, Capodilupo, et al., 2007). The taxonomy included the categorization of racial microaggressions as microinsults that are often unconscious; microassaults, that are often conscious; and microinvalidations, that are often unconscious (Sue, Bucceri, et al., 2007; Sue, Capodilupo, et al., 2007). Additionally, to bring clarity to characteristics of racial microaggressions experienced by Black women in this study, I applied the exemplified manifestation of racial microaggressions within the original taxonomy. The authors of the original taxonomy (Sue, Capodilupo, et al., 2007) include: (a) ascription of intelligence—assigning a degree of intelligence to a person of color based on their race, (b) second class citizen—treated as a lesser person or group, (c) pathologizing cultural values/communication styles—the notion that the values of communication styles of people of color are abnormal, and (d) assumption of criminal status—presumed to be a criminal, dangerous, or deviant based on race.

A vital element of microaggression theory that I employed throughout this study was the application of observing and noting the reactions and of the women of this study and the imposed dilemmas of those interactions. Microaggression theorists assert that
there are four dilemmas of racial microaggression with which recipients of microaggressions must contend: (a) clash of realities, which describes the conflict that arise when people interpret situations differently; (b) invisibility of unintentional bias refers to the idea that people are socialized with dominant group norms and believes, which results in implicit bias toward various marginalized groups; (c) perceived minimal harm of microaggression, the false notion that the impact of microaggressions is minimal and such experiences do not cause much grief or damage in people’s lives; and (d) catch-22 of responding to microaggressions involves the difficulty in addressing microaggressions, especially given the possible consequences (Nadal, 2018; Sue, Capodilupo, et al., 2007).

Through the lenses of CRT, Black feminist thought, and microaggression theory, I sought to bring light to the experiences of Black women administrators and how racial microaggressions influence the career experiences and trajectories of Black women senior and executive administrators at California community colleges.

Through this process, four themes and 14 subthemes were identified based on the experiences of racial microaggressions in the lives and careers of the 15 women in this study. Table 1 provides the emergent themes and subthemes reflective of the experiences of the study. The first emergent theme focuses on the prevalent experiences with racial microaggressions in their roles as senior and executive administrators within the California Community Colleges system. The women in this study assert that experiences of racial microaggressions are common and are to be expected by virtue of them being Black women. For the women in this study, experiences of racial microaggression have been constant and consistent throughout their lifetime both personally and professionally.
The dominant forms of racial microaggressions that are present in their experiences are microinvalidations and microinsults. Microinvalidation often presents itself in the negation of thoughts, ideas, experiences, and existence of the women who participated in this study. Additionally, the manifestation of microinsults was prevalent in the ascription of their intelligence as Black women in when others may assign her to a lesser degree of intelligence and aptitude to lead within the organization.

The women in this study are situated in a complex predicament within their roles as senior and executive administrators who encounter racial microaggressions in the community college system. The second theme is centralized within the scope of burden bearing. The women in this study are burdened with the task of navigating through racial microaggressions as they must apply mental agility in identifying the microaggression, internalizing the experience and then deciphering how, when, and if to address the perpetuator of the microaggression that has been inflicted. The women in this study also bear the burden of contemplating when and if to educate others of the ramifications of the intention or unintentional forms or racial microaggressions that are imposed by the perpetuator. Additionally, unique to their experiences with racial microaggression, the women in this study provided multiple insights to experiences of racial microaggression that occur in open settings or public spaces within the organization.

The third theme in this study encapsulated the experiences of the resulting influence of incessant experiences of racial microaggressions that have contributed to transitional career decisions for women in this study. Although racial microaggression may have not been the sole reason for departure, resignation, or retirement, the pervasiveness of experiences by superiors where contributing deciding factors for several
women in this study. The personal influence of racial microaggressions within the lives of Black women administrators contribute to their thoughts of self-doubt, feelings, of frustration and silencing themselves within the institutions in which they choose to no longer insert their ideas, thoughts, or opinions. Additionally, in an arbitrary manner, experiences of racial microaggression inadvertently caused women in this study to be more reflective in affirming their self-worth, value, and identity.

Finally, the fourth theme that developed illuminated the coping strategies that the women in this study employ and rely on to process and overcome the detrimental impact of racial microaggressions. Overwhelmingly, the participants of this study expressed their steadfast commitment to providing service for the benefit of students and their success. An overarching sentiment for their intrinsic motivation is to be present to positively impact policies and practices that benefit the community of students that are served within their intuitions. To this end, it is important for the women in this study to engage in strategies that allow them to cope with their unique experiences as Black women senior and executive leaders. Personal relationships with their spirituality, family, friends, mentors, and institutional allies play a significant role in contributing to the support of the women in this study.

Discussion

The experiences of racial microaggressions as they pertain to Black women senior and executive administrators at California community colleges is minuscule in its availability in published literature. This study avails itself in the need to reveal and disclosure of the influence of racial microaggressions as it pertains specifically to Black women within California community colleges and is transferrable to other institutions of
higher learning. In the following sections, I will expand up the research questions and the dominant themes that emerged in alignment with the literature and theoretical framework that guided the research study.

**Research Question 1: What Are the Salient Experiences of Black Women Senior and Executive Postsecondary Administrators Who Experience Racial Microaggressions at California Community Colleges?**

As referenced in the literature review, racial microaggressions refer to the everyday subtle and often automatic putdowns (Pierce et al., 1977) and insults directed toward Black Americans. They vary on a continuum from being intentional to unintentional (Torino et al., 2019). Black women senior and executive administrators at California community colleges experience frequent unintentional racial microaggressions consistently throughout their career and while in their positions as senior and executive administrators. The manifestation of racial microaggressions are particularly noted in the forms of microinsults specifically in relation to the ascription of their intelligence in that others assign a degree of intelligence to a person of color based on their race (Sue, Capodilupo, et al., 2007). It is a common experience for others to verbally communicate lowered expectations of the intellectual prowess and adeptness to their ability to lead. Sue, Capodilupo, et al. (2007) note the pathologizing of communication styles of Black people, which insinuates that the communication styles are abnormal. Although all of the women in this study have earned advance degrees from accredited institutions of higher learning, it is usual that others unintentionally express sentiments of astonishment of their academic accomplishments and their verbal communications styles that are generally clear and coherent.
Racial microaggressions as a form of modern day racism are burrowed in old-fashioned racism and they are akin to aversive racism. Dovidio and Gaertner (2004) describe aversive racism as the conflict between Whites’ denial of personal prejudice and underlying unconscious negative feelings toward and beliefs about Blacks. However, in the experiences of Black women senior and executive administrators, their experiences of racial microaggressions are not solely inflicted by White people or those of dominant culture. The experiences of perpetuated racial microaggressions occur through microaggressive acts facilitated by ethnic groups outside of the dominant culture including other by other Black people. Although stereotypes of the angry Black women are prevalent in the career encounters of women in this study, gender based microaggressions were not typical. However, the evidence of gender-based microaggressions was more prevalent with interactions with Black men as the aggressors of gender based microaggressions toward Black women in this study.

Consistent with existing literature, microassaults are less prevalent in the day to day lives of people of color and the women in this study. The empirical literature today implies that covert racism has declined; however, it has been reconfigured and has a different presentation of itself. The body of literature on the morphing of racism suggests that while old-fashioned racism has declined significantly, it has manufactured a new face. It is more covert, has become implicit, and is not under conscious control (Dovidio et al., 2002; Jones, 1997; Sue, 2010). On the contrary, Black women senior and executive administrators have reoccurring experiences of microassaults that manifests themselves in the form of public shaming during institutional meetings; open forums or via electronic email correspondence in which others are permitted to view or participate in their
reprimand; interrogation; or confrontation of the women being challenged by superiors, subordinates, or peers. This form of microassault causes Black women in this study to either respond in a manner of self-defense or it elicits the engagement of institutional allies to defend her in the presence of the aggressor(s) and others who inflict the microassault. The complexity in the response of Black women administrators when confronted with an act of public shaming is burdened with her mental and emotional internalization of the occurring incident and her conscious desire to avoid the pitfall of responding in a way that depicts the stereotypical caricature of her as the angry Black woman who is hostile or aggressive. Additionally, Black women administrators, when choosing to self-defend, contend with circumventing the perception of not being a team player because they have chosen to advocate for themselves.

Despite the layered complexity of responding to the microassault, the women in this study tend to strategically respond to such incidents. Because of their noted extensive experiences of racial microaggressions throughout their adolescent years into their adult careers, they recognize that racial microaggressions are prevalent and pervasive. They understand that these experiences are to be expected, and they have become adept in their preparation to address them. Over time, they have developed an instinctive ability to recognize, internalize, and the respond to the act of microassaults. They will decipher the best approach in addressing the assault based upon who the aggressor is, where the microassault has taken place, and when the response should take place. Although there are several variables that determined the response from Black women senior and executive administrators in this study, overwhelmingly they chose to respond and address the matter. Consistently, women this study asserted that their ability and intuitiveness to
do so has either developed over time, or it has been an inherent characteristic that they have always held.

**Research Question 2: How Do Racial Microaggressions Influence the Experiences and Career Trajectories of Black Women Senior and Executive Administrators at California Community Colleges?**

As mentioned, perpetuations of racial microaggressions are prevalent in the experiences of the women in this study at California community colleges. Scholars contend that individuals that experience racial microaggressions may exhibit various symptoms that include anxiety, depression, mental stress, lack of confidence, loss of drive, sleep difficulties, elevated blood pressure and heart rates, risk of heart attack, hopelessness, rage, and anger (Holder et al., 2015; Howe-Barksdale, 2007; Mazzula & Campon, 2019; Root, 2003; Solórzano et al., 2000; Sue, 2010; Sue, Capodilupo, & Holder, 2008; Torres et al., 2010). Most women in this study concur that these experiences of racial microaggressions have contributed to physiological responses such as increased blood pressure, imposed mental stressors, and solicited emotional reactions such as feelings frustration and anger.

Although women in this study have had successful career ascensions within the California Community Colleges system, for several of them, racial microaggressions were contributing factors in their decisions to resign, retire, or redirect their career paths altering their career trajectories. Consistent with existing literature, experiences of racial microaggressions within California community colleges contribute to creating a toxic and adverse work environment for women in this study. Researchers note that hostile work environments in which Black women work can impede their persistence (Aguirre, 2000;
Dowdy, 2008; Holder, 2015; Turner & Meyers, 2000). The developments of unfavorable work environments edified by experiences of racial microaggressions contribute to influencing the career trajectories of several Black women senior and executive administrators in this research study. Women in this study contend that experiences of racial microaggressions are discernable at various hierarchical levels within the institution. Black women in this study maintain consistently with the literature that experiences with racial microaggressions occur where the perpetrator of the microaggression are subordinates. Kim et al. (2019) assert that in the workplace people must contend with microaggressions from those who are in junior roles. Additionally, women in this study are confronted with racial microaggressions afflicted by peers. As stated by Sue (2010), peer-to-peer microaggressions occur between individuals who occupy equal status relationships in the organizational chart, but do not necessarily experience an equal amount of power and influence. Finally the most impelling element of hierarchical racial microaggressions that has contributed to the Black women in this study that considered their experiences with racial microaggressions as a contributing factor to their resignation, retirement, or redirection of their career path is the perpetuation of racial microaggressions from supervisors or those in higher authority within the organization. As the literature illustrates, when microaggressions are enacted by supervisors or superiors, people of color have a lower job satisfaction, institutional commitment, self-esteem employees describe lower life and job satisfaction, organizational commitment, morale, motivation, self-esteem, and work and family life satisfaction (Cartwright et al., 2009; Kim et al., 2019; Sue, 2010). Based on the evidence of their knowledge of self-worth and value that the women of this study hold, such
interactions with racial microaggression have caused women in this study to remove themselves from environments with pervasive racial microaggressions where the perpetrators are those in higher levels of authority.

**Research Question 3: What Strategies Are Employed By Black Women Senior and Executive Administrators at California Community Colleges to Overcome Racial Microaggressions to Ensure Career Advancement and Success?**

Consistent with the literature, religion and spirituality are coping strategies employed by Black women to safeguard themselves from the impact of racial microaggressions (Bacchus, 2008; Holder et al., 2015). For the Black women in this study, religion and spirituality serve as mechanisms to alleviate stress through the meditation of prayer and to create an element of compassion and forgiveness for those who may intentionally or unintentionally cause harm to them. Religion and spirituality were centralized themes for the 15 Black women in this study as the connectedness that they gain to a supreme being allows them to achieve a greater perspective of overall needs within the community college system. Their relationship with religion and spirituality situates them in a self-sacrificing predicament for service to students. The women in this student have a strong will and intrinsic motivation to serve students, in particular they have an affinity to help support Black students through the work they do and by virtue of their presences within the institution, which demonstrates to Black students that they can be Black, educated, and successful. The religious beliefs and spiritual connections empower the women in this study to remain grounded and focused on the bigger picture, which for them is always service to students and not service for
themselves. As such, they sacrifice themselves and set aside the triviality of racial microaggressions to move their agendas of service forward.

Additionally, the Black women senior and executive administrators in this study found the support of family and friends proved to be essential in their ability to cope with encounters of racial microaggressions that occur in the roles as college administrators. As referenced by Holder et al. (2015), Black women engage in a process of questioning their perceptions when faced with racial microaggressions. In these instances, Black women senior and executive administrators in this study employ the support of close family member, friends, and mentors to aide in deciphering the experience. The interaction between family, friends, and mentors serve the women in this study as venues for clarification of their perception of a possibly racial microaggression but additionally as expressed by women in this study the communication with family, friends, and mentors provide a cathartic cleansing in releasing the experience and providing an opportunity for them an outlet to expel feelings of anger or frustrations that may have been acquired through the perpetuation of a racial microaggression.

Research Question 4: How Do Support Networks Impact the Successful Retention of Black Women Confronted With Racial Microaggressions Within the California Community Colleges System?

Support networks are a critical element in supporting the retention of the Black women senior and executive administrators who participated in this study. These networks of support are essential tools women in this study used in their roles as college administrators. For the women in this study, these networks served as channels for support when confronted with racial microaggression within the institution. The women
in this study expressed that support networks such as family, friends, mentors, and institutional allies were imperative to their success and retention within the colleges. In accordance with Holder et al. (2015), institutional allies are essential in supporting the inclusion of Black women within the organization. Networks of support for the women in this study served as coping mechanisms both inside and outside of the community college environment. These networks provided them with a reprieve from the challenges of contending with the pervasiveness of racial microaggressions. Additional networks such as mentorship provide women in this study with strategic advice in support of their career transitions. Scholars contend that support networks help to protect Black women from the humiliation, marginalization, frustration, and the diminishing impact of lowered self-esteem that can be imposed by racial microaggressions (Franklin, 1999; Franklin & Boyd-Franklin, 2000; Holder et al., 2015). Women in this study expressed that the support networks that they relied on provided them with a source of empowerment and encouragement. These networks also helped validate their experiences and value to the community college system as a whole.

**Implications for Practice**

The findings of this study provide several practical implications for California community colleges who seek to be intentional in their efforts to create and institutional culture that is environmentally safe for Black women senior and executive administrators within the institution. Implications for practice are also provided for Black women who serve as senior or executive administrators or those who aspire to ascend to those roles.
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The nature of racial microaggression are that they are rooted in racism and are often unintentional acts, deeds, or expressions based upon deeply entrenched unconscious bias. California community colleges would benefit from an overall institutional cultural shift in the manner of which all individual within the organization are provided opportunities to become informed, aware and conscious of their biases toward Black women and how they may unintentional or intentionally expresses racially derived microaggressions toward Black women senior and executive administrators. The burden to teach, educate, and inform others of their racial microaggressive actions should not be the sole responsibility of Black women senior and executive administrators as they too in their occupational roles have duties to perform that should be done without the mental oppression of internalizing and navigating racial microaggressive behaviors of subordinates, peers, or superiors.

Human resources and campus diversity offices. To create a sustainable culture of systemic change, California community colleges must make a conscious effort to eradicate the presence of insidious manifestations of racial microaggressions toward Black women administrators. Human resources, in collaboration with campus diversity and equity offices, should create a strategic plan that initiates with the colleges marketing of the instructional as an organization with no tolerance for informed negligence in deliberate acts or deeds of microaggressions. The plan should also include the facilitation of a training program that teach new members of the organization about racial microaggressions and allow new members of the organization to confront, acknowledge, and become aware of their personal biases toward Black women and others. Individuals
with employment interest within the organization should know where the colleges position on its commitment to creating safe spaces for Black women.

Upon a candidate’s offer for a position within institutions, the mandatory requirement for participation in the institutionalize training for racial microaggressions should be reiterated as a contingency for employment within the organization. Once the new employee has been onboarded and has completed the initial training, all employees should be required to participate in diversity and inclusion trainings that reinforce recognition of one’s personal biases and allow individual to reassess their behaviors of racial microaggressions toward Black women and how they contribute to or take away from safeguarding a positive workplace for Black women administrators.

**Network expansion opportunities.** Colleges must invest in providing network expansion opportunities for Black women senior and executive administrators. Often times, Black women senior and executive administrators will not have a peer among their rank within and institutions. Funding and time allocations should be made for Black women to participate and engage in networking opportunities where they can meet and engage with other women who contend with similar issues within their institutions. Consideration of theses network expansions should get beyond the intuition’s regions and the state of California. Membership fees for participation in the National Council on Black American Affairs (NCBAA) should be supported by the intuitions on behalf these women. The NCBAA is a council of the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC). The organization serves as a collaborative voice and promotes the success of Black administrators. Annually, NASPA – Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education hosts the African American Women’s summit. Black women senior and
executive administrators should be supported in their participation and attendance to further expanded their networks of support. Additionally, the Thomas Lakin Institute for Mentored Leadership is facilitated by the organization’s Presidents Round Table (PRT) that is a consortium of Black community college presidents and chancellors that mentor and support Black administrators serving in community colleges throughout the nation. In addition to the national scope and perspective that these opportunities would provide to Black women senior and executive leaders, they also offer regional opportunities that would expand their networks while in closer proximity.

**Increase the recruitment, retention, and completion rates for students.** When California community colleges create safe spaces with minimal experiences of racial microaggressions the attrition and dissatisfaction of Black women senior and executive administrators will decrease and because of the retained presence and influence of Black women administrators within the colleges the retention and persistence of Black college students will increase as well. Black women play a significant role providing a much need perspective on how to support Black students. Additionally, the presence of Black women senior and executive administrators within the California Community Colleges system serve as motivation and inspirations for Black students who aspire to advance academically or professionally. As noted in Chapter 1 of this study, the California Community Colleges system has taken a documented stance to support marginalized groups of students, inclusive of Black students. To best use the state's resources in its investment in Student Equity, the colleges must also consider the role that Black women administrators play in supporting the statewide effort.
Black women administrators. There are significant implications for Black women administrators and those who aspire to ascend in their career trajectories within the California Community Colleges system who are confronted with racial microaggressions. The women in this study were explicit in providing wisdom for Black women within the California Community Colleges system who currently serve or aspire to serve in senior and executive roles of leadership. As demonstrated by their current success, the knowledge of these women is monumental value.

Maintain personal relationships with family, friends, and mentors. Black women must accept that racial microaggressions will happen. The maintenance of close personal networks will be needed to provide support in debriefing, venting, and deciphering the experiences of racial microaggressions. These personal relationships will also serve as outlets and a source of relief from the mental stressors induced by racial microaggressions. Black women need to have personal networks available to them to decompress and discuss their experiences. These personal support networks with those closest to Black women senior and executive leaders also provide accompanied outlets to enjoy the recreational outlets of life and to help put into perspective they experience in a grander scheme. Developed and sustained relationships with mentors should allow for candid situational conversations in which mentors can shed light or provide alternative perspectives for Black women. Additionally, mentors can also serve as practical guides to help prepare for microaggressions and how to address them when they arise.

Self-investment. It is imperative that Black women invest in themselves and advocate for institutional investment in their personal and professional growth and development. Black women senior and executive administrators must take time for self-
care through mediation, exercise, and a healthy diet. Black women must also take time to read literature that uplifts them as Black women and working professionals. These women must strive to learn and value their worth in an effort of creating an exterior armor to thwart the pervasive impact of racial microaggression that will inevitably arise. Finally, Black women must invest in their abilities to address racial microaggressions so they do not fester within in them and cause mental, physical, or emotional harm.

**Implications for Future Research**

The following implications for future research have developed based my interest to know more about topics that arose during the research process. As existing literature contends there is a growing body of research about racial microaggressions against students of color on college campuses (Nadal, 2008; Solórzano et al., 2000; Sue, Bucceri, et al., 2007; Sue, Capodilupo, et al., 2007). However, very little research has been conducted in regard to Black women. Future studies pertaining to Black women and their experiences of racial microaggressions would assist in increasing the scarcity of knowledge that is currently available.

**Intraracial Microaggressions**

During several interviews with women in this study, in group racial microaggression among Black people were identified, in particular intraracial microaggressions perpetuated by Black men toward Black women. Additionally, consideration for future research related to intraracial microaggression should consider how intraracial microaggressions impact and influence Black women and their persistence within the institution, and the influence of microaggression perpetuated by members of marginalized communities from within the group. Often within the
community college system in California there are very few if any Black persons at the helm of the organization. Some women in this study expressed the notion that because there are so few Black people, there is a high propensity for some individuals within the group to become territorial in occupying positions of leadership or authority.

**Developmental Ability to Address Microaggressions**

Future studies would benefit empirical knowledge in understanding how Black women develop their ability to recognize, internalize, process and address racial microaggressions. The women in the study have been successful in their career journey’s and they recognize and accept racial microaggressions as persistent experiences that will occur throughout their daily lives both personally and professionally. To increase the retention of other Black women, knowledge of how Black women senior and executive administrators developed their ability to address racial microaggression would be benefits for organizations and Black women as well.

**Microaggressions and Intersectionality**

Black women have two noticeable intersecting identities, they are both Black and women. However, the intersection of identities can include multiple dimensions. Implications for future research would benefit from future studies that investigated the experiences Black women who are disabled, Black women who are immigrants, Black women who are of various religions faiths, and Black women who identify with the LGBTQIA Community. As our society diversifies, so do the intersecting identities of Black women within college campuses.
Closing

The intent of this dissertation was to illuminate how racial microaggressions influence the career experience and trajectories of Black women senior and executive administrators at California community colleges. I sought to bring voice to the lived experiences of 15 successful Black women community college administrators and their experiences with racial microaggressions. Over the course of 3 months, with travel throughout the state of California, I strived to unearth an understanding of their encounters and the influences of pervasive microaggressive behaviors. The women in this study were candid, honest, fierce, and fearless.

Despite of their experiences of racial microaggressions, the women of the study have progressed to senior and executive roles within the community college system, so it is evident that the pervasive occurrences throughout their lifetimes did restricted them from their career ascension; however, they have influenced decisions along he career paths and how they choose to interact and engage with others within the institutions.

In addition to navigating the political system within their colleges and district offices, the women of this study are also faced with the challenge of navigating racial microaggressions and addressing them and yet they do so with pose, ease, and grace.

Within their roles, they operate under a microscope of scrutiny; notice is given to their every action, from the style of their hair, the tone of their voice, the expression of their face, the clothes they select, and the company that they keep. Often times, the assumptions that are made based upon these women’s physical characteristics and attributes will precede the relevance of the value of their intellectual capacity, academic achievements, and work-related abilities. Before they present who they are and what they
bring to an organization, there is an existing barrier constructed by bricks of bias that are cemented by stereotypes that must be penetrated to allow the talents they possess to be brought to the surface.

As Black women in these roles, they are more than the positions that they hold; they are mothers, daughters, sisters, aunts, wives, girlfriends, friends, and representatives for their community at large. To the community, they are church members, board members, and activists, they are the hopes and dreams of their ancestors, and they are the gatekeepers of opportunities for future generations of African American people. The burden that they gladly carry is insurmountable. The experiences of racial microaggressions are crucial to understanding the unintentionally imposed burdens that Black women administrators must also contend with while leading within their respective institutions. The Black women in this study represent a great source of talent and leadership that is needed in the community college system to propel the institutions’ mission to best serve those within the community.

The 15 Black women who participated in this study are exemplary in their roles of services and are beacons of hope, inspiration, and empowerment for Black women, Black people, and society at large. They are truly phenomenal women.
REFERENCES


APPENDIX A

Recruitment Email

From: Beverly Warren <XXXXX@gmail.com>
Date: January 17, 2018 at 4:36:06 PM PST
To: ______________
Subject: Black Women Leaders: Racial Microaggressions

Dear President ______________

As a doctoral candidate under the supervision of Dr. Frank Harris III, I would like to request your participation in a research study that I will conduct. The purpose of the study is to examine how racial microaggressions influence the career experiences and trajectories of Black women who have served as administrators in California community colleges.

I have attached a copy of the approved Informed Consent for Non-Medical Research by San Diego State University for your review and requested consent to participate.

I will be available to travel to your region the week of February 12th or the week of February 19th. Please advise as to your best availability should you chose to participate.

To schedule your interview or if you have any questions or concerns, I can be reached at (619) XXX-XXXX or via email at XXXXX@gmail.com.

In advance, I thank you for your time and consideration to participate in this meaningfully study.

Sincerely,
Beverly
APPENDIX B

Interview Questions

This study is about racial microaggressions. As defined by Sue et al. (2004), *racial microaggressions* are brief and common daily verbal, behavioral, or environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicates hostile, derogatory, or negative racial slights and insults toward people of color. The manifestation of microaggressions arises in the form “microassaults,” “microinvalidations,” and “microinsults.”

1. **Microassault** is an explicit racial derogation characterized primarily by a verbal or nonverbal attack meant to hurt the intended victim through name calling, avoidant behavior, or purposeful discriminatory actions. . . . They are most likely to be conscious and deliberate.

   Example: Referring to someone as “colored” or Oriental, using racial epithets, deliberately serving a White patron before someone of color and displaying a swastika. Microassaults are most similar to “old-fashioned” racism conducted on an individual level.

2. **Microinvalidation** is characterized by communications that exclude, negate, or nullify the psychological thoughts, feelings, or experiential reality of a person of color.

   Example: When Asian Americans (born and raised in the United States) are complemented for speaking good English or are repeatedly asked where they are born, the effect is to negate their US American heritage to convey that they are perpetual foreigners. When Blacks are told “I don’t see color” or “We are all human beings,” the effect is to negate their experience as racial/cultural beings (Helms, 1990).

3. **Microinsult** is characterized by communication that convey rudeness and insensitivity and demean a person’s racial heritage or identity. Microinsults represent subtle snubs, frequently unknown to the perpetrator but clearly convey a hidden insulting message to the recipient of color.

   Example: When a White employer tells a prospective candidate of color “I believe the most qualified person should get the job, regardless of race” or when an employee of color is asked “How did you get your job?, the underlying message from the perspective of the recipient may be twofold: (a) people of color are not qualified; and (b) as a minority group member, you must have obtained the position through some affirmative action or quota program and not because of ability.
Questions

1. Can you start by introducing yourself and telling me a little bit about the work you do at ______________college/district?

2. Please tell me about your career path that has led you to your current role within the community college system.

3. What is it like to be a Black woman community college leader?

4. Have you ever experienced a racial microaggression? If so, can you share a recent example of an experience?

5. When do you recall your first experience of a RM while performing in a leadership position from a colleague, supervisor or subordinate?
   a. If you recall, what were your thoughts in that moment
   b. How did you respond?
   c. What influence your response or actions?

6. How have you addressed a racial microaggression when the perpetuate may have been a supervisor or person in higher authority within educational institution?
   a. Why did you at the pond the RM
   b. Did you consult with anyone before doing so?
      i. if yes who?
      ii. If yes why?

7. Please tell me about a time when you have been in the presence of colleagues where derogatory comments(s) was made that was directed toward people of your race and gender.
   a. How did you feel?
   b. How did you respond?

8. Please tell me a time when you felt that your personal thoughts, ideas or opinions were overlooked when you express them, but were acknowledge when a person of another race or gender expressed similar thoughts, ideas or opinions.
   a. How did you feel?
   b. How did you react physically, mentally or emotionally?
   c. Would you consider these occurrences to be frequent within the academy or during a certain stage in your career?

9. Please tell me a time during your professional career where you felt targeted as a result of a derogatory comment or statement made in relation to your race and gender.
   a. How did you feel?
   b. Did you choose to respond?
      i. How did you respond?
ii. If yes why did you respond?
  c. What was the outcome?

10. Please tell me about a time where you felt intellectually insulted as a result of your race and gender.

11. What personal rituals do you engage into combat the fatigue of RM?

12. How do RMs impact your relationships with colleagues?
   a. Supervisors
   b. Subordinates
   c. How do you choose to respond/what is your process in determining to respond?
   d. How do you respond (in the moment/verbally/written communication)?

13. When you experience RMs, do you feel an emotional impact?
   a. If so, how do you cope with the impact of the RM emotionally?

14. How has racial microaggressions impacted your emotional well-being?
   a. Physical well-being?
   b. Mental well-being?

15. How has your race and gender influenced your workload or responsibility in contrast to colleagues of a different race and/or gender?

16. How do racial microaggressions impact your work performance?

17. When has an experience with racial microaggressions contributed to your decision to seek other employment opportunities, resign from a position or leave an institution?
   a. How did you come to that decision
   b. what network did you lean on to assist in the decision process
   c. how do you think your career would be different

18. To what extent has your experience with RM affected your career trajectory? Do you believe you would be further along in your career had it not been for RM’s?

19. What lessons have you learned as a Black woman in a leadership position in the community college system and how and when to respond to an RM?

20. What advice do you have for future Black women as leaders within postsecondary education when confronted with RM’s within the academy?
How Racial Microaggressions Influence the Career Experiences and Trajectories of Black Women Midlevel and Senior Administrators as California Community Colleges: A Constructivist Grounded Theory

You are asked to participate in a research study conducted by Beverly Warren, doctoral candidate in Postsecondary Educational Leadership, Concentration: Community Colleges at San Diego State University.

To participate, you must meet the following criteria: (a) you must be 18 years of age or older, (b) self-identify as Black/African American, and (c) have worked as California Community College Midlevel or Senior Administrator (i.e., Dean, Associate Vice President, Vice President, Vice Chancellor, Chancellor).

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study is to examine how racial microaggressions influence the career experiences and trajectories of Black women who are mid-level and senior administrators at California community colleges. Semi-structures interviews will be conducted with 20 Black women who served in California community colleges as administrators (i.e. Dean, Associate Vice President, Vice President, President, Vice Chancellor, and Chancellor). A constructivist grounded theory methodology will be used to uncover the constructed lived experiences of this population.

The interviews will focus on racial microaggressions experienced during the careers of the participants and how these experiences have influenced their career trajectories. Results yielded will include themes and employed coping strategies. Insights from the interviews will be used to inform California community college policies, practices, and interventions as it relates to the retention and professional support of Black women as college administrators. Additional direction for future research and theoretical implications will be provided. The current literature pertaining to Black women as higher education leaders and their experiences with microaggressions and its influence is minimal. The proposed study will add to the existing literature and to the profession of postsecondary education.

PROCEDURES

If you agree to participate in this study, Beverly Warren will interview you about your experiences with racial microaggressions. The interview will be approximately 60 – 90 minutes and will be audio-recorded and transcribed for data collection and analysis. Audio recordings will be deleted once they are transcribed. Interviews will be transcribed by the principal investigator (Warren). You will be given the opportunity to select a meeting location that is private and comfortably suited for you (i.e. on or off-campus).
POTENTIAL RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS

The potential risks involved in this project are minimal. You may experience some discomfort answering questions about sensitive topics, such as race and gender. Participation in this study also requires that you be audio taped, which may also create some anxiety or discomfort.

Measures have been established by the principal investigator to ensure safeguards against any potential career risks. You as well as your college and/or district will have a designated pseudonym in lieu of actual names. Participants are being recruited from all 113 California community colleges. If necessary, institutions will be referenced by regions within California (Northern, Central, and Southern). If you begin to feel uncomfortable for any reason, you may discontinue your participation either temporarily or permanently without consequences. Your participation in this study is voluntary; you may withdraw your participation at any time.

POTENTIAL BENEFITS

You will not benefit directly from your participation in this study beyond having the opportunity to share your experiences and expertise with the researcher. Overall, the potential benefit of this study will be to contribute to knowledge and understanding of influence of racial microaggressions and how Black women at California community colleges overcome them in their careers. As a participant, you will be contributing to knowledge that will be used to support the retention and professional success of Black women college administrators.

PAYMENT/COMPENSATION FOR PARTICIPATION

You will not be compensated financially for your participation in this study.

CONFIDENTIALITY/PRIVACY

The individual interview will be audiotaped and transcribed for data analysis. The audio recording and transcript will be stored under password protection on the principal investigator’s (Warren’s) computer to prevent access by unauthorized parties. Once the audiotape is transcribed, it will be deleted. The transcript will be maintained under password protection on the principal investigator’s computer and will be encrypted utilizing Advance Encryption Standard (AES) 384 bit.

Your answers, identity, college, and/or college district will be confidential. The records of this study will be kept private. Final documents produced from this study will not include any information that will make it possible to identify you. Only the researcher will have access to the records. Tape recorded interviews will not be labeled with any identifiable information and the interview recording will be deleted after it has been transcribed. Transcriptions of the audio recorded interview will be done by the investigator.

Your name and any other identifying information will be coded from the information you provide before it is analyzed. The electronic code book for this study will be stored separately from the transcript. The electronic code book will be encrypted and password protected as we as securely stored in a locked file cabinet. Any information that is obtained from this study that can be identified with you will remain confidential and will be revealed only with your permission or as required by law. If you disclose illegal or dangerous behavior during the interview (e.g. any kind
of abuse or serious harm to self or others). I must report this information to the appropriate university and law enforcement authorities.

When the results of the research are published or discussed publicly, no information that can potentially reveal your identity will be included. Federal regulations require that the Institutional Review Board (IRB) periodically review all approved and continuing projects that involve human subjects. To ensure that your rights as a human subject are being protected in this study, it is possible that representatives of the Institutional Review Board may come to this research site to inspect study records.

VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your choice of whether or not to participate will not influence your future relations with San Diego State University or the San Diego State University Foundation. If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw your consent and to stop your participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are allowed.

CONTACT INFORMATION

If you have any questions about your rights as a participant in this study, you may contact an IRB representative in the Division of Research Affairs at San Diego State University (telephone: 619-594-6622; email: irb@mail.sdsu.edu). You may also contact Beverly Warren at XXXXXX@gmail.com or (619) XXX-XXXX.

Having read and/or heard the aforementioned information, would you like to participate in this study?

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE

The San Diego State University Institutional Review Board has approved this consent form, as signified by the Board’s stamp. The consent form must be reviewed annually and expires on the date indicated on the stamp.

Your signature below indicates that you have read the information in this document and have had a chance to ask any questions you have about the study. Your signature also indicates that you agree to be in the study and have been told that you can change your mind and withdraw your consent to participate at any time. The investigator has provided you with a copy of this consent form with information about who to contact in the event you have questions.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of Participant (please print)</th>
<th>Date</th>
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<tr>
<td>Signature of Participant</td>
<td>Date</td>
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<tr>
<td>Signature of Investigator</td>
<td>Date</td>
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APPENDIX D

Participant Recruitment Screening Questionnaire

1. What is your first and last name?
   First Name: __________________  Last Name: _____________________________

2. What academic degrees have you completed and at which institutions?
   Degree 1: __________________ Institution: ________________________________
   Degree 2: __________________ Institution: ________________________________
   Degree 3: __________________ Institution: ________________________________
   Degree 4: __________________ Institution: ________________________________
   Degree 5: __________________ Institution: ________________________________

3. What is your preferred racial identity? ________________________________

4. (If racial identity is stated as Black/African American) What is your preferred ethnic identity?
   African  African American  Afro-Latin American  Afro-Caribbean  Afro-Asiatic
   Other: ________________________________

5. What is your current occupational position? ______________________________

6. What is your current institution of employment? __________________________

7. What were your previous positions held within the past 10 years?
   ___________________________________________________________________
   ___________________________________________________________________
   ___________________________________________________________________
   ___________________________________________________________________
   ___________________________________________________________________

8. How many years have you worked in postsecondary education? ____________

9. Which of the following ranges best describe your age:
   18-24  25-34  35-44  45-54  55-64  65-74  75+

10. The following is an optional response for this study; Which of the following categories best describe your marital status (you may choose to decline before responding):
    ___ Single   ___ Never Married   ___ Married   ___ Domestic Partnership
    ___ Widowed   ___ Divorced   ___ Separated   ___ Other: