From Family Storytelling to Emancipatory Knowing: Bearing Witness to the Resistance of Black Women Leaders in Higher Education

Eboni Sterling

*University of Missouri-St. Louis*, eboni.sterling87@gmail.com

Follow this and additional works at: [https://irl.umsl.edu/dissertation](https://irl.umsl.edu/dissertation)

Part of the [African American Studies Commons](https://irl.umsl.edu/dissertation), [Higher Education Commons](https://irl.umsl.edu/dissertation), [Photography Commons](https://irl.umsl.edu/dissertation), and the [Social Justice Commons](https://irl.umsl.edu/dissertation)

**Recommended Citation**

[https://irl.umsl.edu/dissertation/1163](https://irl.umsl.edu/dissertation/1163)

This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by the UMSL Graduate Works at IRL @ UMSL. It has been accepted for inclusion in Dissertations by an authorized administrator of IRL @ UMSL. For more information, please contact marvinh@umsl.edu.
From Family Storytelling to Emancipatory Knowing:
Bearing Witness to the Resistance of Black Women Leaders in Higher Education

Eboni L. Sterling
B.S., Elementary Education, University of Missouri-St. Louis, 2011
M.Ed., Adult and Higher Education, University of Missouri-St. Louis, 2013

A Dissertation Submitted to The Graduate School at the University of Missouri-St. Louis
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree
Doctor of Philosophy in Education with an emphasis in Educational Leadership & Policy Studies

May 2022

Advisory Committee
Thomasina Hassler, Ph.D.
Chairperson

Melinda Bier, Ph.D.

Thomas Hoerr, Ph.D.

Carl Hoagland, Ed.D.

Copyright, Eboni L. Sterling, 2022
Abstract

We, in the Black community, have preserved our existence and histories through storytelling. The blessing of stories passed from one generation to the next serves as survival signposts. Amidst this tradition, ongoing dominant narratives work to mischaracterize and dehumanize members of the Black community, specifically Black women. The unique and intersectional position of Black women leaders invites an onslaught of racial challenges in any sector. However, a complex relationship exists between Black women leaders in academia and the metanarratives manufactured by dominant groups. While often viewed as entertainment, the cultural practice of storytelling can incite empowerment and emancipation of the mind. This qualitative study explored how family storytelling functions facilitate emancipatory knowing in Black women leaders (BWLs) at predominately White institutions (PWIs).

Black feminist thought and intersectionality served as the theoretical framework and pedagogical lens for understanding Black women leaders’ lived experiences. Traditional, qualitative, and visual methods were utilized to collect data from 10 Black women leaders employed at a PWI. Narrative inquiry aided in gathering in-depth stories to address the research questions. Three research questions guided and framed the study: (1) How does retrospective family storytelling facilitate emancipatory knowing in Black women leaders at predominately White higher education institutions? (2) What do Black women leaders perceive are the emancipatory functions of retrospective family storytelling? and (3) How do Black women leaders employ emancipatory functions/knowing to oppose dominant narratives?
The exploration of this under-researched area lobbied for the influence of storytelling as a tool of survival, resistance, resilience, and *knowing* for Black women leaders in higher education. The findings indicate that family stories function as navigational and therapeutic tools. In addition, the study offers a culturally relevant leadership profile for Black women leaders in higher education. These findings are presented along with suggestions for future research on the intersection of family storytelling, Black women leaders, and higher education.

**Keywords:** *Black women leaders; family storytelling; emancipatory knowing; higher education; predominately white institutions*
Dedication

Grandma Sharon, I never knew I could miss someone I never met until I learned of you.
Rest on, love.

Dr. Patricia Boyer I remember the day you squared my shoulders with full confidence you said “You’re okay. It will be okay.” You were right. All is well. May you rest in eternal peace.

Dr. Matthew Davis, you taught me the pursuit of knowledge no matter how grave the struggle. May you rest in eternal peace, my friend.

Martina, I met the soul of courage the day you came to visit. Rest peacefully, friend.

To my future legacy: family is your duty; family is your charge. Take considerable care of the ones entrusted to you. How mysterious is it that God picked us to love each other as a family? The world will not care of you. Do not fail to take care of one another. Understand, the word family is messy, complex, and worthy, deserving of second chances, forgiveness, and blessings. Know, there will be times family will not make sense. Remember, God does not require us to make meaning of every intricate part of life. Family is not absent of difficulty. When you are faced with disappointment, wave your banner of love. Sky-high, bold, brave, and beautiful—wave your banner for family.
Acknowledgments

You are my dearest friend. There is not a more congruent companion. No man or imitation can rival your presence. I am because you are. You have been kindness. My care is supreme in your thoughts. I submit this work as I have submitted my life to you, Jesus.

Ma, you are teaching me the art of traveling in peace. Watching you, I study the way love goes. While on this journey you modeled how to keep my soul and spirit at rest. I practiced exactly what you taught—to rehearse God’s goodness toward me. Without that reminder, this dissertation would not be possible. I am thankful God has granted us so much time together. I love you and only God knows the depth. Pop, your courage to carve out your own lane and lead your family has always inspired me. You should know, I love you.

To my siblings, you all contribute to who I am. The scriptures read “there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother.” Thankfully you’re my friend and my brother; I love you, Nathan. Zachary, thank you for taking care of me in your own special way. I love you, buddy. Zephanie, I appreciate the way you watched over me and the family. I love you and Zaiden. Nikki and Shemecka, God pieced us together as siblings; for that, I thank Him.

T.T., I know joy because of you. You brought on all the good times when my world seemed dim during this journey. Uncle Kevin, your support did not go unnoticed. Thank you for showing up. Aunt Deborah and Burnetta, the stories you shared with me about our family are tattooed on my heart. Thank you for giving me a little piece of our
history. I love you. To my dearest friend, Tra, you nourished me while I walked this path. Thank you for covering me.

To my committee, your guidance and expertise made this journey possible. Dr. Hassler, I am grateful for your tutelage, mentorship, and allyship. I know words are not enough to convey how you have guided and supported me. However, it meant the world to have you as my chair. Dr. Bier, your generosity is the reason I began this path. Thank you for believing in me; thank you for sponsoring me. Dr. Hoerr, you never failed to check on my well-being throughout this journey. Your witty emails and dad jokes meant more than you know. Dr. Hoagland, thank you for supporting my research and ideas!

It took a village to walk with me down this road. Dr. Carter, you exemplify selflessness. Thank you for demystifying this Ph.D. process. God knew exactly what I needed when He sent you, my sister-doctor. Billy, your words matched your actions. Your allyship never faltered. Thank you for everything. Henry, thank you for your friendship and encouragement! Lydia, I appreciate how you supported my efforts. My gratitude is unending.

To my participants, you all entrusted me with your untold stories. You shared the intricacies of your family life and allowed me to bear witness to your experiences. Your narratives reclaimed and invoked the notion of love. Now, when I think of moral courage, I think of you all. Thank you for the gift of community and sisterhood.
Table of Contents

Abstract ......................................................................................................................... ii
Dedication ...................................................................................................................... iv
Acknowledgments ........................................................................................................ v
Table of Contents ......................................................................................................... vii

Chapter One: Introduction ........................................................................................... 11
  Problem Statement ....................................................................................................... 18
  Purpose Statement and Research Questions ............................................................... 20
  Theoretical Framework ............................................................................................... 22
  Chapter Summary ....................................................................................................... 23

Chapter Two: Literature Review .................................................................................... 25
  Theoretical Framework ............................................................................................... 27
  Black Feminist Thought ............................................................................................. 27
  Intersectionality Theory ............................................................................................. 30
  History of Black Women Leaders in Education ......................................................... 30
  Barriers and Challenges of Black Women Leaders ..................................................... 33
  Coping Strategies of Black Women Leaders ............................................................... 37
  Leader Identity Development ...................................................................................... 40
  Attributes of Black Women Leaders ......................................................................... 41
  Storytelling ................................................................................................................ 42
African American Storytelling Traditions .................................................. 43
Retrospective Family Storytelling ............................................................... 45
Emancipatory Knowing ............................................................................. 47
Chapter Summary .................................................................................... 49

Chapter Three: Methodology ................................................................... 50
Research Design ....................................................................................... 50
Research Paradigm .................................................................................. 51
Methodological Framework ...................................................................... 52
Population, Sample, and Recruitment ...................................................... 57
Data Collection ....................................................................................... 59
Photo-and-Artifact elicitation ................................................................. 60
Data Analysis .......................................................................................... 62
Trustworthiness ....................................................................................... 65
Limitations and Delimitations ................................................................. 66
  Limitations ............................................................................................ 66
  Delimitations ....................................................................................... 66
Chapter Summary .................................................................................... 67

Chapter Four: Narratives and Themes ..................................................... 68
Participant Demographics ...................................................................... 69
Description of Themes ........................................................................... 70
Theme 1: Navigating Spaces in Higher Education ............................................. 72
Navigating White Spaces.............................................................................. 72
Navigating Other Black Women Leaders..................................................... 81
Navigational Strategies................................................................................ 84
Theme 2: The Therapeutic Nature of Family Storytelling............................. 87
Know Thy Self............................................................................................... 89
Spiritual Compass......................................................................................... 93
Theme 3: Redefining Leadership.................................................................... 97
Leading in Love............................................................................................. 98
Results of Member Checks.......................................................................... 103
Chapter Summary......................................................................................... 104

Chapter Five: Discussion............................................................................. 106
Summary of the Study .................................................................................. 106
Discussion of Findings................................................................................... 108
Recommendations.......................................................................................... 121
Reflections of the Researcher ....................................................................... 124
Conclusion..................................................................................................... 127

References.................................................................................................. 129

Appendix A — Definition of Key Terms......................................................... 142
Appendix B — Interview Protocol ................................................................. 144
Chapter One: Introduction

Memoir must be written because each of us must possess a created version of the past... If we refuse to do the work of creating this personal version of the past, someone else will do it for us.

—Patricia Hampl, *I could tell you stories: Sojourns in the land of memory*

My great grandmother, Queen Esther Burris, knew the pain of sharp cotton burrs. Bloody fingers and a cramped back, as early as grade school, she was forced to trade in her schoolbooks for a six-foot long cotton sack. She survived. In her early teen years, she was married off to an older man. She was only a child but, she survived. Robbed of formal education, she proved to be resourceful and taught herself to read, write, and count money. She set her face like flint and survived. Of the seven children she bore, each of them led successful lives personally and professionally because of her tenacity. Survival and resilience remain the spirit of my family. Our ethos is an amalgam of faith, family, and education. These values are the overtones of our identity. An ethos is the spirit of a family, culture, and identity as manifested through its rituals and legacies. When I think of my family, I specifically think of the women who reconstructed victimization into a praxis of resilience and resistance (See Figure 1). I witnessed the ingenuity of my family throughout my adolescent and young adult years through the stories they told and re-told. Accordingly, my epistemology is deep-seated in my family’s continuity, despite anti-black rhetoric. My mother and the lineage of women who came before her helped sculpt the woman I am today. How I know what I know is attributed to family—my great grandmothers, grandmothers, mother, and aunts. For that reason, as a
Black woman higher education professional, I have revered my family’s stories as methodologies of resistance.

**Figure 1**

*A photo collage of Queen Esther and her descendants.*

The following passage is a small vignette that helps cement the complex relationship between Black women leaders in academia and the metanarratives manufactured and proliferated by the dominant group. This non-fiction story is my lived experience as a young, hopeful Black woman entering the *belly of the beast*, also known as the *academy*. 
"Monkey, Monkey!" Her eyes met mine as I chewed the first bite of a half-peeled banana. At that moment, I knew I was the monkey she referred to. A White woman colleague, short in stature, mocked me as I enjoyed a late afternoon snack. I swallowed the dissolving banana and struggled with what to do or say next. Her whiteness and veteran status in our college caused me to simply say goodnight and walk away. Appalled, I found refuge in my car, slid into the driver seat and sat in anger. A welcome sign on the brick building outside of my office became my fixation for the next few minutes. My thoughts landed on this reality, as a Black woman, I had to walk the tightrope of respectability for career survival. Feelings and injuries were irrelevant. Maintaining a face of flint and attitude of strength mattered most. So, there I sat, thinking of preserving my dignity and my new position at the university. I wondered would speaking up cost my job. Would colleagues label me the sensitive, angry Black woman? Did I want to deal with the aftermath and backlash? Was the incident that serious? I concluded, yes, I must address her demeaning remarks. A month prior, a Black woman, senior administrator, offered the position along with a substantial raise. Two Black colleagues, male, female, and I joined the team as the only Blacks in the department. I was the youngest Black woman on the team.

While driving home, I called the other new hire, a Black woman and shared the story with her. I wanted advice and solace. We spoke for several minutes as she described past experiences at other colleges. Her advice centered on how to play the game and why we, as Black women, must juggle higher education politics. Sitting in rush hour traffic, I reflected on her words. I archived the stories I found relatable and drove to my mother's home. Of all the Black women in my life, my mother's words hold the most weight. She
reminded me to rehearse who I am, where I come from, and to whom I belong. Our heart to heart led to resolve; I would pen a letter to address the racist remarks. However, I needed to ensure this conversation did not backfire and invite retaliation.

My clock read 9:00 p.m. as I settled in for the night. The final phone call was to my mentor, a seasoned Black woman, higher education professional. Over the years, she communicated how to navigate the treacherous terrain of politics in higher education. That night, we strategized. We considered plausible outcomes and worst-case scenarios. Who to trust and what to say were essential factors. How to conduct myself after the meeting and what to expect from others were considered. The list of possible sinkholes and areas of quicksand were endless. Before our phone call ended, she said, "Eboni, you're loved. You possess the wit and intelligence to survive and thrive here. Don't doubt yourself. You are not an imposter. Make your presence known and hold your head high."

Admittedly, I cried that night; I knew morning would dawn and I would challenge a White woman colleague.

The letter I constructed conveyed my demand for respect and my appreciation for the new role:

"As a colleague in this college, it is my goal to work productively and effectively for my students and with my co-workers. Maintaining an office atmosphere that is welcoming and team-oriented is most important to me. With that said, I did not find the words "Monkey, Monkey" welcoming, appropriate or professional. Yesterday, a colleague referred to me as "Monkey, Monkey" while I finished a half-peeled banana before leaving for the day. This particular incident occurred in another colleague's office. While I did not respond because I was utterly
speechless, I did, however, feel disrespected and insulted. I request that my colleague only refer to me as my legal name, Eboni Sterling. I do not find it professional to be called: little girl, bad penny, girl, kid, or monkey. All of these terms are quite offensive. Thank you for your consideration concerning this matter."

The opening story, highlighted above, underscores the effects of anti-Black rhetoric on BWLs in the workplace, but most importantly, it lobbies for the influence of storytelling in the survival and emancipatory knowing of BWLs. My network of family and friends i.e., extended family or kinships offered support in the form of stories. The storytelling articulated by other women provided material and cultural knowing to challenge and overcome the pitfalls of everyday racism. Collins (2002) referred to this as "every day, taken-for-granted-knowledge" (p. 36). For Black women leaders who are often disempowered due to race, sex, class, or the combination of each construct, oral traditions help Black women achieve a sphere of freedom in consciousness and beyond (Abrums, 2004).

The qualitative study's primary aim was to understand how the process of retrospective family storytelling facilitates emancipatory knowing in Black women leaders at predominately White institutions (PWIs) of higher education. The study explored Black women leaders' lived experiences in the higher education sector at PWIs. In the last 50 years of the 20th century, the United States workforce has undergone an extreme shift regarding diversity. Undeniably, the United States workforce continues to advance in economic opportunity for underrepresented groups post the civil rights era; the demographics of age, sex, and ethnicity contribute to an increasingly diverse
workforce at present. As the meaning of diversity in the workforce evolves, the United States workforce's changing complexion calls for diverse leadership (Holder, Jackson & Ponterotto, 2015). Although women occupy 47% of the United States workforce, securing a leadership role not related to middle management is a constant obstacle (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2011). The participation of Black women in the workforce was 59.4% and is expected to decline by 2026 to 58.8% (Toossi & Joyner, 2018). This sizeable representation of Black women participating in the labor force should also reflect in the United States workforce's leadership. However, women of color remain underrepresented in leadership positions, and specifically, the scarcity of Black women in leadership positions remains alarming (Connerley & Wu, 2016). Bagati (2008) documented from 1991 to 2001, Black women increased their professional and graduate degree attainment 219%. Furthermore, Holder et al. (2015) clarified that although Black women are a viable and significant source of growing talent and represent the largest female group to attain educational degrees, they are not represented in leadership positions.

Those Black women who secure leadership positions beyond the glass and concrete ceiling face a whirlpool of racial and social injuries i.e., microaggressions, discrimination, stereotyping, invisibility, hypervisibility, surveillance, and racial battle fatigue. This is due in part to a historical and intricate dominant narrative spawn by the dominant group. Delgado (1989) referred to the dominant group as the ingroup and the marginalized group as the outgroup. Delgado (1989) wrote,

The dominant group creates its own stories, as well. The stories or narratives told by the ingroup remind it of its identity in relation to outgroups, and provide it with
a form of shared reality in which its own superior position is seen as natural. (p. 2412)

Dominant narratives told and re-told by the dominant group have steered Black women's misrepresentation as individuals and leaders. Considering the robust responsibilities that accompany leadership for any leader, those responsibilities are multiplicative and heightened for Black women. With the intersection of race, ethnicity, and sex, the road to leadership identity development narrows and becomes increasingly complex. Intersectionality recognizes the complication of the lived experiences of Black women. To be a Black woman is to be intersectional, and this duality causes extreme challenges. Dixson, Anderson, and Donner (2017) suggested storytelling i.e., counterstories vies for the voices, personal accounts, and experiences of people of color. This form of storytelling seeks the expertise of marginalized communities over dominant discourses and social constructions. Additionally, family storytelling is the make-up of shared beliefs, values, attitudes, and behaviors within familial contexts over time (Kellas, 2005). A self-concept is formed through the telling of stories within a family. A critical purpose of this study sought to understand how Black women leaders form a leader identity with retrospective family storytelling. The study hoped to uncover how retrospective family storytelling aids in the resistance and emancipatory knowing (Grassley & Nelms, 2009) for Black women leaders. The emancipatory functions of storytelling promote empowerment, well-being, and grounding as women re-tale or share their experiences and lessons from family i.e., the family of origin or extended kinship.
Problem Statement

Overwhelmingly, the extant research concerning Black women leaders highlights the effects of marginalization, challenges faced in White dominant spaces, and coping mechanisms practiced in light of systematic racism. Indeed, the discourse underpinning the plight of Black women leaders implores importance. As Black women are slowly becoming increasingly visible in higher education institutions, a conversation concerning the pedagogies they bring from their families i.e., family of origin, extended family or kin and community is warranted. Moreover, Black women’s leadership must be understood against the backdrop of their intersectionality and standpoint.

Mosley (1980) presented an interesting point regarding the conversation about Black women leaders in PWIs of higher education:

Black female administrators in White academe are an endangered species. They are still tokens in higher education. Black women, where they are represented, are most often in positions peripheral to the policy-and decision-making core of higher education. They feel overworked, underpaid, alienated, isolated, uncertain, and powerless. (p. 296)

McCluney and Rabelo (2018) reported that due to Black women's social location, they commonly negotiate and navigate conditions of visibility. McCluney and Rabelo (2018) detailed four conditions of visibility: precarious visibility i.e., low distinctiveness, low belongingness, invisibility i.e., low distinctiveness, high belongingness, hypervisibility i.e., high distinctiveness, high belongingness, and partial visibility i.e., high distinctiveness, low belongingness (p. 144). Precarious visibility refers to the lack of power Black women are allotted to make their work more visible.
Invisibility describes others' inability to recognize Black women’s particular social location and unfortunate experiences—color blindness (McCluney & Rabelo, 2018). Hypervisibility explains the intensified scrutiny of their professional contributions or the exploitation of their talents. Partial visibility refers to the dominant group's reluctance or other groups to associate power with Black women (McCluney & Rabelo, 2018). If Black women are not visible in the workplace, Black women leaders also struggle to maintain visibility.

Often, Black women are subjected to endure racialized surveillance and manage racial microaggressions. Browne (2015) introduced the concept of racializing surveillance. Her research expounds on the idea of surveillance as social control and the convention of surveillance as a form of power through policy; surveillance defines who and what is acceptable (Browne, 2015). Browne speaks to White America’s fragility and the disallowance for Black women to be in a position of power.

Black women as leaders are an unacceptable concept in dominant spaces dictated by systematic oppression. Stress offenders, such as conditions of visibility, surveillance, microaggressions, and intersectionality, lend to the crooked room idea. Harris-Perry (2011) illustrated how Black women leaders who experience and confront racial and gender discrimination are “standing in a crooked room and left to their own devices to find which direction is vertical” (p. 29). Black women face a myriad of challenges in life and their places of work. Centering the sustainability of Black women leaders meets the economy’s need for diverse leaders with modern perspectives.

However, less apparent are the methods Black women leaders use to garner agency and construct their leader identity. Moreover, relatively little research has
explored how retrospective family storytelling informs Black women leaders' leader identity development. As a result, their remains an elusive understanding of how Black women leaders in education professions make meaning of their leader identity by way of retrospective family storytelling.

**Purpose Statement and Research Questions**

The qualitative study's primary purpose was to understand and explore the utility of retrospective family storytelling as a tool for resistance and emancipatory knowing (Grassley & Nelms, 2009) in Black women leaders in higher education at PWIs. Accordingly, the study sought to validate and affirm Black women’s experiences through the stories they tell. In doing so, the study adds to the dearth of knowledge on Black women leaders by chronicling the stories and narratives they articulate. This research agenda asked deliberate questions distinct to Black women leaders' experiences. Such inquires elicited knowledge from Black women leaders to provide an in-depth understanding interpreted from their realities. Using a qualitative methodology of narrative inquiry coupled with Black Feminist Thoughts (BFT) and intersectionality as a conceptual framework, Black women leaders' voices, and perspectives were centered in this research agenda. As a Black woman leader, it is my responsibility and privilege to lift and honor our voices.

The guiding research question for this study was: (1) How does retrospective family storytelling facilitate emancipatory knowing in Black women leaders at predominately White higher education institutions? (2) What do Black women leaders perceive are the emancipatory functions of retrospective family storytelling? and (3) How
do Black women leaders employ emancipatory functions/knowing to oppose dominant narratives?

**Significance of Study**

The foci of research concerning Black women leaders—generally and within higher education—heavily engages their challenges and apparent coping strategies both personally and professionally (Dickens & Chavez, 2018; Holder, Jackson, & Ponterotto, 2015; Mosley, 1980; Stanley, 2009; Vakalahi & Starks, 2011). Less evident is a transdisciplinary research approach on Black women leaders' intersections, retrospective family storytelling and emancipatory knowing. Similarly, research conducted in retrospective family storytelling reveals a literature gap relating to cultural and racial family narratives (Kellas & Horstman, 2014). Surprisingly, the field of leadership suggests a similar issue. Leadership literature scarcely reviews storytelling as a contributing factor to leadership, leader identity, or leadership development (Shamir Dayan-Horesh, & Adler, 2005; Sternberg, 2008). The dearth of knowledge suggested above renders this study significant to the fields of education, leadership, family science, communication, and African American studies. Ultimately, the study framed itself as transdisciplinary.

The findings of this study contribute to understanding the difficulties experienced by Black women leaders in academia and the agency gathered from their families. Following in the vein of related research studies that worked to increase awareness within and outside of the academy, this study provides further inquiry into the topic at hand. A distinctive feature of this study is the attempt to explore the intersections of Black women leaders’ epistemologies and ontologies related to family storytelling and emancipatory
knowing in academia. As a result, this study identified the importance of family and storytelling for Black women leaders’ survival in academia. This contributes to the overall understanding of Black women leaders’ experiences serving at PWIs of higher education. Additionally, participation in the study intended to be an emancipatory experience to empower the resourcefulness of Black women leaders in the ivory tower.

For Black women leaders, their family stories were embraced and harvested as resources. Furthermore, Black women leaders acknowledged their family stories as a source of strength and agency in their current roles. In addition, Black women leaders wielded family storytelling as an emancipatory tool of resistance to decolonize the dominant narratives about them and forge new realities for them.

**Theoretical Framework**

Patricia Hill Collins developed the theory Black feminist thought in 1990. For Collins (2002), BFT depicts Black women's lives from the knowledge they produce. Black women intentionally created this theory for Black women due to the brandishing of intersecting oppressions. It situates the Black woman and explores how the intersectionality of race, gender, and class work in concert against Black women's advancement (Collins, 2002). Specifically, the theory unveils how Black women perceive, cope, and construct creative solutions for their experiences from intersectional perspectives.

Moreover, the conceptualization of BFT works to represent a standpoint of empowerment. Black women's vantage points are unique to their lived experiences, and rightfully so. BFT returns the authorship of these experiences to Black women. Although all Black women are intersectional, this group is not monolithic. This idea suggests that
how Black women interpret and respond to daily bouts of discrimination could differ vastly in and among this group (Collins, 2002). Thus, Black women's challenges may or may not produce contrasting perspectives (Collins, 2002). For this study, Collins' BFT operated as a filter to understand and explore Black women leaders' individual and shared experiences.

The duality of being Black and a woman causes an onslaught of challenges. This unique position of marginality is known as intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1991). According to Dixson et al. (2017), intersectionality examines the various perspectives of inequality and identity and how both topics relate. Black women share a unique relationship with the workplace in that, while these women may be physically present, they are rarely seen; they remain largely invisible in leadership and administration. The experience of women in general in the workplace is one entirely different than men; their experience is skewed and often mirrors the widespread racialization and gender disparities in the United States. However, for Black women, they face double jeopardy in the workplace and are seldom viewed as competitors to White women and Black men—both minorities.

**Chapter Summary**

This chapter outlined the research problem, purpose, and significance. It discussed the theoretical framework, guiding and sub-research questions. The courage and preservation Black women leaders have amassed are not by happenstance; instead, these survival hacks derive from their families and communities' multiplicity. Joseph White (1984) suggested that family communities, original or extended, are critical to the "survival equipment of African American people" (p. 33). This notion is especially true for Black women leaders. The knowing their loved ones equip them with—through
storytelling— is a vital mainstay in their leadership roles. For the Black women leaders braving dominant racial narratives in academia and beyond, this study aims to affirm their positionality, *knowing*, and honor the stories that shape who they are.
Chapter Two: Literature Review

Oppressed people resist by identifying themselves as subjects, by defining their reality, shaping their new identity, naming their history, telling their story.

—bell hooks, Talking Back: Thinking Feminist, Thinking Black

The critical review of the literature presented in this chapter is categorized into three themes. To establish a context for discussion concerning Black women leaders, the review will begin with a brief overview of BFT and intersectionality as two theoretical frameworks frequently visited to explore the lived experiences of Black women leaders. The literature review considers the positionality of Black women leaders at PWIs in the United States, given their social locations. In light of Black women leaders’ social location, the second theme reviews their historical landscape and examines their lived experiences at these institutions. It further explores the challenges of Black women leaders due to specific racialized offenders and dominant narratives. Following, the third theme considers the history and value of storytelling i.e., African American storytelling, retrospective family storytelling, and emancipatory knowing for Black people and Black women leaders. This review offers empirical based accounts that connect storytelling to emancipatory knowing in the lives of Black women.

We in the Black community have used storytelling as proof of our existence and lived experiences. Storytelling is the thread that ties us together. Through the power of storytelling, we glean moral courage to do what is right for the right reasons. Our historical past weathered defeat and victory. Through the re-telling of our history, we
have preserved and displayed resilience. Amason (2020) articulated how storytelling is a tool used to transmit values, beliefs, expectations, and norms from one generation to another. Ultimately, the re-telling of stories translates into a collective identity. This constructed identity develops into a legacy as the stories are retold, valued, and put into practice.

A common practice in many families is to pass down items or heirlooms. Smith (2020) suggested that this practice helps to reveal the personal history of a family. Similar to heirlooms, storytelling preserves family history and identity for future generations. As families share stories or personal narratives, individual members make meaning of the family's ecology. According to Kellas (2005), this offers context for the family's subjective identity. Members make meaning by recalling how their ancestors did family and how they currently do family. As families share, retell, or reveal stories about their identity, individuals further understand how they have come to who they are (Kellas, 2005).

Understanding Black women leaders’ lived experiences and the role of storytelling in their lives is a necessary step to address the dearth of research on the topic. As Black women leaders navigate dominant narratives embedded in academia, how they make meaning of their experiences through retrospective family storytelling remains under-researched. Moreover, the discourse about Black women leaders typically speaks to the barriers and challenges of managing racism and microaggressions on their trek to leadership. However, it is also critical to inquire of Black women how they define themselves, the tools they use to resist dominant narratives and the knowing that
materializes from their story-sharing. How storytelling—retrospective, family, or otherwise—facilitates their emancipatory knowing warrants a necessary discussion.

**Theoretical Framework**

**Black Feminist Thought.** The study applied BFT as a theoretical framework as it appropriately frames Black women's lived experiences as a group. The same is true for the sub-group of Black women leaders in higher education institutions. Essentially, BFT theorizes and depicts the lives of Black women from the knowledge they produce. The theory was created for Black women by a Black woman, Patricia Hill Collins. Centered on the experiences of Black women, as Collins described it, the theory represents empowerment. Alinia (2015) affirmed Collin’s rationalization stating:

Black feminist thought exposes the way that domination is organized and operates in various domains of power. It also shows the path of struggle and to empowerment, while at the same time highlighting the challenges and difficulties in combating intersecting oppression, since the multipositionality of social agents, on the one hand, and the simultaneity of multiple and intersecting sites of oppression, on the other, make the relationship between domination and resistance highly complex. (pp. 2334–2335)

Collins (2002) claimed that BFTs sole purpose is to resist oppression from the dominant order and its mounting efforts.

In response to the brandishing of intersecting oppressions, BFT was formed. Collins (2002) offered six distinguishing features of BFT:

1. Although geographically Black women may experience difference, the oppressions they endure in the United States are linked. Such oppressions are
described as “race, class, gender, sexuality, and nation,” wrote, Collin’s (2002, p. 23). These intersecting oppressions foster group commonalities based on the collective standpoint of Black women (p. 22).

2. These experiences of oppression, while common, are not universal. On the one hand, historically, Black women have endured a legacy of struggle (p. 30). On the other hand, while their experiences may be linked, their interpretations may differ. Black women share experiential knowledge; however, their experiences are not identical.

3. “Black feminist thought concerns the connections between U.S. Black women’s experiences as a heterogeneous collectivity and any ensuring group knowledge or standpoint” (Collins, 2002, p. 29).

4. Another tenet of BFT puts forth the critical contributions of Black women intellectuals; “Black women intellectuals are neither all academics nor found primarily in the Black middle class. Instead, all U.S. Black women who somehow contribute to BFT as critical social theory are deemed to be “intellectuals” (Collins, 2002, p. 14).

5. As the social structures in the United States continually shift, BFT adapts to the changing social conditions (p. 39). Collins, purported BFT a theory and practice concerned with implications of change.

6. BFT addresses the experiences of Black women specifically, yet the theory and practice inherently addresses other social and racial issues. When Black women’s struggles are centered, wider struggles of oppression within marginalized groups are also centered.
Collins (2002) likened BFT to the empowerment of Black women. More specifically, she wrote concerning this matrix of knowledge Black women produce when in dialogue. This dialogical relationship produces a change in thought and consequently in actions. In her study about Black church-going women, Abrums (2004) grounded dialogical storytelling as a source of new knowledge for Black women. When in community and dialogue with other Black women, an independent consciousness emerges. Abrums (2004) referred to this phenomenon as “a ‘sphere of freedom’ in oppressive situations” (p. 194). In addition, Collins (2002) asserted the idea of “taken-for-granted knowledge” deriving from everyday experiences, thoughts and actions (p. 36). Knowledge creation among Black women is interwoven in commonplace occurrences and conversations; Collins (2002) claimed these dialogical relationships can facilitate the transformation of Black women’s thinking. *Knowing* is conceivable in any space or site where Black women congregate and offer discourse. Collins suggested even blues clubs or washrooms are sites where knowing happens among Black women. Churches, hair salons, their mother’s bedrooms, kitchens, breakrooms, and the offices of higher education professionals are all sites where *knowing* occurs. In other words, the African American oral tradition of storytelling has the potential to liberate and transform the thinking patterns of Black women. Through the utility of storytelling, Black women can depict their experiences and ultimately shape them. In light of this claim, BFT and storytelling work to aid Black women in survival, coping strategies, resistance and knowing.

As Collins (2002) stated, a world absent of oppression and systemic racism is a world void of BFT. Black women established the theory out of necessity in response to
the reprehensible existence of oppression. Creating a caucus for Black women, BFT makes known Black women's communal philosophy; the theory allows them to depict and interpret their lives as only they can. This is especially true for Black women in higher education as one of the main tenets of BFT focuses on the knowledge base of Black women *intellectuals*.

**Intersectionality Theory.** In the United States, race, class, and gender remain renowned markers of power and oppression (Crenshaw, 1989; Harris, 1990; Collins, 2002). Black women are wedged in the center of these three constructs. The theory of intersectionality interprets this complex phenomenon. In her groundbreaking work, Crenshaw's (1991) discourse around intersectionality conveyed how race, class, and gender interface to structure how Black women experience work and leadership. Described as an identity theory, intersectionality creates experiences of privilege and marginalization.

**History of Black Women Leaders in Education**

The topography of Black women's self-development and feats of resilience suggests they have long defied the gravity of oppression. Before the slogan "each one, teach one" became an African American proverb, Black women, dating back to slavery, risked their lives to learn the verbal and written American language—English. During the slavery era, Black women championed themselves and their loved ones, teaching other enslaved men and women the fundamentals of reading and writing despite the consequences (Jones, Dawkins, McClinton, & Glover, 2012). Preceding the Civil War, the education of a slave was illegal. Although some slaves, through allies and sheer courage, pursued an education in secrecy, others were permitted a limited education for
labor or religious reasons (Jones et al., 2012; Solomon, 1985). The Civil War was a signpost for change; it shepherded a novel generation of women advancing beyond their homes, especially Black women. Chamberlain (1991) recorded, women and Black people were prohibited from the experience of higher learning before the Civil conflict in the United States. As the war concluded, promising opportunities arose; higher education became a more attainable goal for women and Black people by establishing the Morrill Act of 1862 and the Morrill Act of 1890 (Chamberlain, 1991). The combination of these two laws provided policy that created access for the coeducational attainment for Black women.

Evans (2008) historical account attributes Oberlin College as the first institution to admit and confer degrees to women. "Women first gained entry to institutions of higher education in the United States when Oberlin College admitted female students in 1837—more than 200 years after Harvard College was founded for the education of young men," wrote Chamberlain (1991, p. 3). Oberlin College, a faith based academic community, was established in 1833 and the institution's policy favored the admission of women and Black students over their omission (Solomon, 1985). As a result, Black women, previously excluded from higher education, established a precedent of Black women earning degrees. Jones et al. (2012) reported that, in 1850, Lucy Sessions was the first woman awarded a literary degree from Oberlin College. In 1862, Oberlin College awarded Mary Jane Patterson a B.A. degree. Evans (2008) stated that Mary Jane Patterson was the first Black woman to make that achievement. In 1865, Fannie Jackson Coppin graduated from Oberlin and in 1884, Mary Church Terrell earned her degree from
Oberlin (Evans, 2008). After earning their degrees, these women traveled similar paths; each pursued the field of education in some manner—teaching or administration.

Perkins (1993) observed, “By 1890, only 30 Black women had earned baccalaureate degrees compared with more than 300 African-American men and 2500 white women.” (Perkins, 1993, p. 272). In 1900, W. E. B. Du Bois quantified, 252 Black women earned baccalaureate degrees. Of those 252 degrees, 55 were earned from Oberlin College (Evans, 2008). While the educational attainment of Black women was seemingly downtempo, progress continued. Shelia Flemming wrote in her book, The Answered Prayer to a Dream: Bethune-Cookman College, 1904-1994, Mary McLeod Bethune instituted the Daytona Literary and Industrial School for Training Negro Girls (Flemming, 1995, as cited in Evans, 2008). It is documented that Bethune became the first Black woman college president, also. In 1909 at the start of the twentieth century, before the Harlem Renaissance, The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) convened (Library of Congress, n.d.). During this time, Black people migrated to Northern America, sights set on gainful opportunities. By 1920, in scores, Black women earned degrees and established institutions. As claimed by Noble (1988), “more degrees were conferred to African American women than African American men in the twentieth century except for the decades between 1920 and 1930” (p. 89). Explaining the stride of Black women to earn doctorate degrees, Jones et al. (2012) reported the first Black woman to earn a PhD at the dawn of the 1920s: Sadie Turner Mossell Alexander, of the University of Pennsylvania. As Black women's intellectual production edged along, another significant contributor to their legacy of education was Lucy Diggs Slowe. History reflects she conducted the inaugural
conference of deans and advisors in Black schools at Bennett College, established in 1926 (Wolfman, 1997, as cited in Jones et al., 2012). At the start of the 1940s, specifically 1943, Mamie Phipps Clark earned a Ph.D. from Columbia University; she is known to be the first Black woman to hold a doctorate in Psychology (Littlefield, 1997). By 1946, Willa Player became the first Black woman college president at Bennett College and left a legacy of robust scholarly works (Evans, 2008; Jones et al., 2012).

Green (1988) considered the impact of Brown v. Board of Education—the outcome carved a path for all people, including Black women, to gain equal access at higher education institutions. Several pieces of legislation worked in favor of women and Black people during this period. As the reality of education in the country began to shift, the federal government also began reshaping the workplace for women. Similarly, the 1960s Civil Rights Movement advanced the educational attainment and employment status of Black women (Green, 1988). In 1964 two significant policies were established that ensured the prohibition of employment discrimination against women and marginal groups — The Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the institution of affirmative action (AAAED, n.d.). Following suit, the Higher Education Act of 1965 helped Black women alleviate the financial burden of higher learning (Roebuck & Murty, 1993). As a result of these policy shifts, the Civil Rights Movement pushed forward. During the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s, colleges and universities witnessed an increase in representation of Black student enrollment, administrators, and professors (Roebuck & Murty, 1993).

**Barriers and Challenges of Black Women Leaders**

DeJesus and Rice (2002) wrote, “while the literal twine of the noose of racism that chocked our throats is relatively obsolete, the figurative rope continues to cut the
breath of our psychological well-being” (DeJesus & Rice, 2002, as cited in Harley, 2008). Vakalahi and Starks (2011) reported the lived experiences of Black women in academia are complicated and stressful due to their intersectional nature. Although Black women are overwhelmed by race and gender-based challenges, retrospective family storytelling may help to alleviate psychological stress and trauma from microaggressions, conditions of visibility, and racialized surveillance. Notably, identity management remains a crucial strategy for Black women in the workplace. Dickens and Chavez (2018) interviewed ten Black women focusing on identity shifting. Several themes emerged from their study, including that Black women negotiate the costs and benefits of interacting as their authentic selves or conforming to the dominant culture's standards.

Hypervisibility is yet another blaring act of violence Black women maneuver daily. W.E.B Du Bois (1903) purported the double consciousness of being Black in America (Du Bois, 1903, p. 9). As an extension to his definition of two souls and thoughts warring within, consider the following: if Black women in the United States are Black and female, they endure a triple consciousness; three souls and three thoughts daily warring within. A woman, a Negro, and an American; which role does she cater to on any given day or situation? This depends on how the dominant society defines her existence. Du Bois further explained the Black woman’s viewpoint, as constantly sorting her identity through the dominant narrative's perception.

For Black women leaders, survival in academia and higher education is largely attributed to their family and friends (Vakalahi & Starks, 2011). Whether relating their resiliency to biological health, psychological well-being, or social well-being, Black women collectively revered their family and friends as positive attributes in their
leadership quests. In a research study, Vakalahi and Stark (2011) confirmed these notions as the women in their study offered comments about the matter:

When asked about factors that contribute to one’s biological health, one woman of color said, “family…partner, parents, sisters” where as a group of women said, “strong familial ties and support, support system…family and friends.”

Reflecting the sentiments of many participants when asked about factors that contribute to psychological well-being, one woman said, “…the influence of strong mothers and a special circle of women”. Another stated, “strong family support, strong network of friends…friendship”.

When asked about factors that contribute to social well-being, one woman of color said, “I have a strong circle of family and friends, strong family support, strong support of ‘sister friends’”. Another woman of color stated, “A strong sense of self which comes from a lot of love from extended family, spouse, and parents”. (Vakalahi & Starks, 2011, p. 188)

When thinking of family, as noted in the above comments, often this term of endearment is related to one’s family of origin i.e., parents. In many cases for Black women, however, family refers to close friends, siblings i.e., biological or fictive, and networks. This phenomenon is not new for Black women leaders. Along the same lines, Gregory (2001) testified to Black women leaders seeking supportive networks within and outside of their institutions. Relying on family and friends can be viewed as an African proverb in the Black community. Unlike Black families, Dugger (1988) characterized White
feminists’ perspectives of family and home as sites of oppression. Conversely, Black women depicted their families and homes as a source of sustenance and a shield from the persecution they needlessly endure (Dugger, 1988).

Individually and collectively as Black women in higher education practice resistance against dominant forces, White counterparts practice resistance against diversity and inclusion (Atwater, 1995). These dominant, elitist attitudes assist in the comprehensive effect of racial battle fatigue in Black women leaders at PWIs. McGee and Stovall (2015) submitted that racial battle fatigue is reached when Black persons are continually exposed to debilitating covert and overt forms of racism. Such experiences are characterized as race-related stressors. McGee and Stovall (2015) likened these experiences to emotional and psychological traumas. Promoting the character strength of resilience in academia may take a toll on Black women leaders as racist practices are sustained.

Collins (2002) further claimed within institutions there is a system of social control intended to disadvantage Black women leaders. Black women leaders are denied access to advancement and resources of which their counterparts i.e., White women and Black males are privy. The recruitment and hiring practices of predominately White institutions empathize with the dominant group's needs, disfavoring and handicapping Black women's progression in academia (Hughes & Howard-Hamilton, 2003; Patitu & Hinton, 2003). In comparison to other minority members, Black women leaders earn lower salaries and are more likely to be reprimanded for an unjust cause (Gregory, 2001; Jarmon, 2001). In the same vein Patitu and Hinton (2003) pointed out several reasons Black women struggle to gain promotion and tenure: “conflicting information, unwritten
rules, lack of direction and mentoring, and nitpicking or triviality (Patitu & Hinton, 2003, p. 87). As a result, Black women leaders feel a lack of belonging and isolation. These same feelings carry over to their research pursuits. By drawing on the concept of scholarly works, Thomas and Hollenshead (2001) detailed how Black women leaders receive little to no support for research pursuits centering people of color. Lutz Hassouneh, Akeroyd, and Beckett (2013) contended the small number of Black women leaders at PWIs leads to feelings of separation, stress, and isolation. In this context separation refers to the intentional dichotomy between a sense of belonging on campus and a forced responsibility of multicultural programming (Lutz et al., 2013). Gardner Barrett, and Pearson, (2014) emphasized Black women leaders are typically shouldered to manage multicultural initiatives even as they are not accepted fully on campus. This separation breeds isolation as Black women leaders work to maneuver between the dominant culture’s expectations and their own culture. Stress is not a monolithic experience for Black women leaders but, rather, complex, and nuanced. Lutz et al. (2013) distinguished stress as superficial or emotional. Their choice of dress, adornments, or hairstyles may contribute to the levels of stress they experience. Or, their positionalities, either politically or socially may also contribute to their stress levels (Dillard, 2016; Lutz et al., 2013). Adopting a similar portrayal Vakalahi and Starks (2011) demonstrated the experiences of Black women leaders often induce a state of bankruptcy spiritually, socially, and emotionally.

**Coping Strategies of Black Women Leaders**

Evans, Bell, and Burton (2017) presented the BREATHE model as a lifestyle shift to enhance Black women's wellbeing. The BREATHE model is outlined as balance,
reflection, energy, association, transparency, healing, and empowerment. The model is essentially a guiding principle to promote self-care—a counteraction against racial and gender risk factors. Black women juggle a multitude of roles as women of a minority race. Shifting from their own culture to the dominant culture in the workplace becomes taxing and emotionally exhaustive. Black women are responsible to their families, workplace, community, and religion. The BREATHE model explains why balance is critical for the longevity of Black women. Self-care is an approach to honor rest and decrease stress.

The reflection stage of the BREATHE model highlights the importance of intentional alone time. Creating time to audit one's thoughts, feelings, emotions, actions, and goals helps to determine which thoughts are toxic. Evans et al. (2017) emphasized that reflection should not resemble self-abuse, but rather a way to center and reconnect with oneself.

Evans et al. (2017) established energy as setting small goals to create a pattern of wins. The celebration of micro and macro successes affirms one's spirit and provides a boost of motivation. This process helps combat the negative energy encountered throughout the day. According to Evans et al. (2017), Black women desire prosperous and peaceful lives without sacrificing their careers or families. Black women want the weight lifted; they desire to simply breathe without crippling under the world's pressure from the dominant culture. The modern Black woman simply desires to exhale and move throughout spaces free of unnecessary burdens.

Evan’s model applies to Black women leaders in the higher education sector, also. As these leaders combat and resist intuitions of racism and hatred, Dillard (2016)
explained, Black women leaders seek real honest colleagues. Here Dillard depicts the suffering Black women leaders endure in academia,

I am looking for real honest colleagues who assume that my ways of being (my culture), my ways of knowing (my theory), and my ways of leading (culturally engaged) are not any less rigorous or righteous or real than their own but instead a place from which I center and make sense of my work as an African American woman. These real colleagues do not see a conflict between theory and cultural/experiential explanations as principles which guide thought and action but recognize that it is that sort of didactical framing that inherently continues to advance a traditionally racist and sexist agenda, particularly in leadership and educational research. (p. 32)

A dichotomy exists between the academy’s norms and Black women leader’s ways of knowing. Although Black women leaders’ may feel unsupported from their colleagues, Dillard speaks of a strong historical ethos upheld from the families and fictive kinship Black women belong to. Through these familial relationships, Black women leaders harvest strength, resilience, and the continuity of resistance.

This study put forth family storytelling as a connective strategy in the survival, success, resistance, and emancipatory knowing of Black women leaders. These stories are sites and sources of strength and empowerment. As Black women physically leave their homes for work, with them are the stories of their ancestors, family, and friends. Black women may redress these stories to fit the challenges faced but each story takes shape as struggles arise. Indeed, family storytelling is a resource to assist black women in overcoming deviant and devaluing stereotypes. As it relates to higher education, through
the lens of BFT, the marginalization these women face is acknowledged and centered (Howard-Hamilton, 2003). Banks-Wallace (1998) extended the emancipatory functions of storytelling by identifying how women make sense of their worlds and create solutions through dialogical means. They articulate their experiences through storytelling allowing them to position their stories and experiences.

**Leader Identity Development**

The leadership phenomenon is both sophisticated and multifaceted. Described as an omnipresent theme (Sendjaya, 2015) continually redefined the subject of leadership as obscure. Hero, the term of endearment bestowed upon historical figures i.e., Mao Zedong, Caesar, Nelson, and Napoleon aided in solidifying the concept (Bennett & Murakami, 2016). Subsequently, many intellectuals have attempted to ascertain the shifting, subjective meanings of leadership. According to McCleskey (2014), over two hundred ideas, theories, and definitions accompany the concept. What’s more, understanding the makeup of various leaders is often uninterpretable. As a result, when considering leadership qualities, too often, only a boilerplate description is provided. Leader development is evaluated on years of experience, relationships with direct reports, and assessing and using employees’ strengths, risk assessment, and various aspects. While each factor listed is critical to a leader's success, a leader's ecology extends beyond skills and qualifications. Leader identity is not forged solely from degree attainment and professional development. The backdrop of leader identity reveals self-identity, family identity, and life experiences (Kellas, 2005; Lord & Hall, 2005; McCain & Matkin, 2019). How leaders lead is not unrelated to who they are and from where they come.
What drives their passions is not detached from their selfhood and self-understanding. Why they lead is not disparate from the family legacy they choose to embrace.

Lord and Hall (2005) published how the development of effective leadership is hinged upon an individual defining themselves. Leadership development, in part, is due to an individual clarifying a self-concept—identity. According to the authors, the manifestation of a leader identity is germane for leadership development. They went on to offer a three-part explanation as to why: (1) the formation of a leader identity provides a structure to filter relevant or new knowledge through; (2) a source of motivation, leader identity inspires a leader to seek out new experiences and developmental situations; and (3) leader identity incites motivation within followers through stories, beliefs, or values. Lord and Hall (2005) suggested leader identity facilitates and solidifies the process of leadership development. They imply the integration of critical leadership features relies on the degree to which a leader successfully develops her or his leader identity. Specifically, honing and grounding the components of a leader identity is directly related to a leader’s failure or success, developmentally.

**Attributes of Black Women Leaders**

Meyerson (2001) described Black women leaders as *tempered radicals* or their leadership style as *tempered radicalism*. Elaborating on this phenomenon, Meyerson (2001) stated:

Tempered radicals reflect important aspects of leadership that are absent in the more traditional portraits . . . it is more local, more diffuse, more opportunistic, and more humble than the activity attributed to the modern-day hero. This version of leadership depends . . . on qualities such as patience, self-knowledge,
humility, flexibility, idealism, vigilance, and commitment . . . they are not lone heroes . . . are quick to acknowledge that they cannot do it alone. (p. 171)

Black women leaders work to create safe spaces for all persons. They are uniquely sensitive to the oppression others may experience because of the intersectionality Black women live with daily. Lorde (2007) offered her perspective by explaining that Black women are innovative and use the dominant power intended to harm Black people for constructive change. McCluney and Rabelo (2018) articulated how Black women leaders emulate the dominant culture through their actions and strategic behavior. Often, these women leaders find the utility of strategic visibility beneficial. McCluney and Rabelo (2018) detailed this condition of visibility as a tactic to advance and sustain the leadership of Black women. Strategic visibility involves an aggressive approach to “leaning in” and intentionally seeking opportunities for highly visible assignments. Black women leaders adjust to the paradox of being a leader and a Black woman by harnessing the power of White male values or “acting White” (McCluney & Rabelo, 2018).

**Storytelling**

The literature related to storytelling is vast and presumably never-ending. Before exploring the literature concerning African American storytelling, family storytelling, retrospective storytelling and emancipatory knowing, it is pertinent to look briefly at the characteristics of storytelling in general. Berger and Quinney (2005) led with this sentiment, "storytelling is as ancient as the language it uses (p. 9). The term is often synonymously used with oral history, oral tradition, or folklore. The familiarity of storytelling lingers with many of us, knowingly or unknowingly. As children and adolescents, the utility of storytelling fortifies the educational lessons prescribed in
classrooms. Families use storytelling as part of a nighttime regiment for children. From pulpits, preachers harness storytelling to relay the message she or he received from on high. The media employs various forms of storytelling to communicate and influence the broader society. For many, storytelling is an entertainment source through movies, books, music, theater, dance, and song. Storytelling tethers the past and present, while also girding the next generation with family histories and identity. Culturally, storytelling intricately binds people together from the past, present, and future (Livo & Rietz, 1986). Globally and historically, storytelling i.e., myths, fables, fairytales, and folktales facilitated the transference of values and cultural preservation among a people (Boadu, 1990; Sims & Stephens, 2011).

**African American Storytelling Traditions**

For African Americans, storytelling is an extension of folklore originally conveyed through oral traditions and progressively transferred through written text. Renown African American writers such as Zora Neale Hurston, Toni Morrison, James Baldwin, Maya Angelou, Langston Hughes, and many more found solace between the pages of a notebook turned story. African American folklore bears witness to a history mauled by revisionists. It is important to note that folklore derives from African orature. More than just an alternate way to describe storytelling within an African context, orature is, as Asante (1998) put it, “the total oral tradition of Africans and African Americans” (p. 96). This form of folklore is vividly captured as the "boiled-down juice of human living" (Hurston, 1995, p. 875). African American folklore or orature is a form of homage performed through poetry, music, recitations, and storytelling. These creative mediums shape the culture of African Americans in the United States. Asante goes on to
assert, conducting any discourse on the presence of folklore and storytelling without acknowledging orature is a bland attempt to represent the African American’s historical oral tradition and culture (Asante, 1998).

Reluctantly, Africans brought to America certain traditions, customs, and values. Ogunleye (1997) offers an intriguing viewpoint on the meaning of folklore:

Folklore represents a line to a vast, interconnected network of meanings, values, and cognitions. Folklore contains seeds of wisdom, problem solving, and prophecy through tales of rebellion, triumph, reasoning, moralizing, and satire. All that African American people value, including the agony enslaved and freed Africans were forced to endure, as well as strategies they used to resist servitude and flee their captors, is discernible in this folk literature. (p. 436)

Rootlessness was the outcome of the African people uprooted from their homelands and displaced in America. Gates (1989) recounted how African slaves were stripped of their customs i.e., religion, values, and beliefs. Slave owners enforced an Americanized version of life upon the African slave families. Also known as domestication, this successful attempt to assimilate the African slaves was poignant violence against their bodies, minds, spirits, and souls. Of the prohibitions, African language restriction was the most devastating and crippling act (Gates, 1989). Slave owners required English as the sole language to communicate. However, reading and writing the English language was also outlawed. Thus, in part to the unforgiving colonial law, spoken communication developed as the leading medium of communication. Families were separated and dispersed throughout the new lands. Inhumane punishment awaited the African slave who insisted on preserving and practicing their cultural identity (Gates, 1989). The African
slave found herself in this new world, forcibly disrobed of her native tongue, name, family, cultural practices, and herself. The African slave's Americanization disarmed them of agency and *knowing*—knowing their pre-American identity. These acts of violence led to a loss of critical history and the birth of a novel story concerning the African people—the dominant narrative (Asante 1998; Gates, 1989).

**Retrospective Family Storytelling**

Retrospective family storytelling has two significant implications that apply to the experiences of Black women leaders. Communication researchers understand retrospective storytelling in and about family to (1) assist with overcoming challenging experiences and making meaning of one's life, and (2) socialize an individual and familial identity and legacy despite societal expectations (Kellas & Horstman, 2014; McAdams, 1993). To successfully navigate higher education politics, Black women leaders must creatively learn to solve or cope with social and racial difficulties. Black women leaders are viewed and consequently characterized through the gaze of the dominant culture. The same is true for Black women leaders in the higher education sector. Within Black families, storytelling has been used to counteract the myths and incorrect characterization of family members and Black women by White culture. By extension, retrospective storytelling is used to transmit ideas about oneself and the world (Livo & Rietz, 1986). The preservation of self-defined family and individual identity is sustained through the engagement of retrospective family storytelling.

In her transformational book, Black Sheep and Kissing Cousins, Elizabeth Stone offered a critical commentary on how retrospective family storytelling clarifies and verifies its members' personal identities. Stone (2008) wrote:
"...those of little power and status and those of great power and status tend to confirm one another's position. It is the first job of the family, through its stories, to explain to its members where they are positioned socially" (p. 145).

At times characterized as a counternarrative, retrospective family storytelling affirms the personal identity and character of a family member. Stone (2008) discussed how this form of storytelling suggests that behavior patterns are communicated and learned by re-telling family stories and histories. As family members engage with retrospective family storytelling, sense-making occurs and a knowing materializes. She further elaborated that retrospective family storytelling is powerful enough to help individuals cope emotionally (p. 144). These stories communicate and reveal survival strategies and coping mechanisms repurposed over time by elders or ancestors. In addition, McCain and Matkin (2019) expounded on the topic from a leadership standpoint. Her study suggested that retrospective storytelling used as a research method can investigate emerging adults' leader identities (McCain & Matkin, 2019, p. 166). By recounting family stories, young adult emerging leaders may construct a leader identity (McCain & Matkin, 2019, p.166).

As it relates to Black women leaders in higher education, retrospective family storytelling has the potential to teach Black women strategies to resolve daily racist problems. Summarizing the connection between Black women leaders' survival and retrospective family storytelling, Collins (2002) explicated that dialogical relationships between Black women may serve as a resistance tool. As Black families share one to another, literal survival stories, Black women leaders carry this acute sense of empowerment into the workplace. Through the power of retrospective family storytelling,
Black women maintain their self-defined identities and learn the art of psychological and emotional strategies for resistance and survival in the academy.

**Emancipatory Knowing**

The liberating nature of storytelling is well documented, dating back decades. Known for its disruptive nature to challenge and dispel the dominant order, storytelling constructs new meaning and self-perspectives (Shor & Freire, 1987; Razack, 1993). Storytelling also elicits emancipatory functions (Banks-Wallace, 1998). Scholars and researchers within the medical field have applied emancipatory functions to analyze patients' experiences in the care of nurses (Bank-Wallace, 1998; Kagan et al., 2014). The practice is also referred to as emancipatory nursing. Emancipatory functions are also transferrable to the field of education and for the purposes of this proposal, emancipatory functions are used to explore the retrospective family storytelling of Black women leaders.

Applying emancipatory functions to storytelling, Chinn and Kramer (2008) put forth a concept termed emancipatory knowing. The authors define emancipatory knowing as human capital to transform problematic circumstances in place of circumventing a reality. The process involves identifying and naming inequitable situations in one’s life and redefining and transforming those situations through creative avenues (Chinn & Kramer, 2008). Emancipatory knowing is a lens through which Black women leaders can co-opt agency and mind their realities through their consciousness. Chinn and Kramer (2008) went on to write about the *story*, “The story has exquisite value as a frame from which to explore avenues of understanding and meaning, to shift experiential ground and create visions for the future” (p. 162). Through storytelling i.e., self, familial, dialogical,
or professional storytelling, Black women leaders gain knowledge of the ways in which their experiences can be improved.

Banks-Wallace (1998) identified emancipatory functions through her study with mothers of African descent who breastfed their infants. Using storytelling, Banks identified six functions of storytelling from the group of mothers: “(a) contextual grounding, (b) bonding, (c) validation and affirmation of life experiences, (d) catharsis, (e) resistance against oppression, and (f) the education of participants” (Banks-Wallace, 1998, p. 18). Banks-Wallace came to understand contextual grounding as the means of locating oneself and place in the world (Banks-Wallace, 1998). The women within her study participated in contextual grounding by expressing how they viewed themselves and others. According to Banks-Wallace, bonding was most influential within the group of women. Through storytelling, bonding flourished among the women. As the women shared stories, they spent significant and meaningful time with one another. Their lives and experiences became interwoven through the intimate relationships they built. Storytelling became the glue to which the women became relatable to each other—a synergy formed among the women that validated and affirmed their experiences. An unmistakable sisterhood began to take shape among the women as venting led to catharsis and joy. The group engaged in compassionate listening and responding. As a result, agency developed as stories were told and re-told.

Banks-Wallace documented how empowerment emerged through the act of storying. In addition, she theorized that storytelling challenged the status-quo and European American values. As the women deconstructed and revised their life stories related to breastfeeding, they resisted the myths and stereotypes prescribed to their
identities. Notably, storytelling also served as a means to inform and educate the women in the group; knowing emerged. The pivotal life events shared within the group suggested freedom from dominant ideologies concerning breastfeeding. The results from Banks-Wallace’s study suggest that as Black women leaders reinterpret their experiences through storytelling, emancipation of the mind is achievable. From ancient customs of African storytelling and orature, through the personal narratives of Black women in US higher education institutions, the power of the story as a source of emancipatory knowing led to this research study which explored, in depth, how this tradition is rooted in the success of Black women leaders.

Chapter Summary

This chapter explored substantive literature that supports the theoretical frameworks of BFT and intersectionality. In addition to chronicling the long-lasting legacies of Black women leaders in education, the chapter detailed how Black women leaders can integrate forms of storytelling as a form of survival, resistance and emancipatory knowing. A context for understanding the history of African American storytelling further solidified the utility of storytelling in the Black community. The literature established the emancipatory functions of retrospective family storytelling in proximity to Black women leaders serving at PWIs.
Chapter Three: Methodology

...arts-based researchers have an opportunity to consciously reject research practices that are implicated in colonialist traditions of objectivity and that treat production of knowledge as a function of social privilege.

—Susan Finley, Arts-based research

Research Design

Qualitative methods were appropriate as the study revolved around the exploration of the participants' lived experiences and stories. The decision to use a qualitative research method was based on the research questions and the population of inquiry. Creswell (2018) asserted, “qualitative research is a means of exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem” (Creswell, 2018, p. 4). Therefore, the meaning Black women leaders constructed through their storytelling and re-storying offered important findings for the study. Within in this study Black women were insiders with unique abilities to make meaning of their lives. This study's underlying intent was to elicit experiences, stories, and family stories of Black women leaders in higher education at PWIs. Semi-structured interviews leaned on the use of elicitation. Specifically, photo-elicitation and artifact elicitation i.e., photographs, journals, text messages, pictures, videos, letters, audio clips, or other objects.

To add, qualitative methods were fitting for the study and aligned with Black feminist thought's purpose. A foundational tenet of Black feminist thought seeks to emancipate, empower, and equip Black women to resist traversing oppressions (Collins, 2002). Collin's (2002) theory provided Black women the ability to name, define, and
articulate who they are and what they experience. In the current study, Black women leaders were cast as *experts* in the acquisition of knowing. Merriam (2009) affirmed the notion that qualitative research empowers the voice of participants. Moreover, Merriam (2009) claimed it is appropriate to use qualitative research methods if the interest is to give participants space to construct their worlds, interpret their experiences, and make meaning of their experiences (p. 23). Thus, a qualitative approach supported the exploration of Black women leader's retrospective family storytelling as they articulated their experiences.

**Research Paradigm**

My axiological beliefs were hallmark to this research study. Axiology, as described by Hays and Singh (2012), "encompasses the researcher's values and assumptions in qualitative inquiry and how they influence research questions and research design" (p. 36). I believe values should play a role in a research study involving participants—especially a study concerning marginalized or oppressed populations. When I refer to values, I am referring to altruistic values. As a qualitative researcher, I relate more to a reflexive approach. As a result, when conducting the study, I shared my experiences and assumptions.

Reflexivity probes at the authenticity of the researcher, ultimately revealing how a researcher’s experiences, biases, and values may impact the study (Creswell, 2018). This notion investigates how values, and experiences could disrupt the study. Apart from traditional quantitative pursuits, non-positivists are inherently reflexive (Marsh & Furlong, 2002). Knowing this, it is important to recognize the cultural paradigm that guides a researcher’s beliefs and standpoints. As a qualitative researcher, I maintain the
ontological belief that there is no true objective *truth*. Non-positivists operate from this tenet. The non-positivist approach returns value to the participant and the participant’s voice. It is through the participant’s experiences and subjective lens that *truth* is achieved. Collin’s (2009) Black feminist thought specifically served as my research paradigm. Fundamentally, BFT instructs researchers to collaborate with Black women to produce knowledge that clarifies their lived experiences. This paradigm invites researchers to view their research through the cultural perspectives and worldview of Black women. BFT acknowledges the need for individuality and recognizes that not all Black women share the same lived experiences. However, there are similarities throughout their lived history in the US that espouse common threads. BFT helped further the understanding of Black women leaders from their standpoints. A culturally congruent paradigm, BFT guided this investigation of the intersectional and retrospective family stories of participants. Thus, the truths expressed by Black women leaders were the sole and most important data sources for this study. I arrived at this research topic from my beliefs and values as a Black woman who was shaped by the love and stories of family. Together these values unquestionably influenced my course of research.

**Methodological Framework**

This study sought to examine the influence of retrospective family storytelling as a tool for emancipatory knowing in Black women leaders in the field of higher education at PWIs. Narrative Inquiry was chosen for this study to draw out and gather in-depth stories to support the questions below. Narrative inquiry is a compelling method for the gathering of individual and group thought, feeling and knowledge, which are sensitive to
the matters that often are not discovered by more traditional methods (Webster and Mertova, 2007).

The following central research question was created to obtain valuable information for this study: (1) How does retrospective family storytelling facilitate emancipatory knowing in Black women leaders at predominately White higher education institutions? (2) What do Black women leaders perceive are the emancipatory functions of retrospective family storytelling? and (3) How do Black women leaders employ emancipatory functions/knowing to oppose dominant narratives?

To ensure the research questions were answered, narrative inquiry provided a structure through which to collect data from the stories of Black women leaders. These stories were explored, in their own words, and from the families and experiences these women derive. Narrative inquiry assisted in a storytelling and testimonio structure to reveal the meaning expressed by participants. There is a cultural sensitivity built in narrative inquiry. Beverley (2008) suggested a distinct quality of testimonios is the cultural sensitivity given to marginalized groups in the meaning making of their experiences through the stories they tell. Narrative inquiry recognizes the value of communal and cultural ways of knowing, through storytelling, within groups such as Black women leaders. Polkinghorne (2007) understood narrative research as the “study of stories” (p. 1). With that in mind, Kramp (2003) reminded us that “stories preserve our memories, prompt our reflections, connect us with our past and present, and assist us to envision our future” (p. 107). Emancipatory knowing extends this notion as it considers the cultural and social context in which experiences are centered and envisions creative
solutions to complex problems. Thus, the method of narrative inquiry was a portal to emancipatory knowing in the Black women leaders.

Clandinin and Connelly (2000) instructed the researcher to share the reconstructed stories of others. In doing so, narrative inquiry will help convey the power of their stories and experiences. The one advantage of this method is that it allows researchers to discover deep complexities, connections, and retrospective meaning making pivotal to storytelling and elicitation (Chase, 2005). To understand how storytelling (family or otherwise) influences Black women leaders' emancipatory knowing in higher education at predominately White institutions, I employed a narratology method, specifically, narrative inquiry. Chase (2005) considered how qualitative researchers use five lenses in conjunction with narrative inquiry:

1. as a "way of understanding one's own and other's actions, of organizing events and objects into a meaningful whole, and of connecting and seeing the consequences of actions and events over time" (p. 656)
2. by viewing verbal action through narratives
3. as narratives that are "enabled and constrained by a range of social resources and circumstances" (p. 657)
4. as stories that are "socially situated interactive performances" (p. 657)
5. to see "themselves as narrators as they develop interpretations and find ways in which to present or publish their ideas about the narratives they studied" (p. 567)

These fundamentals of narrative inquiry assist researchers in making sense and meaning of participants' lived experiences.
Clandinin and Connelly (2000) gave credit to John Dewey and other scholars for the creation of narrative inquiry. By definition, narratology aims to comprehend what stories unearth about individuals (Hays & Singh, 2012). Creswell (2018) further added, "Narrative research is a design of inquiry in which the researcher studies the lives of individuals and asks one or more individuals to provide stories about their lives. This information is then often retold or re-storied by the researcher into a narrative chronology" (p. 13).

The research tradition of narratology is not limited to narratives: life history, biography autobiography, oral history, storytelling, family histories are all related methodological approaches. Through narrative inquiry, retrospective family stories served as a primary data source in this study.

Narratology encompasses the sub-terms narrative and narrative inquiry. While narrative is viewed as a practice of reflecting on phenomena, narrative inquiry is understood as a methodological approach (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006). Although the umbrella term narratology has endured various definitional notions, Bruner (2002) situated the term most appropriately for this study, "Telling stories is an astonishing thing. We are a species whose main purpose is to tell each other about the expected and the surprises that upset the expected, and we do that through the stories we tell" (Bruner, 2002, p. 8). On the one hand, as people lead their lives, stories develop and those stories are eventually communicated to others. On the other hand, it is the researcher's role to depict the stories derived from participants' lives. As researchers collect and explore participants' stories, they are charged with authentically and carefully communicating such stories and experiences truthfully (Connelly & Clandinin, 2000). Narratives
communicate cultural ways of knowing in the form of stories. The telling of stories transmits identity and one’s identity in relation to the world. The stories Black women shared for this research study were framed through a narrative inquiry lens. This approach drew out rich stories and experiences from the participant’s perspective. Similarly, Collins (2002) pointed out that “defining one’s own reality lies with the people who live that reality, who actually have those experiences” (p. 35).

Additionally, the study leaned on critical art-based research methods such as photo-elicitation and a subcomponent, artifact elicitation. Finley (2008) put forth, "At the heart of arts-based inquiry is a radical, politically grounded statement about social justice and control over the production and dissemination of knowledge" (p. 72). Critical art-based and visual methods challenge the dominant scientific way of knowing (Finley, 2008). Such method types depend on the people’s stories of everyday and ordinary living. Arts-based research methods centers marginalized lives and racial and social justice initiatives. Finley (2008) described how arts-based and experimental research methods differ, “To claim art and aesthetic ways of knowing as research is an act of rebellion against the monolithic ‘truth’ that science is supported to entail” (p. 73). These method types challenge the notion of quantitative data as the only factual and trusted data. Hays and Singh (2012) suggested an advantage of visual methods is the opportunity for participants to express themselves nonverbally (p. 278). Thus, visual methods and critical arts-based methods are characterized as socially responsible methods providing space for participants to define and create their realities as they experience life. This approach dismisses the dominant way of knowing and consequently challenges the status
quo. Denzin (1999) explained this action as "guerrilla warfare" for qualitative researchers (pp. 568, 572).

This study used a visual method, photo-and-artifact elicitation, to elicit rich and thick detail from participants. John Collier, held credentials as a photographer and researcher. In 1957 he published a paper detailing photo interviewing that eventually developed as photo-elicitation (Harper, 2002). Using Collier's approach, photo-elicitation and artifact elicitation refined Black women leaders’ memory and supported clear interpretations. This use of graphic imagery aided in stimulating robust responses concerning the participant's lived experiences.

**Population, Sample, and Recruitment**

The target population in this qualitative study was Black women who previously or currently served in leadership positions in higher education at PWIs. Their level of leadership was middle management and higher, scholar and rising scholar. The majority of participants live in the United States Midwest. However, one participant lives in the United States Northeast. The criterion for participant selection included the following: (1) ideally a resident within the St. Louis metropolitan area currently or previously employed at a predominately White institution i.e., institutions whose campus community is predominately White; (2) a current or previous Black woman leader i.e., faculty, staff, administration, doctoral student. The population for this study was inherently small; 12 participants were anticipated however, 10 participants were secured.

This study employed a non-random purposive sampling procedure to enroll participants. This particular sampling procedure helped identify expert participants who were knowledgeable and informative for the purposes of the study. Additional sampling
methods such as: criterion, network and snowball sampling were not necessary (Hays and Singh, 2012). Moustakas (1994) outlined the requirements for participant selection as the following; (a) the participants had an intense experience of the phenomenon, (b) were interested in understanding it, and (c) were willing to participate and have findings published. Respondents were selected based on the characteristics that meet the criteria for the research study (Fink, 2017).

Creswell (2018) suggested that participants for a purposive study are chosen because they represent the group of interest. When participants are purposefully selected, they "will best help the researcher understand the problem and the research question" (p. 185). In this research study, Black women leaders were chosen based on their ability to meet each criterion, as stated in the recruitment plan. I contacted participants through electronic mail. Email addresses were received via university websites and LinkedIn profiles. Having served in higher education for nearly a decade, I have long-standing relationships with Black women leaders. With this advantage, I considered their participation first before extending the research study to social media sites.

First, I drafted a recruitment message to send within my personal and professional network. I also extended the opportunity to Black women outside of my network. To attract willing participants, I drafted a recruitment message to post in social media groups and send via email to university officials associated with multicultural and diversity centers. Recruiting participants from national and local organizations of higher education professionals i.e., National Association of Student Personnel Administrators, Missouri Academic Advising Association, National Center for Faculty Development & Diversity, and the Missouri Association of Faculty Senates, was not necessary.
Data Collection

To understand the dynamics between the researcher, participant, and the participants cultural community, it is vital to have prior information about the participant's community. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) presented a similar notion, "What is told, as well as the meaning of what is told, is shaped by the relationship" (p. 94). Narrative methods necessitate an intimate rapport within the researcher-participant relationship. Often participants are storying intimate parts of their life and culture. The data collection aspect of research is not always acceptable in some cultures and may be viewed as revealing secrets. Many cultures assert unwritten rules and expectations concerning what stories are made public knowledge if any. Re-storying one's life, perhaps, is deemed taboo or a mark of offensive in respective cultural communities. As a higher education professional, I utilized my veteran experience in this arena to relate and establish a sense of trust during the interview process. However, more important to this point, I believe my cultural competence and lived experience in the Black community aided in building a sense of belonging and safety. The study's data collection process consisted of two data sources: in-depth interviews and retrospective family stories supported by the use of artifact elicitation. Hays and Singh (2012) suggested three types of interviews used in qualitative research: (a) the structured interview, considered as a strict protocol preestablished where questions are asked verbatim; (b) the semi-structured interview allows for a more informal exchange and depth from the participants, and (c) the unstructured interview mostly utilized for participant observation (Hays & Singh, 2012, p. 239). Retrospective family stories are sub-data sources of interviews; thus, the study sought to elicit this sub-source through the use of one-on-one semi-structured
interviews, also known as in-depth interviews (Hays & Singh, 2012). Before the actual interviews, I sent electronic emails to each prospective participant, briefly detailing the research study's purpose and an official invitation for participation. Once participants confirmed their participation by acknowledging the consent form, an introductory zoom call was placed to clarify any questions and introduce the study. Importantly, each participant reviewed an approved IRB adult consent form before answering any questions related to the study. The study required consent for three major components: zoom audio and video recordings for the purposes of data collection and analysis, photographs provided by participants of their artifacts, and disclosure of personal and professional information. Following the zoom call, a second email detailed that participants should spend, at most, two weeks immersed in their family history, stories, and legacies before the scheduled interview. This caused participants to visit family photo albums, collect certain mementos, heirlooms, or other objects, i.e., artifacts. Essentially participants reviewed and collected three to five artifacts that represented their family stories. For the official interview, zoom audio and video recorded interviews lasted up to three hours.

An interview protocol was established to ensure consistency between participants. However, participants were able to freely the questions in any order. I encouraged each woman to refer to the interview questions, photos, or other artifacts as a guide to assist with their life and family storytelling. Also, I instructed participants to abstain from responding to any question they felt uncomfortable answering.

Photo-and-Artifact elicitation

Merriam (2009) described photos and artifacts as prompts for mining interview data (p. 146). The traditional use of photo-elicitation is accompanied by interviews.
Often, photographs contain information richer and more complex than words. It is also true this form of information is more difficult to translate into words. However, Harper (2002) contended, “photo-elicitation mines deeper shafts into a different part of human consciousness than do words-alone interviews” (p. 23). Thus, this method was promising for the interpretation of complicated matters such as familial influences and experiences.

Harper (2002) described the value of using photo-elicitation versus words alone. Here he states, "images evoke deeper elements of human consciousness that do words; exchanges based on words alone utilize less of the brain's capacity than do exchanges in which the brain is processing images as well as words" (p. 13). He asserts that elicitation used in interviews can draw connections between the participant, society, culture, and history (Harper, 2002, p. 13). To clarify, the use of photographs underscores more than a supportive method; they invite the researcher and audience into the world of the participant. I would argue the photographs and artifacts invite the participant into their own worlds beyond a superficial and surface-level recollection. This deepening of interpretation is a crucial advantage of photo-elicitation. In the simplest form, photo-elicitation inserts a photo in a research interview (Harper, 2002; Rose, 2007). Although Heisley (2001) contended the use of photo-elicitation could be the sole methodology of a research project, for the purposes of this study, photo-elicitation and artifact elicitation will serve to support the semi-structured interviews. Through the interview process, photographs are interpreted and meaning is carried from photo to participant to researcher (Collier, 1986). Photos taken are not limited to the researcher or the researched. Both researchers and participants may engage with the process of taking an image through photography.
Within the current study, the photographs and artifacts collected by the participants were used as a form of archaeological memory (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) during their interviews. Collecting the photos and artifacts provided imagery and representation of their experiences and familial influences. These tools gave insight into who they have become and what they have come to know about themselves and the world in which they live. Additionally, the photos and artifacts represented the people, places, or items surrounding them in their workspaces that help ground them as they continuously resist false narratives. The participants offered familial photographs or artifacts of people, places, or items that represented the source and essence of their emancipatory knowing. For each photo or artifact selected, the participants were asked to generate a caption and respond to a narrative prompt describing and interpreting their feelings, emotions, observations, and denotations. These narratives primed each participant for the interview. Their families' photographic imagery and artifacts guided the discussion around the meaning and knowing made throughout their lives. During the interviews, I wrote observation notes of each participant's appearance, environments, and expressions. Additional questions were asked that bubbled up (Wolcott, 1990).

**Data Analysis**

Creswell (2018) delineated the application of five general data analysis steps. The first step involves collecting all data sources to organize, prepare, and display. Researchers then review data sources and reflect on the information collected. The goal is to begin making sense of the stories participants shared. Third, researchers begin the process of coding the data of text or images. Here is where labels are assigned to words or phrases. Following, descriptions are generated that lead to key findings also known as
themes. Step five details the development and presentation of each theme. While the above steps help shape the general process of qualitative data analysis, I leaned on Polkinghorne’s (1995), *analysis of narratives*. 

Polkinghorne’s thorough interpretation of narrative design made distinct the differences between *narrative analysis* and *analysis of narratives* (Polkinghorne, 1995). The process of narrative analysis includes participants analyzed stories that are re-storied for an audience. This process places the stories in chronological order for the purposes of the reader. Polkinghorne (1995) asserted, “narrative analysis relates events and actions to one another by configuring them as contributors to the advancement of a plot” (p. 16). The main factor of narrative analysis focuses on sequence and linkages revealed among stories from the participants. Ultimately, researchers are charged with synthesizing and interpreting participants stories, to re-story their experiences in narrative form. In contrast, Polkinghorne (1995) and Kramp (2003) defined the “paradigmatic analysis of narratives as locating common themes or conceptual manifestations among the stories collected as data” (Polkinghorne, 1995, p. 12).

Essentially, the researcher investigates participants stories to locate shared meaning among them. This can be achieved inductively or deductively. This study began with an inductive process that gradually shifted to deductive. The storytelling in this study allowed participants to describe their experiences. An inductive process leaves room for the discovery of individual and shared notions from the participants. The two key features of analysis of narratives are (a) pinpointing the central theme in a single story and, (b) a central theme that relates to each participant’s story. For the purposes of this research study, I did not use narrative analysis, as a chronological narration was not
the aim. The study engaged *analysis of narratives*, as this approach more appropriately extracted *knowing* related to the research questions.

Merriam (2009) purported data collection and data analysis should occur simultaneously throughout the study. Doing so will gave me a chance to refine the data collection methods throughout the interview procedures. Promptly, following each interview, I reviewed the transcript for accuracy. A constant comparison of data ensured I consistently reflected throughout the data collection and analysis. Following the interviews, a graduate student transcribed the data. While I reviewed the data to locate the similarities and differences in the identified themes, concept linkages, and patterns constructed through the participants stories. The analysis of the semi-structured interviews was supported by Atlas.ti software for organization and coding. Bogden and Biklen (1998) described the coding process as the following:

> Developing a coding system involves several steps: You search through your data for regularities and patterns as well as for topics your data cover, and then you write down words and phrases to represent these topics and patterns. These words and phrases are coding categories. They are a means of sorting the descriptive data you have collected so that the material bearing on a given topic can be physically separated from other data. (p. 171)

In order to identify emerging codes, I implemented a line-by-line coding procedure. Exact words and phrases from the participants were used to develop the initial codes. As codes were developed around the participants experiences and stories, themes became evident through repetition between participants stories and similarities. I drafted a matrix via Atlas.ti to further analyze and extract shared and individual themes. Kramp (2003)
recommended “All aspects of a matrix stand in relation to each other. The variations on a theme remain explicit and meaningful at the same time that the common themes are identified and illustrated” (p. 119). The interviews were reviewed once more for patterns within each interview and compared to other interviews. Themes became evident from the following categories family stories of resilience and perseverance, knowing and advice from family, barriers and challenges as Black women leaders, and leadership experiences in higher education. After the initial phase of coding and development of themes, I merged and revised codes to refine them. A subset of themes focused on the intent of the research and research questions.

Collins’ (2002) BFT framework acted as the filter through which the interviews were further analyzed. In the analysis I noted the following, (a) the commonality of stories and experiences among Black women leaders from the BFT standpoint, (b) the unique stories, experiences and responses Black women espoused due to their individuality and positionality, (c) how the common experiences had an impact on their leadership style or achievement of emancipatory knowing, (d) the contribution of intellect from family or other Black women in their village (e) how the Black women leaders articulated their standpoint in opposition to the dominant narrative, and (f) the coping strategies used to manage the effects of continual oppression.

**Trustworthiness**

Trustworthiness has been cited by Lincoln and Guba (1985) as establishing credibility, transferability, dependability, and conformability within a study. Each tenet listed is essential to a study’s validity. Moreover, trustworthiness reflects the credibility of the data, analyses and findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Patton (1990) stated “the
credibility of qualitative inquiry is especially dependent on the credibility of the researcher because the researcher is the instrument of data collection and center of the analytic process” (p. 461). I achieved participant collaboration by ensuring they voluntarily desired to contribute to the study. The study’s trustworthiness increased as participants were familiar with me as a Black woman in the field of higher education. This increase in trustworthiness helped participants feel a sense of comfort and protection in the study. Additionally, to enhance the trustworthiness member checks were conducted. The study embraced member checking by meeting with the participants to review the findings of the study in presentation form. I invited participants to review and offer feedback regarding the themes during the data analysis phase.

**Limitations and Delimitations**

**Limitations.** The study focused on Black women leaders practicing at PWIs of higher education. Due to this study's narrowed scope, generalizations cannot be made for the phenomenon of interest because the study focused on a particular group of Black women leaders.

**Delimitations.** The proposed study acknowledges the following delimitations. Although other groups of minority and marginal women experience bouts of systemic racism due to the dominant narrative, the study's scope centered Black women of the African Diaspora. Accordingly, the heritages of such women [other minorities] were not considered for the purposes of this research study. However, emancipatory knowing can also be achieved within the aforementioned groups.
Chapter Summary

This chapter put forward a brief overview of the qualitative methods considered for this study. It also detailed the methodology narratology, specifically, narrative inquiry. This methodology grounded in a non-positivist approach will be utilized to elicit retrospective family stories from Black women leaders at PWIs. In addition, this section covered semi-structured retrospective family interviews supported by artifact elicitation for data collection. As for as analysis, the chapter outlined the use of Creswell’s (2018) five step data analysis process and Polkinghorne’s (1995) analysis of narratives.
Chapter Four: Narratives and Themes

Slowly I am putting these stories together. Not for the public but for the women who wrote them. Will seeing each other’s lives make any of the past clearer to them? I don’t know. I hope so. I hope the contradictions will show but also the faith and grace of a people under continuous pressures. So much of the satisfying work of life begins as an experiment; having learned this, no experiment is ever quite a failure.

—Alice Walker, In Search of Our Mothers’ Gardens

This qualitative research study deeply explored the utility of retrospective family storytelling as a tool for resistance and emancipatory knowing (Grassley & Nelms, 2009) in Black women leaders in higher education at PWIs. The study was designed to elicit “taken-for-granted knowledge” (Collins, 2002) from Black women leaders to provide an in-depth understanding of their experiences interpreted from their standpoint. Through retrospective family storytelling, the study made space for Black women to trace the history of their socialization and its benefits, reckon with the angst of leading while Black and as a woman, and to curate their leader identity. Continuing this course of thought, the research study’s purpose aimed to add to the dearth of knowledge about Black women leaders by Black women leaders. Three research questions guided the findings of the study: Three research questions guided and framed the study: (1) How does retrospective family storytelling facilitate emancipatory knowing in Black women leaders at predominately White higher education institutions? (2) What do Black women leaders perceive are the emancipatory functions of retrospective family storytelling? and (3) How
do Black women leaders employ emancipatory functions/knowing to oppose dominant narratives?

Presented in this chapter are the two primary points of data that informed the overarching themes, subthemes, and significant statements. Data sources included in-depth interviews and retrospective family stories supported by the use of artifact elicitation. It is important to note each Black woman leader carried out the African American tradition of practicing oral narratives to inform others and preserve their stories. The symposium of stories will be classified as historical counternarratives for future generations to utilize as sites of emancipatory knowing and empowerment. The Black women leaders indexed their truths unapologetically and without fear. All identifiable information was generalized or replaced with pseudonyms in the interest of protecting participant anonymity.

**Participant Demographics**

The Black women leaders included in this study represented a non-random purposive sample rather than a random sample. This ensured the participants adhered to the sample criteria detailed in chapter three. Table 1 provides an overview of the ten participant demographics included in the study. Listed are the pseudonyms, ethnicity, age, level of education, marital status, number of children, and religion. The results of a Qualtrics survey revealed all participants self-identified as an African American woman who holds a graduate or advanced degree. Among the participants two are Doctor’s of Philosophy, two are Doctor’s of Education and six hold Master’s degrees. All participants except one identified as a member of the Christian faith to some degree; one participant believed in Catholicism. Participant’s range from 34 to 63 years of age.
Largely, the study participants reside in the Midwest with one participant located in the Northeast. Participant leadership roles varied and are vaguely presented to maintain the confidentiality of their identity. In addition to their leadership titles, the Black women leaders varied in the institution type in which they lead or led. Among the ten participants, one is a lead researcher at a higher education organization, two lead at private universities as faculty, two lead at public universities as administrators, one leads as a director at a public university, two lead at private universities as a director and staff member, respectively. One leads as a staff member at a public university and one led as a

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Level of Education</th>
<th>Marital Status</th>
<th>Children</th>
<th>Religion</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dr. Naomi</td>
<td>African American</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>PhD</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Christianity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dr. Miriam</td>
<td>African American</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>EdD</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>NC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Priscilla</td>
<td>African American</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>Master’s Degree</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Christianity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leah</td>
<td>African American</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>Master’s Degree</td>
<td>P</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Catholicism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dr. Beth</td>
<td>African American</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>EdD</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Christianity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hannah</td>
<td>African American</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>Master’s Degree</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>NC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dr. Ruth</td>
<td>African American</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>PhD</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Christianity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hadassah</td>
<td>African American</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>Master’s Degree</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Christianity-Baptist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mary</td>
<td>African American</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>Master’s Degree</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Christianity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rachel</td>
<td>African American</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>Master’s Degree</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Christianity</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. S=Single  M=Married  P=Partnered  NC=Non-Denominational Christian
staff member at public university. All institutions are predominately White. Table 2 below depicts the career demographics of each participant, respectively.

**Table 2**

*Career Demographics*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Employment Position</th>
<th>Institution Type</th>
<th>Location of Institution</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dr. Naomi</td>
<td>Researcher</td>
<td>Org, PWI</td>
<td>Northeast</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dr. Miriam</td>
<td>Director</td>
<td>Private, PWI</td>
<td>Midwest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Priscilla</td>
<td>Staff/Faculty</td>
<td>Private, PWI</td>
<td>Midwest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leah</td>
<td>Administration</td>
<td>Public, PWI</td>
<td>Midwest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dr. Beth</td>
<td>Administration</td>
<td>Public, PWI</td>
<td>Midwest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hannah</td>
<td>Staff</td>
<td>Private, PWI</td>
<td>Midwest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dr. Ruth</td>
<td>Faculty</td>
<td>Private, PWI</td>
<td>Midwest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hadassah</td>
<td>Staff</td>
<td>Public, PWI</td>
<td>Midwest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mary</td>
<td>Staff</td>
<td>Public, PWI</td>
<td>Midwest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rachel</td>
<td>Director</td>
<td>Public, PWI</td>
<td>Midwest</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This study required a two-week exploration of family stories. Participants were instructed to immerse themselves in their family histories, stories, and legacies. In doing so, participants visited family members, contacted friends and family via phone and facetime. To aid in their search for artifacts or photographs, participants viewed family
photo albums, mementos, heirlooms, letters, songs or other objects. As previously noted in this study, two to five photographs or artifacts were required per participant. Essentially, they reflected and recalled significant family stories about survival, triumph, resistance, overcoming, empowerment, struggle, identity, and more. To fully understand each participant’s experience, I relied on their family stories, photographs, and artifacts to inform me.

While participants’ artifacts and family stories varied, there are a few prominent family stories and artifacts reflected below. Eight participants inadvertently or directly shared artifacts and family stories that captured their desire to break the cyclical nature of generational curses in their families and places of work. All participants in this study alluded to the robust infrastructure of women in their families i.e., grandmother’s, mother’s, and aunts. Some participants referred to these women and themselves, as queen, boss, Big Mama, or Madea. All participants revered the words of wisdom, expressions, and experiences of the Black women in their lineage. Often relying on these factors within in their workspaces as navigational tools. All participants conveyed to some degree their reliance on a higher power i.e., Jesus, God, or spirituality. Holy scriptures, prayer, energy, and crystals were viewed as sacred practices. Two participants shared songs as their artifacts. One shared Etta James At Last, representing a new-found romantic love that broke the dysfunctional cycles in her life. The other shared a 22-song playlist, OG’s Making Memories, that embodied the love that whelmed her from her grandparents. Table 3 thoroughly illustrates each artifact provided that represented a family narrative.
**Table 3**

*Participant Photographs and Artifacts*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>#</th>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Description of Artifact/Photo</th>
<th>Caption</th>
<th>Family Story Connection</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dr. Naomi</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Photo</td>
<td>Father and Uncles</td>
<td>“Broken Promises”</td>
<td>Relationship with my father and men of the family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Photo</td>
<td>Mother, Sister, and I</td>
<td>“Momma’s Blues and Hues”</td>
<td>Self-love and Colorism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Photo</td>
<td>Great Grandmother’s Garden</td>
<td>The “Great Migration”</td>
<td>Family Migration and Resilience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dr. Miriam</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Artifact</td>
<td>Earned degrees</td>
<td>“Paving the way: BGC”</td>
<td>My family didn’t value education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Photo</td>
<td>Grandma, Mom, and Aunts</td>
<td>“I come from STRENGTH”</td>
<td>Black women’s resilience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Photo</td>
<td>Current family</td>
<td>“Creating my own legacy”</td>
<td>Creating my own lane and BGC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Artifact</td>
<td>Scripture: Jer. 29:11</td>
<td>“Paving the way: BGC”</td>
<td>Family values: church and prayer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Photo</td>
<td>“Sista” friends</td>
<td>“Sisterhood and Black Excellence”</td>
<td>I value authentic relationships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Priscilla</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Photo</td>
<td>Niece and Mother</td>
<td>“T-Shirt Across Generations”</td>
<td>Family Reunions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Artifact</td>
<td>Mirror from Grandmother</td>
<td>“I See You”</td>
<td>See me, see you</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Photo</td>
<td>Grandmother at my 6th grade graduation</td>
<td>“The Importance of Education”</td>
<td>Family viewed education as the key to the “good life”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Entry</td>
<td>Description</td>
<td>Item</td>
<td>Title</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------</td>
<td>-------</td>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leah</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Mother and Daughters</td>
<td>Photo</td>
<td>“I got all my sisters with me!” Known as Miss Tori’s 5 beautiful daughters</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Family members</td>
<td>Photo</td>
<td>“Loves of my life” Always walk in God’s light</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Portrait of self</td>
<td>Photo</td>
<td>“Early Years” Education broke the poverty cycle</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Photo album from work staff</td>
<td>Photo Album</td>
<td>“We were a center of kindness” The value of extended family</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dr. Elizabeth</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Painting of kindergarten graduation</td>
<td>Artifact</td>
<td>“Little Elizabeth” Fulfilling my great grandfather’s dream of reading and writing</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Holding hands</td>
<td>Photo(s)</td>
<td>“May May’s Hand” Shifting atmospheres to love</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hannah</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Grandfather’s military belongings</td>
<td>Artifact(s)</td>
<td>“#grandfather #armylife #leader” Loyalty, dedication, and service</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Mother’s degree</td>
<td>Artifact</td>
<td>“#first-generation #studentmom #overcomer” Family legacy of overcoming</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Quote in a plaque</td>
<td>Artifact</td>
<td>“#faith #presson” The Lord helps during tough times</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dr. Ruth</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Family of Origin</td>
<td>Photo</td>
<td>“Family” Love, commitment, sacrifice</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Brother and Sister portrait on mouse pad</td>
<td>Artifact</td>
<td>“Just Us” Keep going for our family legacy</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Artifact</td>
<td>Box secures firearm, money, and important documents</td>
<td>“Metal Box”</td>
<td>Responsibility and leadership</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Artifact</td>
<td>12” Thick Crystal Vase</td>
<td>“Crystal Vase”</td>
<td>Represents my mother’s strength and beauty</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Artifact(s)</td>
<td>Handmade set</td>
<td>“Cream and Sugar Set”</td>
<td>Friendship: Gift from an employer turned friend</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hadassah</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>Artifact</th>
<th>Photo from an art party</th>
<th>“Sunday Morning”</th>
<th>Family traditions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Photo</td>
<td>Debutante memories</td>
<td>“Debutante Ball”</td>
<td>Coming of age</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Photo</td>
<td>Bible, hair scarf, and friends</td>
<td>“At the heart of it all”</td>
<td>Church family</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Artifact</td>
<td>22-song playlist</td>
<td>“OG’s making memories”</td>
<td>Family gatherings</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mary</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>Artifact</th>
<th>Bible: family heirloom</th>
<th>“Family Bible”</th>
<th>Carrying on the responsibility of keeping God at the center</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Photo</td>
<td>Mother and Son</td>
<td>“My College Graduation”</td>
<td>We made it</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Photo</td>
<td>Husband and family</td>
<td>“Photograph”</td>
<td>A love that heals</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Artifact</td>
<td>An Etta James Song</td>
<td>“At Last”</td>
<td>The makings of a family free of dysfunction and trauma</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rachel</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>Photo</th>
<th>Grandmother</th>
<th>“Matriarch—our very first educator “</th>
<th>Family legacy of education</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Photo</td>
<td>Aunt</td>
<td>“The first family wedding”</td>
<td>Family legacy of marriage and weddings</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Photo</td>
<td>Aunt</td>
<td>“Laura gets her Master’s Degree”</td>
<td>Family legacy of education</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------</td>
<td>------</td>
<td>---------------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. BGC=Breaking Generational Curses
Description of Themes

The element of intersectionality among the three themes was apparent. This interconnected nature revealed how the themes as well as respective subthemes do not exist independently of the other. The themes in relation to subthemes inform each other; by doing so, they are reinforced and validated. This created an intricate convergence of how family stories inform, support, and influence Black women leaders in higher education at PWIs. As a result, the themes in addition to subthemes showcase examples of emancipatory knowing from the participants’ family stories. Figure 2 illustrates the intersectionality of each theme and subtheme. The overarching themes discovered from the data were: (a) navigating spaces in higher education, (b) the therapeutic nature of family storytelling, and (c) redefining leadership. As the participant’s family stories and experiences continued to unfold, six subthemes were composed: (a) navigating White spaces, (b) navigating other Black women leaders, (c) navigational strategies, (d) know thy self, (e) spiritual compass, and (f) leading in love. Figure 2 demonstrates how the influence of family storytelling on the emancipatory knowing of Black women leaders is reinforced.
Figure 2

The Intersectionality of Themes

THEME 1
Navigating Spaces in Higher Education

Subthemes:
- Navigating White Spaces
- Navigating Other Black Women Leaders
- Navigational Strategies

THEME 2
The Therapeutic Nature of Family Storytelling

Subthemes:
- Know Thy Self
- Spiritual Compass

THEME 3
Redefining Leadership

Subtheme:
- Leading in Love

(Sterling, 2022)
Theme 1: Navigating Spaces in Higher Education

The first prominent theme from participants’ narratives detailed the immutable experiences of overt and covert racism endured at PWIs. The theme, navigating spaces, presents and reveals the participant’s perceptions on the ills of navigating predominately White spaces as Black leaders. Throughout the participant’s storytelling, three subthemes became evident: (a) navigating White spaces, (b) navigating other Black women leaders, and (c) navigational strategies. Respectively, the subthemes capture the essence of Black women leaders’ untold stories of inner angst and resistance in predominately White spaces. Figure 3 demonstrates the effects of oppressive spaces on Black women leaders. In excerpts below each subtheme is deconstructed and expanded upon by the participants’ accounts.

Navigating White Spaces. This first subtheme sets the context for the subthemes to follow. Participants elaborated on the pathology of White supremacy and how work environments are shaped and affected as a result. To some extent, navigating PWIs was deemed burdensome for all participants. Their stories were rimmed with the penalties they encountered because of White supremacy. However, for many participants investing in the next generation i.e., students outweighed the persistent racial turbulence in these spaces. Collectively, the women recounted experiences of professional abuse, exhaustion, microaggressions, workplace terrorism, demeaning perceptions, the duplicity of whiteness, and imposter syndrome. Reflecting on the memoir of her grandmother’s garden, Dr. Naomi grappled with the current state of her professional life versus the future she imagines for herself. Her reflections clarified the tension of imposter syndrome
experienced in oppressive environments. She opened with a penetrating metaphor that expressly described her relationship with higher education institutions. Dr. Naomi stated:

I think about all the weeds that are currently growing in my professional garden. Like, literally, I got a whole patch of weeds, and I'm like, Ooh, they're getting bigger by the day. And I'm somewhere so busy thinking about how big they're getting, and I'm not actually cutting them out. Because it's scarier to cut them out than to actually watch them grow. I become so used to the weeds that like, what would new growth be like? Like, you mean I gotta cut all this out, aerate the ground, and I might have to burn it? Like, you mean, I gotta destroy this thing for it to come back in full? So, when I think about gardens, I think about like our souls I think about, I think about a lot of things like I think about this cycle of life, and death and recreation and all of these things. And I'm somewhere in between, like, maybe it's time to burn the garden of my professional life. And, like, see new growth, because this ain’t it. This ain’t it. So, I'm starting to see glimpses of what my garden is gonna look like. And it's scary. It's scary, because I think I figured out what I want to be when I grow up. Um, and that's scary, because you don't really want to tell people that. You know, when I wanted to be a college president, and I still might want to be a college president. I told somebody that and they said, “You know, that's not something you aspire to.” Why the hell not? Why
can't the presidency be something I aspire to? So, when I think about that, gardens give you hope, like, you know what you planted under the soil, you're just like waiting on that thing to pop through. Like, you wait on top of that last layer of dirt. And you're like, wow, something I did is growing up under there … that's probably just the best way to describe it is I'm trying to figure out if, if I'm weeding my garden, or if my garden needs to burn entirely and like regrow. I didn’t think that was gonna make me emotional, but it did.

Intentionally Dr. Naomi repeated terminology such as *weeds*. Detailing her use of the word *weeds*, she expands on this trope and explains the effects of white supremacy in her workspace.

Like the self-doubt. White supremacy don't grow in my garden. Don't get me wrong, it shades. It shades my garden. So, there are some days I can't get direct sunlight on all my plants. But, white supremacy don't grow in my garden. So, what does grow because of white supremacy? And because it's harmful is that weeds pop up of self-doubt. Weeds pop up of like, am I good enough? Will I be able to publish enough? You know, those are the weeds that have to go because ultimately, white supremacy doesn't exist in here. That's mine … and so, it's my responsibility to cultivate that space because it is mine.
Similar to Dr. Naomi, all of the women in the study cited their experience of *weeds* in their professional garden. Detailing her early career experiences as a young Black professional, Dr. Miriam talked about how imposter syndrome affected her and a colleague due to the leadership of that department. Dr. Miriam described imposter syndrome:

So, what I mean by imposter syndrome is that this person and I'll include myself, this person and I were very capable of doing the job, right? But, when you are in a toxic environment, um, you question your ability, you question what you're doing and how you're doing it, but you do the work. You do the work well, but the environment that’s been created for you in that space goes against what you know you can do and what your resume shows you can do. … What I think with imposter syndrome, you question it and you feel like you're a fraud, but you're
doing it, but you're not giving yourself the credit... That's how I would explain impostor syndrome.

Many of the Black women alluded to how the effects of impostor syndrome influence how they are depicted in White spaces. Several discussed the demeaning perceptions and stereotypes they refused to subscribe to but were ascribed to them because of their race. For example, detailing an incident with her current White male supervisor, Hannah, explained he viewed her as part of the angry Black crew. She further spoke to faculty perceptions of White versus Black students. She shared:

Sometimes black people, when we speak up, we're always seen as being part of the group that's angry. But when … I'm just gonna say it. When white people do it sometimes— which actually one of the faculty members at our school said this before about a student, a white student … “Oh, they speak with so much passion.” But, why you can't take me as being passionate about my job? Why does it have to be I come off angry?

Several of the participants discussed experiences of isolation and exclusion in PWIs. A common thread among their stories were memories of being shunned and professionally stunted. For example, Leah detailed how she was negatively labeled after standing up for her students of color on campus. She endured bullying and slander that ultimately tainted how other departments on campus perceived her and her students. She described how demeaning perceptions can lead to stunted growth professionally, “Any thought, or any chance that I had to elevate in any other position was null and void at that point. I wasn't going anywhere else and I knew that.” Following Leah’s rebuke of White supremacist tactics she was blacklisted. She recognized the cost for speaking up and ultimately paid
the price. Leah further shared, “It was truly exhausting. I retired, for a few reasons, and one of the reasons was truly, I was exhausted, seriously. … But again, as I say, if you as an African American person, if you stay in the background, you're okay.”

Leah continued:

Because at that point, they label you or they labeled me the troublemaker. “Here comes the troublemaker” you know, or “here comes the angry black woman.” That's the major title, you know, and I wasn't. I'm not. I don't walk around angry. People that knew me, I'm smiling every day all day long. That’s who I am. But, I'm not gonna put up with deceitfulness. And I'm not gonna put up with racism. Period. I'm not. We don't have to, you know.

As the Black women leaders continued the conversation, some highlighted the need to also navigate White students. They expressed how White students viewed them as incompetent and unfit to manage an office, caseload, or classroom. Often, White students questioned their authority as Black women leaders. For instance, Hannah recalled, “I've even had an older White student say to me that she didn't want to come and see me, because I was a young, black female. But when she encountered me, she was like, ‘Man, Hannah’s that deal!’” Another Black woman leader, Priscilla, outlined a conversation with a student that turned divisive rather quickly. Humorously, Priscilla shifted the weight of her voice as she discussed the stereotypical perceptions this White male student held:

It was an academic advising appointment with a student. I was telling a student that he needed to take an additional course and he did not want to take that additional course. And he goes “Well, what can I offer you to not have to take this
additional course?” And I go “Yeah, this isn't a bribe situation. Like that's how this works. You're gonna have to take the additional course” and he's like, “Are you sure that I cannot give you some fried chicken or some watermelon to not have to take this course?” My immediate answer was like, stunned face. Like, did he really just say this? … The words that came out of my mouth were, “I don't even like fried chicken or watermelon.” I’m just like, how stereotypical and just like ridiculous was that, right?

For participants, learning to navigate the *duplicity of whiteness* was another common thread. Dr. Naomi used this phrase, *duplicity of whiteness*, during her interview. Here, Dr. Naomi explained the notes of disparagement embedded in the *duplicity of whiteness*:

So, they'll [White colleagues] thank me privately in meetings for stretching them to be more equitable, while punishing me publicly for speaking out. So, it's just the duplicity, it’s the duplicity of whiteness, where, as long as it has some level of interest convergence, some level of symbiosis for them … they're all on board.

For Rachel, demeaning perceptions were a result of the *duplicity of whiteness*. Not only was she aware of the demeaning perceptions but the effects of the *duplicity of whiteness* on her mentally and physically. Rachel explained, “On one hand, I have that, but then on the other end, I have that I always have to be this strong person that I can do it all. That I could do 30,000 things and I don't get tired.” Rachel went on to communicate the stark cultural differences between White women leaders and Black women leaders. She explained, “A lot of these director positions, and some of the provost positions are these White middle-aged women who run the show. And they just want to work the hell out of you, because this is their world and their whole life.” For Rachel, her home life carried
more weight than her role as director at the university. She valued her family above the demands of higher education. This finding rang true for many of the women in this study. Rachel also voiced that her colleagues view her as expendable, however, in the same vein they enforce surveillance on Rachel’s decision making. She shared, “I also feel like because I'm not a 50-year-old, middle-aged White woman, that I'm, um, that I'm also not competent and feel like, you know, I have to be watched.”

Although the majority of Black women leaders shared stories of surviving PWIs, they spoke poignantly about exhaustion. It became quite clear that weathering the higher education terrain was rather tiring. This exhaustion was felt both physically and mentally. Participants perceived these spaces as exhausting due to the exploitation they withstood daily. Furthermore, most participants cited these spaces as abusive. For instance, Dr. Naomi concluded, “Admitting you're in an abusive professional relationship is hard. Because how do you say that? Companies don't like being told they're abusive … I'm sick of negotiating with terrorists. Like that's just what it is.” In addition, many of them elaborated on the pressure of living up to an image i.e., codeswitching, but also working to maintain their true identity. Honoring her boundaries, Hadassah not only recognized how oppressive White spaces cause harm, she also voiced how she’s intentionally working to reclaim her body and her soul. Thus, declaring she would no longer allow herself to be haphazardly used in these spaces, Hadassah asserted:

But it's like at some point, you have to put the accountability off on them, meaning the White people—men and women. Stop trying to use us to do your shit. And then take the accolades and the praise while we over here burnt out looking dusty and musty. No, we're not doing it. I'm just not doing that. I can't.
My body and my soul won't allow me to do that. Because again, I'm in a different space. Again, I'm not where I fully need to be. I don't know who I am or what it looks like on the other side, but I'm damn sure not where I used to be in terms of that.

In addition to relaying the exhausting burden of navigating oppressive PWIs, a striking concern for participants was the lack of compensation. Dr. Naomi noted Black women leaders are not compensated for the cultural strategies used to survive.

The exhausting work that black women are not compensated for doesn't go on our CVs and doesn't go on our cover letters. Like navigate White supremacy all day long. Like, I wish it could. I wish there was a salary attached to navigating White supremacy and particularly at the intersection of gender, like White women are oftentimes in my experience, the gatekeepers of White supremacy and I work on a women’s leadership research agenda.

Dr. Naomi went on to say:

I think I've been used in some pretty harmful ways. And that also includes carrying the responsibility of very basic mediocre white women who don't know their right from left. That's one of the most exhausting parts of my role, is that there is a dotted line to make sure that white women stay afloat. And that's exhausting. I'm tired of it. I just don't understand why white supremacy won't keep white women afloat. And I don't understand why white women don't recognize that white supremacy don't keep them afloat."

Although Dr. Naomi expressed her disdain for negative aspects of higher education, like her, most participants expressed an overwhelming sense of responsibility to contribute to
the history of Black women scholars and educators. This compelling feeling to steward the next generation of scholars and professionals weighed heavily on their conscious. While these women leaders endured various hardships, their sorrow was most felt by the injuries inflicted from their own—other Black women leaders at PWIs.

Navigating Other Black Women Leaders. The whirlwind of these experiences expressed by each Black woman leader pointed toward internalized oppression as a result of systemic racism in higher education institutions. However, for many of the Black women, Black on Black oppression inflicted by other Black women leaders far outweighed the oppression inflicted by their White counterparts. In discussing how they navigate White spaces in higher education, participants named other Black women leaders as an obstacle in their survival at PWIs. Participants cited the environment of PWIs as the cause of this phenomenon. For instance, Dr. Ruth clarified:

I believe in these spaces where people don't have identity, we merge with this predominant identity. I think when you don't have a strong family background, to be accepted and sometimes to get ahead, you merge with those identities. And that was something I didn't have to do.

From her perspective, the culture of PWIs affects how Black women engage with other Black women. Dr. Ruth specified:

So, you go through all of this, to get the PhD to get hired in the university to feel like crap. … Now, that didn't happen to me directly, right? But, the effects of that came through one of our own [a Black woman]. So, it's the same thing, you go, and you assimilate, and you get so wounded by the culture that you don't even know how to treat your own. Now that's my experience. So, the effects of the
academy what it can have on a person of color can be detrimental. … So here it is. Hurt people hurt people.

For Dr. Ruth, whose family centralized foundational values and a supportive structure, she found identity outside of her work title and scholarly credentials.

On the other hand, participants viewed this issue as self-imposed within the Black community. For example, reflecting on her experience under the leadership of a Black woman at a PWI, Mary suggested, “I feel like we can sometimes have this built-in envy, and crabs in a barrel mentality about different things.” Similarly, Dr. Miriam discussed her feelings of disappointment and anxiety working under Black women leaders. She explained, “My experience is tainted. … I was not thrilled to work under Black women in leadership. Even more so when I do, I'm very anxious at first and not hopeful I will say I confided in the wrong people.” Another participant, Rachel, revealed that she witnessed oppressive departments led by Black women leaders. She confirmed, “To be honest, it was from a person of color, a woman of color [a Black woman] that I've seen people have this exhaustion and trust issues, trust was a bigger issue.”

While most participants deeply felt the ache of injury by Black women in the workplace, Hadassah was affected in all areas of her life. Describing the multiplicative sources of hurt from family, mentors, and supervisors, Hadassah elaborated:

I was having issues with my mom. She's a black woman. My boss at the time was a black woman. And I also got fired from that job for a reason unbeknownst to me. And then I had an academic one [Black woman leader], where my committee was three black women. So, I've been hurt in the largest three areas of my life by black women. So now I'm having trust issues… You hate to look at Black women
like that. You don't want to but, because of these instances I have to, to protect my seat, to protect my peace and myself. And I'm sad, but you have to.

Also elaborating on the complexity of navigating other Black women leaders, Dr. Elizabeth recalled:

I'm like, okay, now I got this biracial black woman that’s my direct boss. She can use the colloquial gestures and stuff to get in. And then she will turn around use the same microaggressions that white individuals use against me. “Oh, do you have to tell them you’re from that city? It might make my white colleagues upset. How about you know you're the field negro and I'm the house negro. Let me talk this time in this meeting. Have you ever thought about losing weight? You know, as a plus size, taller black woman you’re quite intimidating.”

Opinions differed as to whether there was a need to cultivate relationships with other Black women leaders. Concerns regarding the mistrust with Black women leaders were more widespread than anticipated among the participants. For instance, referring to her relationship with a Black woman leader at her campus, Dr. Ruth expressed, “I'm disappointed because I know you're not a safe space as you say. I could never be vulnerable in those spaces.” The participant’s feelings concerning their Sista’s in the workplace were twofold: fear and love. Talking about her mixed emotions Hadassah said:

So that's the reality, that's hurtful. Because it's like, I want to believe with my heart of hearts, that black women have each other's back. I want to believe in black girl excellence and black girl magic. And I'm not saying that I don't. But, when we talk about the reality, sometimes, that's the reality that hurts in some
parts of us that we don’t want to accept, but I had to accept it because it was in my face.

In contrast, Dr. Naomi elaborated on a Black woman who desired to have close proximity to White currency. Commenting on a former Black woman director, Dr. Naomi further explained she felt the director, like many black people, was navigating an identity crisis because there is currency in whiteness. Dr. Naomi summarized:

So, I sit somewhere between feeling sorry for her, and also having to still realize that it’s still my responsibility to advocate on her behalf, even if I don’t agree with some of the ways she performs. So that’s been the hardest lesson in navigating her is that I still got to be my sister’s keeper even when she don’t keep herself.

Interestingly, Dr. Elizabeth added to this ever-widening discussion, emphasis on self-reflection. She articulated that to maintain healthy images of self and relationships with others, Black women must seek to understand themselves and their actions deeply. Dr. Elizabeth offered:

I watched another black woman the other day, take all her pain and her work hurt from a predominantly White institution, out on me. Even though I’ve experienced it firsthand. I’ve experienced the ultimate push out. Yeah, they blackballed you. But also, you didn’t do the self-reflection.

**Navigational Strategies.** Navigational tools at PWIs were a preeminent story arc in the participant’s discussions. The participants on the whole cited the need to be hypervigilant in these spaces. Specifically, they relied on the weight of their voice, boundary setting, faith and lessons from their family. These navigational tools dually operated as alternative methodologies of survival and resistance. For example,
commenting on the power of a Black woman’s voice, Dr. Naomi asserted, “I think there’s something really revolutionary about being a black woman who says no and that’s a complete sentence.” However, she understood that exercising these rights could work against her in such spaces. For instance, Dr. Naomi also described the double-edged sword of setting boundaries in white spaces. She explained:

But I will tell you that working in this predominantly white space, they are a lot less forgiving and grace doesn’t abound in this space. Right? So, as gracious as I want to be in setting my boundaries, I don’t feel like I have the same freedoms to fail. I don’t feel like I have the same freedoms to always exercise my boundaries. And that’s part of the reason I’m deciding if this is where I want to be, right? So, it’s not necessarily a bad thing. But I don’t feel like there’s the same level of grace, there’s not the same shared understanding, there’s not the same shared cultural practice. The way I would tell somebody in my personal life, “like that’s enough,” is different than how I have to police the imaginations of white people. And that is exhausting. That even in my boundary setting, I still have to figure out a way that white people won’t be so threatened that my boundaries equal a death sentence.

Throughout her account, Hannah communicated that she learned when to say *no.* Essentially, she learned when and how to speak up on her behalf. Here she detailed how she responded to her White male supervisor’s pressing requests. She shared:

So, what he does, and I’ve had to learn this is that he will call me immediately after we’ve dialogued through text, which doesn’t give me enough time to process
it. And I’ve given him a few times to get that off on me, but this last time, I said, no. I’m gonna call you back. Because I need to process what’s happened.

The majority of participants explained their tendency to associate navigational tools to faith. Trust and hope in God appeared to function as a source of supernatural strength. In commenting on her grandfather’s love for God, Hannah described the legacy of faith he inspired in his family. She felt that with the help of the Lord she could overcome anything.

The artifact she provided was a quote her grandfather kept in the office of his church. She refers back to this quote as often as she refers to God for strength. Hannah expanded on how her faith informs her daily actions in her workspace. She discussed:

I mean, we [me and God] should be able to handle every situation together. So even when it is difficult, I can close my door and create the ambience for myself to connect with God. If I need to be in a safe, that peaceful place to be like, ‘You know what, Hannah, you can overcome and it’s okay.

When it came to clarifying how Black women leaders managed to overcome dominant narratives in oppressive spaces, family narratives proved to be a prominent resource. Few navigational tools have aided Black women leaders like family stories. For all participants, family stories were the glue that fastened their identity and reaffirmed their worth. In short, through their narratives, Black women leaders demonstrated the
invaluable truth found in their family stories. For Dr. Ruth, this truth emerged as validation and security from the love of her family. She stated:

Our parents never pushed us to a place where we felt that we needed the outside world to validate us. We didn’t. That was just not who we were. We were validated by the love and in family… My mother told a lot of stories to my brother and I to ground us and be thankful. And so again, these stories that they shared about life and family, produced a foundation of security, so that you would be brave enough to be in these spaces…

The data within this study confirmed that PWIs are still riddled with past oppressions and Black women leaders are still a target. The data also provided overwhelming confirmation that the participants garnered strength and navigational tools from their families and the stories that accompanied them.

**Theme 2: The Therapeutic Nature of Family Storytelling**

The second important theme communicated how participants perceived and valued their family stories. For participants, what was clear about family stories—for better or for worse—is that they are reservoirs of empowerment and self-affirmation. As participants continued to reflect and share their family stories two subthemes became known: (a) know thy self and, (b) spiritual compass. Serving as reminders, their family stories aided in maintaining their identity apart from the false dominant narratives about Black women. Figure 4 showcases the collective soundtrack of the participant’s voices in relation to the second theme. The following excerpts illuminate the participants contentions on the therapeutic nature of their family stories.
Figure 4

The Therapeutic Nature of Family Storytelling

(STERLING, 2022)
Know Thy Self. As for grounding, this subtheme represents the participants’ alternative practices to preserve their identities in cultures of assimilation. As for self-affirmation, this subtheme explores the complex strategies the Black women leaders lean on to bolster self-love in less than loving spaces. These frameworks of staying true to self, engender a compassionate love for themselves and the persons they serve i.e., lead. Their family stories acted as mental buffers against the racial challenges Black women face in society and the revictimization they withstand in their workspaces. For example, Dr. Ruth suggested she would narrowly survive in PWIs if not for the mental fortitude her family instilled. It is the family narrative of resilience that cemented self-empowerment in Dr. Ruth. She explained:

I knew once I left our safe space. Oh, I knew not to even think about not being anything but the strong woman that I have been trained to be by both sides of my family. When you leave out the house, no matter where you are. So being a part of a university is no different. And as a matter of fact, it made me stronger. Because I never felt I had to belong. I never felt I had to be accepted.

She continued to speak about how her family narratives girded her in preparation for maneuvering higher education:

Somebody has to say something about it continually, that these spaces are not safe [PWIs], unless you have a strong foundation of support. And I don't mean just financially, I mean, someone has to really put some resilience inside of you, something that you can reflect on. Or, you're not going to make it because it's designed for you not to make it and it's getting harder ... There are people staying in these spaces, because they’re just there, they’re not there to help.
Similar to Dr. Ruth, Mary also considered how her family narrative grounded her as a Black woman leader. She elaborated on the multi-dimensional benefits of her family narratives. Mostly she reflected on the influence her family narrative had on her current identity. She rehearsed the affirmations her family told to her. Mary said:

It's keeping you at a place of balance to me, like, sometimes, you know, that's just our human nature, sometimes our ego, it can be inflated … I always want to be at a place where I am relatable, that people feel like that I am touchable, and that I can be at a place of vulnerability to them. So, I feel like that our family grounds us in the sense of reminding us of who we are, reminding us of where you come from, reminding you of what you're capable of. So that's what I mean, when I say grounding, like, we're going to always be the mirror … you may not agree with what I'm saying, because I'm not going to always agree with you. But I am the place where you can come back and I'm going to remind you of who you are.

It is in the telling of their family stories Black women are reminded of who they are and to whom they belong. As Dr. Naomi stated, “Right now, I gotta remind myself, who I am and whose I am. So that's the space I’m in, professionally.” and Hannah stated, “I had to remember that I come with gifts and talents that I bring to my role.” A common thread among all participants was self-affirmations. For all the Black women leaders, affirming their worth was directly tied to the affirmations they received from their family
networks. For example, recalling the family heirloom her grandmother gave her, Priscilla shared her grandmother’s reminder, that she [Priscilla] is loved and seen. She narrated:

She said the significance of the mirror was basically even if I don't tell you that I love you, you do know that I see you. And that if you need me, I'm going to always be there for you. And that was kind of the significance of the mirror like I see you. And I need you to know that if you ever need me, I will always be there for you.

In reflecting on her family's narrative of attending church and practicing prayer, full of emotion, Dr. Miriam elaborated on the scripture she provided as an artifact. She reminded herself:

My future is, it's okay. And, that I have hope that I have a future and it's going to be good. And that's a promise from God. You know, and like I said earlier, it reminds me good or bad that my path is going to be okay. My path is going to be prosperous as long as I am doing right by people, by my job, by my family, so on and so forth.

Similarly, describing the significance of self-affirmations, Hannah not only highlighted this point, she alluded to the disaffirming nature of PWIs. She detailed:

But I've again had to learn how to, like cast down my thoughts to be like, “Miriam, you know what you're here. There are people that can relate to you and know that you're educated. You don't have to prove anything to yourself.” But I
know the reality, unfortunately, sometimes PWIs we always have to prove ourselves, you know, and that’s how I feel most of the time, that I always have to prove myself.

Also referring to her Great Aunt’s affirming words, Dr. Elizabeth reflected, She's always been the person to say, “Why would you have to prove anything? You are loved. And I'm going to show you.” Dr. Ruth’s reflections mirrored Dr. Elizabeth’s. In revisiting where she learned self-confidence, Dr. Ruth deferred to her family:

So, the sense of security, mainly, the confidence in myself, professionally. I'm secure enough in who I am, to be in the world. To be who I am. I'm happy with who I am. I'm confident. And I'm committed to what I do. All because that's what was put inside of me, that's what was around me.

Self-affirmations and self-reflection were parallel concepts during the participant’s discussion of self and identity. Dr. Elizabeth further pointed out the need to consistently assess herself in PWIs:

And I think sometimes we don't self-reflect as black women in these predominately white spaces. Because you can't lift and climb if you ain't lifting yourself. Are you spending time with yourself? Are you evaluating yourself? Who are you in this space? I'm a bold, smart black woman. I'm bold, I'm plus size. I'm fly. I don't code switch.

While Dr. Elizabeth discussed self-affirmations as a reflective tool, Hadassah noted how her family’s narrative of unconditional support encouraged her to bring the best version of herself to work. She explained how her family has contributed to who she is at work. Hadassah voiced, “I think about just my family and being supportive of me, through all
these years and loving me the way that they have has allowed me to show up to support
the students in the way that I do.” She went on to say, “Really all I’m doing is bringing
who I am. So, I’m bringing my family with me along with my work experiences, my
personal experiences into the classroom or into the building with me.”

**Spiritual Compass.** Throughout the discussion about their preservation of self,
spiritual compass became evident as the second subtheme. In unison, the participants
spoke about memoirs of faith from the families. This notion of faith in God or a higher
power seemed to be regenerative in and among their families. Often participants
communicated the *passing down* of hope and prayer when facing the gauntlet of higher
education. For example, with pride, Mary shared, “Whether it be my parents, but mostly
my grandparents, like my one grandmother… when I say the prayer warrior, she pleaded
the blood on a daily basis.” Mary’s description of *pleading the blood* refers to calling on
the name of Jesus and His host of angels to cover her and her family. For many of the
Black women leaders, faith invoked improvisation in their personal and professional
lives. Through faith in God, they learned strategies to fight spiritually against perpetual
attacks on their personhood. Faith in God implies there is no *hell* that rivals Him [God].
He is more than enough to make it through the day in any space. Here Hadassah
described her family as *believers*, “Grounded in the Lord. Definitely faith-based. We
don’t do anything, go anywhere without saying grace, prayer.” For these women, God
overwhelmed the challenges that would try to overwhelm them. In a profound excerpt,
Mary identified God as her source of life. She showcased her grandparent’s bible that
was passed down to her a year ago:
Um, because it's super old. It's strength. You know, it's tradition, it just, it says everything about like, who we are, and the fact that not only do we have individual purpose, but a purpose as a family. And I'm grateful for that tradition of Christianity, of loving the Lord. And as a result, learning how to love yourself. So that's what I see with that.

Mary expressed her gratitude:

Oh my God, you have smiled on us
God, you continue to smile on us.
And that's why like my family legacy, our family story, God is the center of it all because he is the one that keeps us when we don't know how to be kept. He is the one who guides and leads and protects us. And so, He is always going to be the person that you need to have at the center of your life … to accept Him, to honor Him, and to reverence Him. So that He can continue to show us how to walk this journey because it’s not going to be easy everyday but, it’s gonna be worth it.

The honor of receiving her family’s bible was a reminder to Mary that God must remain at the center of her life always, in all ways.

Beyond serving as a prominent family legacy, faith in God also proved to be a form of spiritual leadership. Dr. Elizabeth spoke about her uncle’s practice of covering the family in prayer. Applauding his spiritual leadership, she recalled many times she felt financially, emotionally, and spiritually covered by him. With gratitude she stated:
Watching him take charge of our family in a spiritual way, like, that’s a whole nother level of leadership. He doesn't just provide financially for us, or emotional support, like I could call my uncle, and we could talk about it. I'm like, can you pray with me Uncle Robert? … Like that, to me is leadership, spiritual leadership, because sometimes we don't realize, you know, yes, he can take care of a household step up and do that. But to watch him cover us, that’s a whole nother level, like he always had as our backs.

Keeping with her family's faith narrative, Hannah elaborated about her grandfather's spiritual leadership; she outlined that faith was her inheritance. Trusting in God was baked into her bone marrow and she often relied on His [God's] spiritual guidance just as she witnessed her grandfather do. Hannah expressed:

He always like, “Girl, the Lord is good!” And when he started talking about the Lord, he would just start crying. Um, but my grandfather, really, his faith was just like, so important to him, because it helped him get through the day.

Almost invariably, many of the Black women leader’s practiced a form of contemplation. As Dr. Miriam expressed, this practice strengthens their inner-person allowing them to project hope and courage in the face of defeat. Dr. Miriam expressed, “I know my faith in that God has set me up for more. I can lean into that during those tough times knowing that this is a phase… you’re going to come out of it and keep pushing forward.

In light of their perpetual challenges, many participants' family narratives are the foundation in their personal and professional lives that supports their mental and spiritual wellness. As family stories produce family narratives over time, participants perceived the narratives functionality as an internal compass to navigate the disempowering cultural
norms of their PWIs. What appeared as a critical step in maintaining their spiritual health was choosing to walk upright as women, as leaders. Mary articulated this perspective when speaking about her family’s bible heirloom:

But again, too, it also keeps me grounded in a sense that when you start to feel some of those, you know, things that we shouldn't be feeling rise up in you, it reminds you of how we should be handling situations and that we do have an extraordinary responsibility as people of God to walk a certain way and to model the way … So, for me, it’s an awesome responsibility, but I’m grateful for it every step along the way.

Here Leah put into context and summarized the importance of walking in God’s light despite her professional circumstances:

So always walk in God's light, I have to do that … Um, like I said, I could be bitter about some things, I can be angry about some things, but I choose not to be. I choose to, to walk in God's light, I feel like when God gives you grace, and blessings, then that is a heck of an honor. And to be able to know that, I think it's huge. It's amazing.

Many of the participants coupled their family narratives of faith and authenticity as factors of resistance in PWIs; their most critical endeavor was to remain true to themselves. They made conscious efforts to immerse themselves in the promises of God and their family narratives of fortitude. The data revealed, for each participant, that family stories were emancipators. The modes of oppression used against Black women leaders stood in contrast to the pedagogies of resilience and love imprinted by their
family networks. How the Black women leaders engaged or disengaged in their respective roles, in part, was a direct result of the resilience seared into their identities.

**Theme 3: Redefining Leadership**

The third overarching theme understood through data analysis represented the pedagogies of love Black women leaders' harness and project in their leadership roles. Through their family narratives, the participants practiced and continually strived to love God, themselves, and others. This form of love is not romantic; instead, this humane love is extended for the holistic good of those in their sphere of influence. The sum of their interviews produced one subtheme: leading in love. This subtheme made known a critical tenant—witnessing love. Figure 5 illustrates the ingredients of leadership for the Black women leaders in this study. For these leaders, witnessing their families lead in love made it possible for them to reimagine the complex concept of leadership.
Figure 5

Redefining Leadership

(STERLING, 2022)

Leading in Love. The narratives told by each Black woman leader in this study became essential resources for constructing a culturally relevant leadership profile for Black women in Higher Education. *Higher Education* is an institution or rather a system; systems are not inherently built on espousing virtues of compassionate love. However, all
systems and institutions need people and people need care. Family likewise is a system, what some might refer to as an institution. The family's inherent purpose is to steward unconditional considerable care for its members. For Black women leaders, reimagining these spaces, i.e., institutions, is to consider compassionate love and grace as the nucleus of their strategic plans. In this regard, Black women leaders turn to their family narratives as blueprints for creating professional spaces of peace and forgiveness, humility and thankfulness, courage and authenticity. For instance, revisiting the memory of her Great Aunt displaying leadership on her neighborhood block, Dr. Elizabeth recalled the moment a group of young men littered in her aunt’s yard. How her aunt navigated this situation reflected her aunt’s love for people and community. Dr. Elizabeth remembered:

Watching her navigate the fact of she didn't know this car. She didn't know these people. But she still led in love. So, not to accuse them. Not to yell at them. Not to shame them. Not to belittle them. But to make it a teachable moment. She treated them as if they were her kids as if they were family.

Further describing her aunt’s leadership profile, Dr. Elizabeth went on to say:

She did it with love and good intentions. And I think that's sometimes what's being missed in leadership is because sometimes it's like, I'm just trying to show that I know more than you; I'm better than you. I'm, superior. She wasn't demanding respect, she was respected. … The way she navigated those men really showed me that you can love anybody. You can love anybody. And you don't never necessarily know who needs that example of love in that moment.
Bearing witness to her aunt’s leadership practices helped Dr. Elizabeth clarify her own leadership profile. Dr. Elizabeth positioned herself and her space as safe places for her colleagues and students. She explained:

Um, I would definitely say, um, leader identity from my family stories, I think I navigate every space as assume good intentions. Leading with love … and when I say leading with love is just even in the workplace. You never know who's navigating trauma or not having a good home life themselves, not just the students, but also faculty and staff. And I might be just a small glimpse of what they could be missing at home. And maybe at home, you're not feeling respected. But here, I'll respect you. You know, maybe at home, you’re feeling not motivated or heard. But I'm going to motivate you and hear you.

Similar to Dr. Elizabeth, Rachel’s leadership style involved creating safe spaces for her followers. Her comments revealed her desire to reimagine work-life balance. She outlined:

I enjoy working with teams. I do. I enjoy motivating people, I enjoy pouring into people, developing them, allowing them to get a feel of what they like and don't like about the job and best practices and stuff like that. I always have side conversations with people, that whenever you're ready to move on, just let me know, how can I prepare you for the next thing, you know, the next level, phase, whatever it may be of your life. Um, and I think that upsets a lot of people, because they just want to keep people at the same level that they're at, and just work the hell out of them. And I don't believe in that. I don't believe in that. I believe in giving people autonomy. I believe in providing flexible schedules,
because work life balance is real, and it should be encouraged at work. And um, people don't believe it.

Rachel further elaborated:

Work is hard and life is hard to and so how can we make the best of both worlds so that we can have great workers, but also healthy people whose families need them to be there for them. So, how can we do that? How can we create those spaces? And so, I don't think higher ed is ready for that, because I have so many ideas in mind of how it could be done.

Leah described her leadership practices as a gift. Thinking of her time spent working with students, staff, faculty, and administration, Leah explained her approach to leadership, “I believe I have a gift of engaging people. I have a leadership gift as well. I can lead in a humble fashion.” These leadership gifts manifested in more ways than one for several participant leadership profiles.

In this statement, Rachel described herself as a servant leader at heart:

I would definitely say I'm a servant leader. Absolutely. I would say I'm a servant leader, I want to lead by example. But I feel like you're in leadership positions for a reason you want to serve definitely your staff. What can I do to develop you? What can I do to help you so that you can be a better person for the team? What is it that you need me to do, so that you can do what you are here to do? So, I would definitely say I'm a servant leader. I am here to serve. … Serving my staff, making sure they are equipped to have all the knowledge that they need to do a great job on a daily basis. Serving the students. Being of service to the campus and the campus community.
Dr. Miriam, expanded on a culturally shared view of leadership. In this statement, Dr. Miriam recalled how a supervisor proved to be divisive and manipulative toward her employees. Dr. Miriam shared how that experience inspired her to lead with honesty at her helm:

I also think that experience, it showed how truthful I want to be in this work. And I think that's where it's always hard for me is because I want to be truthful, I want to be honest, transparent and accountable. But I don't think a lot of PWIs especially when it comes to the DEI work, they're not willing to, to be honest and transparent. And I think that's where it gets hard for me with doing this type of work is because you want to have the right intentions, you want to work hard, but you don't have the resources and the transparency behind you to do it, which makes it hard.

For Leah, leadership was synonymous with unconditional love. She elaborated on the resistance she experienced from her peers due to her leadership views. Here Leah clarified that she led with unconditional love a love that starts with self-love:

Yes, that’s exactly how I led. … Some people embraced it very well, some people in my opinion was just like me, they loved unconditionally. And those were your for real people. The people that had their own agenda, they, you know, they made it an issue, you know, “Oh, she's just too involved”, or “She's just fake.” Some people say it's fake. “That’s not how she feels.” How you gon tell me how I feel? … So again, they're being judgmental, because they're not that way. They don't understand, because it's not in their heart. And sometimes they don't love
themselves. So, you can't love someone else. And once I realized that and realized who those people were, then I knew how to handle myself around those people.

The data analysis answered three emerging questions concerning the participant’s leadership pedagogies: (a) how do Black women leaders perceive leadership, (b) where do Black women leaders learn to lead and, (c) in what ways do Black women leaders lead? These Black women leaders perceive leadership as an honor and avenue to break generational curses both personally and professionally. Their leadership practices are a conglomerate of family stories and life experiences. For these Black women, their leadership does not require their followers to heal as a result of their [Black women leader’s] actions—leading in love is their framework.

**Results of Member Checks**

Contributing to the validity of the study, member checks were conducted with the participants. Following the data collection and analysis, individual meetings were scheduled with participants to review the themes and findings of the study. Four of ten participants provided feedback on the findings. Participants viewed a presentation via zoom of each theme with a thorough interpretation. Given the option and space to share their feelings and initial reactions, participants shared their perspective concerning the study’s results. For instance, Leah expressed her concerns about the subtheme, *navigating other Black women*. She voiced:

Our counterparts are aware of the effects of racism. I’m afraid some will shift the narrative to focus on our [Black women] *in-house* issues instead of the very real racism that runs rapid. They’ll say she’s black and she’s black and they are
against each other so how could it be race an issue? I think it really really matters how you present that one because they’ll use it to their advantage.

Leah went on to convey her excitement for this study, “Thank you, Eboni for including me. Phenomenal work! You captured my heart.” The garden illustration in Figure 3, navigating spaces in higher education, was often cited as a permanent image in participants' minds. For example, Hannah exclaimed, “I can’t get that garden analogy out of my mind. It’s sticking. It’s sticking with me because it’s so true.” Mary also shared, “Wow, the illustration explains roots that I too have to dig up. In fact, this week started off rough but this meeting was just the reminder I needed to push me.” She went on to explain how she could feel theme two. She shared, “The CD cover art is like our songs. This is our song. We are all songs. This is real sisterhood!”

Chapter Summary

Through the participant’s individual and collective storytelling, this chapter offered space for Black women leaders to share their stories of dehumanization in the workplace. Perhaps most important, these leaders recognized their family stories as powerful ways of knowing. What is learned, is that, the dominant culture of post-secondary education may render Black women leaders invisible but, their family stories have operated as critical counter-stories about who they are and where they enter the world. What also became evident is that one must first see love in leadership as a possibility. From the data it was discovered that three themes dominated the study: (a) navigating spaces in higher education, (b) redefining leadership, and (c) the therapeutic nature of family storytelling. In addition, participants’ family stories and experiences provided the foundation for six subthemes: (a) navigating White spaces, (b) discovering
other Black women leaders, (c) navigational strategies, (d) knowing oneself, (e)
following the spiritual compass, and (f) leading with love.
Chapter Five: Discussion

Embracing a love ethic means that we utilize all the dimensions of love—"care, commitment, trust, responsibility, respect, and knowledge"—in our everyday lives. We can successfully do this only by cultivating awareness. Being aware enables us to critically examine our actions to see what is needed so that we can give care, be responsible, show respect, and indicate a willingness to learn. Understanding knowledge as an essential element of love is vital because we are daily bombarded with messages that tell us love is about mystery, about that which cannot be known.

—bell hooks, All about love: New visions

Most of the existing research on Black women leaders focuses on the effects of marginalization, the challenges faced in White-dominated spaces, and the coping mechanisms they use to manage racism. There is no doubt that the discourse underlying the plight of Black women leaders is important. In light of the increasing visibility of Black women in higher education, it is imperative that we engage in a discussion regarding the pedagogies that they bring from their families, i.e., their family of origin, extended family, and community. It is also very important to understand Black women's leadership in the context of their intersectionality and viewpoint.

Summary of the Study

This qualitative study aimed to understand and examine retrospective family storytelling as a tool for resistance and emancipatory knowing (Grassley & Nelms, 2009) in Black women leaders in higher education. Thus, the study validated and affirmed Black women's experiences by listening to their stories. Consequently, this study fills a
void in the body of knowledge about Black women leaders by illuminating the stories and narratives they shared. This research agenda asked deliberate questions specific to Black women leaders' experiences. Through such inquiries, Black women leaders shared their perspectives to provide an in-depth understanding based on their experiences. This study was driven by a qualitative method of narrative inquiry along with intersectionality and Black feminist thought as a theoretical framework. The guiding research question was:

(1) How does retrospective family storytelling facilitate emancipatory knowing in Black women leaders at predominately White higher education institutions? (2) What do Black women leaders perceive are the emancipatory functions of retrospective family storytelling? and (3) How do Black women leaders employ emancipatory functions/knowing to oppose dominant narratives?

A considerable amount of research devoted to Black women leaders, both in higher education and more generally, revolves around their struggles and strategies for coping both personally and professionally (Dickens & Chavez, 2018; Holder, Jackson, & Ponterotto, 2015; Mosley, 1980; Stanley, 2009; Vakalahi & Starks, 2011). There is less awareness of the transdisciplinary research approach examining Black women leaders' intersections, retrospective family storytelling, and emancipatory knowledge. Similarly, research conducted in retrospective family storytelling reveals a literature gap relating to cultural and racial family narratives (Kellas & Horstman, 2014). Interestingly, the field of leadership points to a similar issue. In the leadership literature, there is little discussion of storytelling as a contributor to leadership, leader identity, or leadership development (Shamir Dayan-Horesh & Adler, 2005; Sternberg, 2008). This transdisciplinary study is
important to the fields of education, leadership, family science, communication, and African American studies because of the information gap mentioned above.

**Discussion of Findings**

According to the results of this study, family stories—whether retrospective or otherwise—inform and influence participants' personal and professional identities. The notion of family socialization through family storytelling is in sync with participants' narratives. The study results support that family stories are a key component of Black women's leadership profile, as they provide meaning to self-perception, identity, life experiences, and challenges. This chapter presents a thorough discussion of the findings in relation to the research questions. It further offers recommendations, reflections, and concluding remarks.

How does retrospective family storytelling facilitate emancipatory knowing in Black women leaders at predominately White higher education institutions? Data from this study revealed how Black women leaders employ navigational strategies to their personal and professional lives. Interestingly, these Black women leaders found themselves tethered to the voices of their family past and present. The advantageous nature of their family stories became evident as the participants remembered and retold these narratives. The finding, navigational information, reoccurred often in the participant’s stories; it was the longest common thread among them. Traced back generations, navigational information is a common device employed by Black women leaders of the past and modern-day (Evans, 2008; Solomon, 1985). Historically, Black women leaders have always met racism in the field of education (Hughes & Howard-Hamilton, 2003; McGee and Stovall, 2015). This study’s findings suggest Black women
leaders navigate predominantly White post-secondary educational spaces by using alternative strategies i.e., family stories.

Sadly, at present, Black women leaders are still met with hostile environments in education. As described in this study, managing racism is still an ongoing battle for Black women leaders. Participants described PWIs as abusive, hostile, oppressive, tiring, and racist spaces. This truth is consistent with literature that has documented the history of Black women leaders in higher education (DeJesus and Rice, 2002; Etter-Lewis, 1993; Evan, 2007; Vakalahi and Starks, 2011).

Investigating the uncanny resemblance between the plantation kitchen and higher education as spaces of spiritual and psychology vandalism for Black women, Davis (1999) purported such spaces require Black women to invoke a radical and ancestral power to resist the pejorative effects of racism. Davis (1999) expressed:

The relationship between the kitchen and the Academy informs African American women's experience and historically interconnects their struggles for identity. The kitchen provided a space within which black women during and after slavery transformed their oppression into resistance and transformed an institution of white dominance. (p. 370)

hooks (1992) and Abrums (2004) concurred that Black women default to resistance as a navigational tool when in oppressive spaces. Abrums (2004) referred to this phenomenon as “a sphere of freedom” and hooks (1992) described it as a “space of radical openness.” Further, hooks (1992) offered that these spaces “nourishes one’s capacity to resist. It offers to one the possibility of radical perspectives from which to see and create, to imagine alternative, new worlds (p. 150). Comparatively, Dugger (1988) found the
families and homes of Black women as spaces of rest. Dugger’s conclusions are consistent with the perspectives of the participants within this study. As Collins (2002) purported, Black women are historically disadvantaged and disempowered at the hands of the dominant culture. Participants in this study confirmed Collin’s (2002) thoughts. In this study, participants explained that they expected racism to exist, but what they were surprised to find was oppressive spaces led by other Black women leaders. Navigating their own, i.e., Black women, proved the most difficult and frustrating space to maneuver.

Storytelling has remained a hallmark for Black families, however, the impact of family stories on the resilience of Black women leaders is not always apparent in the literature. However, especially compelling examples can be found in the accounts of these participants. The participants expressed the utility of storytelling as instrumental in constructing their personal and leader identity. Their family stories were used to counteract the myth and false characterizations from the dominant culture. As a result, retrospective storytelling conveyed ideas about themselves and the world around them (Livo & Rietz, 1986). As an example, Dr. Elizabeth elaborated on the importance of authenticity—a principle she learned from her family. She then explained how this principle applied to her professional environment:

So, before my previous institution, I didn’t like politics. I was just like, what the heck is all this crap, all this was red tape? … Not realizing that I used to avoid the politics. You know, I would avoid it because it was like, I feel like I’m being fake. Because you know, a family, you feel like you can be your full authentic self. So, I’m like, I don’t want to interact with anyone or anything when I feel like I have to turn myself down. So, what I’ve realized in my new institution, in my new role
is that you can be friendly and not everybody’s friend. You can be strategic to get what you need. And being strategic is simply being friendly and being receptive. That’s really navigating politics. So, some people will be like, “Why you sitting down with her?” I’m not sitting down with her. I’m sitting down with an opportunity for my students.

Similarly, Leah expanded on the virtues her family embraced and how she utilized these resources in her campus community. She described:

You have to be delicate; you have to be very delicate. Yeah, when you’re navigating the politics and even with family, you know, you don’t want to hurt this person’s feelings. You want to tell this person the real truth about themselves, but you got to do it in a way that is not attacking them. But I’ve learned that you have to be supportive. If you’re supportive and non-judgmental, that will carry you a long way. That’s with family and that’s with dealing with politics within the university as well. You just kind of have to find patience. I learned to be patient. I wasn’t always a patient person. But I found and learned how to be patient. I learned not to jump to conclusions. To let things play out some before you jump in on the bandwagon. You know, do some research so that you have your facts. And always stay calm. No matter what, try your very best to stay calm.

Using family storytelling, these Black women leaders reframed their reality, understood the bigger picture, and stayed true to themselves. They found family storytelling to be critically useful, namely, its ability to remind them of who they are, where they come from, and where they belong. They have survived harrowing experiences and are seeking
new ways to cope. More importantly, they are seeking to remain true to themselves amidst traumatic events in PWIs.

Although this study did not investigate the internal struggle of Black women leaders specifically, I believe it is safe to state racism in PWIs was not their main concern. For these Black women leaders, their soul's condition was paramount. Discussing their reflective practices, these leaders intentionally and habitually examined their feelings toward self and others. This finding is consistent with scholarship by Evans et al. (2017) who chronicled the patterns of holistic healing within and among Black women; she investigated and theorized the ways in which Black women keep well holistically. The participant’s attitudes and behaviors were markers that revealed their soul’s condition. Beyond the racial battle fatigue they experienced at PWIs, furthered by the disappointment they suffered because of other Black women leaders, these women wished to ensure they did not lose their souls. The participants expressed a need to remain honest and true in their workspace and homes. Keeping their purpose in sight and staying connected to their cultural community were important components of staying true to themselves. Soul-care was an unexpected finding (Evans et al., 2017); this finding echoes Dillard’s (2006) account concerning her plea to dwell in safe spaces internally and externally. She also voiced the strength she garnered from her family i.e., community. Dillard emphasized:

I am looking for colleagues who will understand why many Black women do not separate our “academic” work from the rest of our life’s work, from advocacy work on behalf and in the very communities of color and women who nurture us, who take us in, who patch us up after what feels like a lifetime of struggle to
survive the often-brutal realities of the professoriate. We are intimately connected to our communities and must give homage to those whose work it has been to sit with us, talk with us, feed us, bandage us up, hug us, and remind us of the legacy of strong women and men of color who have come before us. It is only then, after we have been pushed back to strength, that our communities of care send us away from these homeplaces, better and stronger advocates for the struggle of opportunity and human rights, especially in educational contexts.

Black women leaders in this study, viewed their family stories of resilience and faith as a north star to guide their souls along the path of integrity.

**What do Black women leaders perceive are the emancipatory functions of retrospective family storytelling?** The data revealed that Black women leaders perceive the emancipatory function of family stories are narratives of resistance, hope, struggle, and, importantly, narratives of truth. This conglomerate of narratives represents another significant finding—the duplicity of family stories. According to Amason (2020) “Stories tell of family tragedies and how the family gained resilience (p. 60). Although their family and family stories, generally, were sources of resilience and strength, some were sources of trauma. By participating in the *telling* of their positive and negative family stories, these women were practicing *truth telling*. It seemed participants fairly depicted the make-up of their families whether positive or negative. I suspect this is due, in part, to their prior relationship with me or our shared intersectionalities. Their trust in my ability to portray their stories safely and accurately may have positively impacted what they decided to *tell*. 
This finding relates to Thompson, Kellas, Soliz, Thompson, and Schrod’s (2009) study focused on family legacies. The authors elaborated on negative family legacies and their participant’s reluctance to be forthcoming. Thompson et al. (2009) referred to this as the participant’s way of *saving face*. However, for the Black women leaders in this study, describing the complete picture of their families acted as a form of truth-telling. This point is worth mentioning because a well-known tradition in many Black families is *what happens at home stays at home*. It is viewed as taboo to pull back the curtain of Black family life, especially stories of negative over-and-undertones (hooks, 1992). Banks-Wallace (2002) referred to this phenomenon in interviews with participants as *conspicuous absences and silences*.

Stories are told in a variety of ways according to cultural codes. Thus, specific stories are deemed inappropriate or too sacred to repeat and share with insiders or outsiders, depending on the culture. (Banks-Wallace, 2002). However, the participants in this study were perceived as forthcoming. To what degree is unknown. For instance, Mary openly described her family of origin as dysfunctional when asked what the purpose of family is: “Like I said, part of that dysfunction included our parents and you know…feeling like our family name was tarnished in a sense…” Another participant, Dr. Miriam, visibly emotional, truthfully shared the negative aspects of the men in her family. When asked what her feelings were about her family stories she shared:

> When I think about the men in my family, they were involved in the street life. So, those are the stories that I have. I felt like in my family, those things were glorified … hustling, having money, and things of that nature.

In response to a photograph of the men in her family, Dr. Naomi stated:
It reminds me that black men are the white women of misogynoir and that sometimes black men have been socialized to want what whiteness provides, because they’ve been so beaten down, that they forget that they sometimes stepped on the necks of black women to achieve that. And so professionally, this reminds me of all my colleagues…there’s not much distinction between the men in this picture and their actions and how white people at work engage in white supremacist ways.

In their discussions, many participants openly shared the dark side of their family stories however, they prioritized the honorableness of their history as well. For instance, Dr. Naomi expressed her family is, “The gatekeeper sometimes of my trauma.” In contrast, she expressed the resilience she amassed is in part linked to the narratives preserved by her family. For example, in discussing her family stories of migration, Dr. Naomi credited her family narrative as a symbol of resilience in her life. She processed:

I think the stories of resilience, like when I think about like the doctoral program, and just how much of a sheer mountain like doctoral programs are hard in general. And then there are programs that are excruciatingly painful. And I happen to have finished at a program that was excruciatingly painful, for multiple reasons. And so I remember thinking about like, our stories of resilience, our stories of getting out of Mississippi. So the story of like this exodus, and knowing when to go, like, I think that story of our migration tells me sometimes when it's time to leave something, when it's time to leave a relationship, when it's time to leave a job when it's time like, this is becoming a violent space, time to bounce,
right? So I think all of those things play a role in how long I stay, and in how I engage while I'm there.

Instead of focusing solely on their ability to cope and weather the daily bouts of oppression alone, the participants named their family stories as an additional source of mental and spiritual strength (Stone, 2008). Similar to Dr. Naomi, Dr. Miriam leaned into the strength of the women in her family when needed. She elaborated:

I think it's um, when I talk about, like, the strength of mind of the women in my family, I think I definitely get my strength from them. That able to be resilient in those tough situations, but still, you know see it through. And still find happiness during those tough times.

This finding underscores that these Black women leaders were ready to tell their truths, they only desired an opportunity—a safe opportunity.

**How do Black women leaders employ emancipatory functions/knowing to oppose dominant narratives?** The second underlying research question examined the methods Black women leaders use to oppose dominant narratives with emancipatory functions. The data from this study found that Black women leaders opposed dominated narrative by putting forth new, multifaceted leadership definitions and practices. Participants offered new concepts of leadership from their standpoint. They were acutely aware of the traditional leadership styles used in higher education but recognized a spiritual and cultural gap. Thus, their interest involved demonstrating a leadership practice that closed the aforementioned gaps. Another feat they desired was the alignment of leaders personally and professionally. The alignment of personhood and leadership calls for *people* to love i.e., lead others. Leaders cannot completely omit their personhood
in their workspaces. One might argue nor should they. The separation of a person from their leadership practices is inauthentic. On the one hand, Lord and Hall (2005) established a leader’s identity is clarified by the construction of their self-concept. On the other hand, McCain and Matkin (2019) understood the development of a leader identity is directly connected to meaning made from family stories. The leaders within this study conceptualized their leadership identity through the lens of Sankofa practices, griot culture, self-love, compassionate and unconditional love, humility, and grace. Family stories were the backdrop influencing their leader identity (Kellas, 2005). This concept of love held the highest impact on the participant’s leadership identity. Love as a practice remains a highly sought-after ability, however elusive. hooks (2001) admonished the necessity of cultivating a love ethic that informs a leader’s daily life. She described:

> Domination cannot exist in any social situation where a love ethic prevails. … When love is present the desire to dominate and exercise power cannot rule the day. All the great social movements for freedom and justice in our society have promoted a love ethic. Concern for the collective good of our nation, city, or neighbor rooted in the values of love makes us all seek to nurture and protect that good. (p. 98)

In this same vein, Sir John Templeton (2000) wrote concerning the effects of a loveless person on others. He warned:

> When we can love enough, we find a fulfillment and a true closeness to others that satisfies our desire to reach another person’s heart. When we do not love enough to enter into this wholesome, freeing union with others, we tend to seek to solve our basic problem of separation by gaining power over others. We may tend
to live by comparison. We may try to analyze how much better or more important we are than others. We may tend to be competitive rather than cooperative and creative and helpful. (p. 24)

In one of His many parables, Jesus taught His followers to love others as you love yourself. That is, love should extend beyond homogenous groups. He commanded: You shall love your neighbor as yourself [that is, unselfishly seek the best or higher good for others] (The Amplified Study Bible, 2016, Matthew 22:39).

Their [Black women leaders] leadership competences extend beyond western ideas of leadership stretching to cultural and spiritual practices. Due to their intersectional identity, these leaders arrive to leadership with a multidimensional profile. In describing her definition of leadership, Dr. Naomi elaborated on the need for leadership practices absent of western ideology. Dr. Naomi proposed:

I mean, most of the literature on leadership is centered around whiteness. I don't know that I will use any of those definitions because I don't know if they fully can encompass who black women show up as, as leaders. Um yeah, leadership writ large has been whitewashed and we don't know what that means for other folks. If I had to describe my leadership, I don't know. It's like a combination of like connectedness ... I've figured out how to make stories and tell stories that make people want to act. And so, I think that I'm a Griot culture leader; like I'm a leader in Griot culture. I'm a leader in impact. So those are probably better ways to describe how I would think about leadership because I've never seen a white person define something around leadership that I was like, “That's the one. Count me in like.” No, white people don't understand the premise of Sankofa, you
know? Like Sankofa isn't built into western ideology and Western culture. You don't have to go pick up what's at risk of being left behind. So, I mean, Sankofa is a part of the leader that I am, right, like, all of these things baked in, and I don't know what to call it. But I'm grateful for the little okra stew that is like the leadership that I am and how I show up.

What also became evident in the study is that one must first see love in leadership as a possibility. These Black women leaders bore witness to love in leadership from their multi-layered family systems. According to their family stories, the possibility of love in leadership was always apparent. Their praying grandmothers and grandfathers, mothers and fathers, and aunts and uncles demonstrated love in leadership within their families and in a world that refused to reciprocate love. Family inspired their confidence and comfortability to embrace a love ethos. As Dr. Miriam and Dr. Naomi described, what makes it difficult to lead in love are environments built on the foundations of selfishness and domination. For these leaders, this humane love spreads beyond theory and manifests in how they care for themselves first and then others. Their family narratives of love aided in countering internalized oppression. A step further, it began the process of decolonizing their perceptions about self-image and ability in professional spaces. This finding is consistent with the love lessons presented by a mother and two daughters in their joint article titled: Love lessons: Black women teaching Black girls to love. Afejuku, Flemming-Hunter, and Gathing (2017) constructed a love guide for all Black women and Black daughters. Presented are the daily lessons of love they found most powerful:

1. Teach your daughter she is a spiritual being.
2. Teach your daughter her heritage.
3. Teach your daughter self-confidence.
4. Teach your daughter to be self-sufficient.
5. Teach your daughter to advocate for herself.
6. Teach your daughter the joy of relationships with others and how to establish healthy boundaries.
7. Teach your daughter about romantic love.
8. Teach your daughter social awareness and respect for others.
9. Teach your daughter the benefits of altruism.
10. Teach your daughter to dream.
11. Teach your daughter resilience.

As the participants continue to learn the art of loving themselves both inwardly and outwardly, the fruit of this labor is reflected wherever they dawn; in turn, the slow, steady hum of oppression is overshadowed. Black women leaders are studying the art of self-love through their family stories. For a Black woman leader, loving herself is a revolutionary undertaking. “The choice to love has always been a gesture of resistance for African-Americans,” wrote hooks (2015, p. 98). Considering the historical context of Black women in America, self-love has a particular relevance for this critical population. Returning to hooks’ (2015) thoughts, she later emphasized love as a necessity for Black women. Her comments are worth mentioning at length:

It is the absence of love that has made it so difficult for us to stay alive or, if alive, to live fully. When we love ourselves we want to live fully. Whenever people talk about black women’s lives, the emphasis is rarely on transforming society so that we can live fully, it is almost always about applauding how well we have
“survived” despite harsh circumstances or how we can survive in the future. …

To live fully, black women can no longer deny our need to know love. (p. 103)

According to the Black women leaders in this study, it appears they no longer feel the need to deny their need for love in their workplaces and their leadership practices. Love is the new best practice in leadership.

Recommendations

I am acutely aware the following recommendations may not be relevant to some PWIs. With this in mind, I believe the relevance of this research agenda is reinforced. If institutions fail to recognize these vital changes, our families will continue to support our holistic well-being outside the institution as we press on in this work. Yet, compiled are recommendations for higher education institutions and researchers based on the findings of this study. Intuitions, universities, and specific departments must:

1. Seek to intentionally curate spaces void of oppression. Spaces that embrace and induce intersectional harm must be reevaluated.

2. Compassionately inquire, listen, and prioritize to the vision of Black women leaders.

3. Review and enhance policies for work-life balance. If the institution lacks such a policy, institute a policy by first investigating the needs of staff, administration, and faculty.

4. Revisit the strategic plan. Create a diverse task force to ensure the plan is effective in word and deed.

5. Require culturally relevant leadership training to and for all staff, administration, and faculty.
6. Consider long-term mentorship and coaching programs for Black women faculty, staff, and administration.

7. View love in leadership as a possibility and embrace a love ethos. Attention to this significant detail is critical to reducing Black women leaders' attrition rate.

Of the present-day literature on leadership, servant leadership, and the subsequent virtues are most closely related to the leadership profile described by the participants. I believe this is a place for Black women leaders to justify their alternative leadership style. Although justification is not necessary. However, to be clear, further investigation is required to consider servant leadership as a long-term practice for Black women leaders. Yet, there are useful components. Greenleaf's (1970) philosophy of servant leadership suggests a duality in terms of a positive outcome:

It begins with the natural feeling that one wants to serve, to serve first. Then conscious choice brings one to aspire to lead. The difference manifests itself in the care taken by the servant—first to make sure that other people's highest priority needs are being served. The best test is: Do those served grow as persons; do they, while being served, become healthier, wiser, freer, more autonomous, more likely themselves to become servants? (p. 4)

Servant leaders work to empower their followers and facilitate their holistic growth. Leaders who practice servant leadership enable their followers to become more self-confident and proactive. Their followers have an opportunity to meet personal and professional goals with their leaders' support. Ultimately, potential the long-term outcomes of servant leadership enable the leader to lead in a culture of trust. Black women leaders within this study required trust and honest relationship building. As
leaders their sole request was for their colleagues and followers to genuinely work toward a synergy and culture absent of gender and racial microaggressions, surveillance, and conditions of visibility. Black women leaders thrive in cultures of care where forgiveness is actively valued, gratitude is freely expressed, humility is viewed as self-awareness, noble purpose provides meaning, moral courage incites risk-taking, empowerment inspires creativity, future-mindedness encourages forward-thinking, and stewardship is the new leadership. A culture built on servant leadership principles can potentially build community and strong personal relationships. Perhaps, servant leadership cultures value the differences of others and supports the practice of compassion (Goffee & Jones, 2011).

Black women leaders of this study led from a sense of calling. Jones (2003) found in her research of Black women instructional administrators that spirituality was a prominent concept emerging from each of her discussions with the participants. Jones' participants identified spirituality as a source of inspiration, leading with a noble purpose, and connecting with students, colleagues, and families within the institution as components of their leadership style. Servant leadership, along with spirituality, has the potential to support the resilience, well-being, and survival of Black women leaders.

While acknowledging the positive characteristics of servant leadership, it is important to examine this practice critically with Black women leaders in mind. Conservation of resources theory (COR) can be used to comprehend the negative and positive consequences associated with utilizing servant leadership as a practice. The theory explains that leaders are motivated to gain resources and protect against resource loss. Hobfoll (1989) defined resources as “those objects, personal characteristics, conditions, or energies that are valued by the individual or that serve as a means for
attainment of these objects, personal characteristics, conditions, or energies” (p. 516).

The premise of servant leadership is to cultivate high quality relationships between leaders and followers. However, how can a servant leader support all follower needs without nearly depleting their resources? The well-being of a servant leader is potentially at risk, especially a Black woman leader.

The paradox between the COR model and servant leadership suggests a relationship between servant leadership and leader fatigue. Black women leaders face a number of stress offenders and one could argue the tax of servant leadership emphasizes unique challenges. In contrast, the conservation of resources theory suggests a possibility of resource gain. In their systematic review, Eva, Robin, Sendjaya, van Dierendonck, and Liden (2019) demonstrated how servant leaders gain resources—well-being, self-actualization, and satisfaction—from developing others. The theory suggests resources obtained through servant leadership practices protect against negative consequences. Negative consequences are defined as a resource loss such as leader fatigue or emotional exhaustion. This outcome of uncertainty justifies the need for careful consideration when promoting specific leadership styles for Black women leaders.

**Reflections of the Researcher**

The concept of family storytelling has captured my heart in a way I never thought possible. I started this work by positing and prioritizing the voices of Black women leaders. Retrospectively, I came to this research as a child. Perhaps growing up in a household with two parents who were spiritually anchored played a part. As Christians, we firmly believed and still believe in Jesus the Christ. Building on my ma’s words, family for us, is God’s way of showing us we are loved. As the middle child, I am among
six siblings. When my father met my mother, he had two daughters. Among the legacy of my mother and father, I am the oldest child. Growing up, I had friends but they were not necessary. My family were my friends. During college, colleagues and classmates made fun of me because I chose to attend family game night over a club. Every Friday our little tribe on 220 Hickman ordered food, joined extended family, and inhaled each other's company. Our fulfillment did not depend on the outside world.

The Sterling household, like many Black families, spent Saturday mornings cleaning baseboards and cooking breakfast. My father worked extremely hard throughout the week and would typically enjoy leading breakfast on the weekends. Soulful sounds of Fred Hammond, smells of carpet freshener, and pancakes circled the family room. What I remember and cherish most about our Saturday mornings were the roundtable discussions. Then I gushed over having both my father and ma present on the same day.

Now, as an adult, I am filled with gratitude for the strength and fortitude they were intentionally shaping inside me. Little did I know that eventually I would face a world, an institution that cared little for me. Thankfully, they knew and thankfully they started early with words of affirmation, stories of resilience, and mental and spiritual tools to gird me.

While I never met my Grandma Sharon, she met me in her dreams. My ma always reminds me that she [Grandma Sharon] named me before my mother knew she was expecting. Sharon, my grandmother, had a dream that my mother would have a girl with a lighter skin tone and long hair. Instructing my ma, she said, “Name her Eboni, Yolanda.” Despite my Grandma
Sharon’s death three years before my birth, I often reflect on the meaning of her dream. She named me Eboni, meaning strength. My mother often reminds me of this fact and that I should fear no one; her words rest at the footstool of my heart.

I have listened to the house quake at the sound of my ma's prayers and declarations for years. Short in stature but filled with wisdom, people dubbed her the powerhouse in church. She is the only woman I know who remains faithful; her faith is never eclipsed by fear or doubt. Passing the torch, she urges me to know God for myself; more than my ma I need Him [God]. Using my family stories, I rehearsed God's faithfulness to me as I began my PhD journey. I placed an overhead banner bearing Joshua 1:9 above my desk. As a young Black woman professional, I too have felt the spiritual and emotional harm of racism and oppression. This banner is a daily reminder to walk with my chin up and head held high. There were a few instances where I opted to remain silent because I too am well-versed in the backlash of speaking up. For example, an older White colleague approached me at my desk to exclaim, with a smile, “I am a racist.” Another White colleague repeatedly renounced social justice just loud enough for me to overhear. One called me a monkey. Some admitted to headhunting other Black colleagues and me since too many of us were working in a department. In this work, I have been used, misidentified as the help, and other times rendered invisible. Yet, I am committed in the name of change. Yet, I harbor hope for the radical
transformation of these spaces. My ancestors also carried the mantle of education; I feel called to the same noble purpose.

**Conclusion**

For many generations, the Black family has invoked storytelling, which serves a crucial role in defining collective and individual identity. In addition to connecting the past and present, storytelling also imparts family histories and identity to the next generation. Culturally, tellers of stories intricately bind the past, present, and future together. Perhaps family storytelling is even more vital. Family stories promote the psychological and spiritual well-being of Black female leaders in higher education, according to the results of this study. Thus, family storytelling was identified as a positive contributor to the survival of Black women leaders at PWIs. The participants perceived PWIs as oppressive, high-stress spaces lacking proper support; thus, they sought outside mentoring and support from their families. The study revealed the resourcefulness of Black women leaders. Through this study, the narratives told by the participants have contributed significantly to the development of a culturally relevant leadership profile for Black women in Higher Education. *Love in leadership* may seem unorthodox to higher education institutions, but Black women leaders have radically redefined leadership with love as their best practice. Perhaps hooks’ (2015) conclusion is the most fitting:

> When we as Black women experience fully the transformative power of love in our lives, we will bear witness publicly in a way that will fundamentally challenge existing social structures. … When we know what love is, when we love, we are able to search our memories and see the past with new eyes; we are able to
transform the present and dream the future. Such is love’s power. Love heals. (p. 111)
References


Dillard, C. B. (2016). To address suffering that the majority can't see: Lessons from black women's leadership in the workplace: To address suffering that the majority can't see. New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education, 2016(152), 29-38. https://doi.org/10.1002/ace.20210


https://doi.org/10.1016/j.leaqua.2005.06.003


https://doi.org/10.1037/a0032364


Merriam, S. B. (2009). *Qualitative research : A guide to design and implementation*


Sendjaya, S. (2015). *Personal and organizational excellence through servant leadership: Learning to serve, serving to lead, leading to transform*. Springer International Publishing AG.


[https://doi.org/10.1177/1523422309351520](https://doi.org/10.1177/1523422309351520)

[https://doi.org/10.1016/j.leaqua.2008.03.008](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.leaqua.2008.03.008)


Appendix A — Definition of Key Terms

The following are key terms that frame this study.

**Black women** — For the purpose of this research study, Black women or African American women will be used interchangeably. African American and Black refer to women whose origin of birth are in the United States of America and who self-identify as Black (Stanley, 2009). However, the term Black can also refer to women of the African Diaspora; the U.S. Census Bureau puts it this way, “Black or African American refers to a person having origins in any of the Black racial groups of Africa” (U.S. Census Bureau, 2011).

**Emancipatory knowing** — As cited in Grassley & Nelms’ (2009) work, “Chinn and Kramer (2008) define emancipatory knowing as the human capacity to recognize and redefine what is problematic about a situation and to seek creative solutions. They describe the process of emancipatory knowing as an interaction between critically examining one’s own experience, assumptions, actions and the social and cultural contexts in which the experience is situated” (Grassley & Nelms, 2009, p. 2448).

**Emancipatory storytelling** — “Storytelling becomes emancipatory as women are invited to be active participants in the identification of inequitable social and cultural structures and in planning needed changes” (Grassley & Nelms, 2009, p. 2448).

**Family** — Family of origin, extended family, or kinship.

**Family storytelling** — “Socializes family members toward specific values, assumptions, and behaviors” (Kellas & Horstman, 2014).
Leadership — Within this study the term leadership will be synonymous to Servant Leadership. Greenleaf (1977) believed in the power of servant leadership, not in philosophy alone but as a lifestyle to be sought after and practiced personally and professionally. He goes on to say:

The difference manifests itself in the care taken by the servant first to make sure that other people's highest priority needs are being served. The best test, and difficult to administer, is: do those served grow as persons; do they, while being served, become healthier, wiser, freer, more autonomous, more likely themselves to become servants? And, what is the effect on the least privileged in society; will they benefit, or, at least, will they not be further deprived. (p. 7)

Retrospective family storytelling — The recollections of storytelling in the family (Kellas & Horstman, 2014).

Stories — “The values, behaviors, aspirations, goals, and fears preserved from one generation to the next” (Gates, 1989, p. 17).

Appendix B — Interview Protocol

Interviewee Name and Title:

Date & Time:

Interviewer: Thank you for this offering of your time and stories. You were selected to speak with me today because you identify as a Black woman in higher education who has a great deal of experience in leading others. The purpose of this interview is to gain understanding about your use of retrospective family storytelling as a tool for resistance and emancipatory knowing in higher education at a predominately White institution. The interview will comprise of two key components: a) a recollection of your lived experiences, family stories, and the use of photo-and-artifact elicitation.

Prior to the interview you were sent the following instructions:

- Over 2 weeks, immerse yourself in your family histories, stories, and legacies i.e., family photo albums, mementos, heirlooms, letters, videos or other objects.
- Choose three to five photos or artifacts and write a caption, write an explanatory narrative, and take a picture of the photo and/or artifact.
- Send the pictures of the photos and/or artifacts to the principal investigator prior to the scheduled interview.

This interview is planned to last no longer than 2 hours. Your participation is voluntary; please communicate if you wish to stop at any point. Do you have any questions? I would just like to confirm that I have your permission to record this interview. Thank you!

1. Tell me about your family.

   Follow up: What does family mean to you?

   Follow up: How would you define it?

   Follow up: What do you feel is the purpose of family?

2. How do you feel about family stories when you think of your own family?

   Follow up: What do you feel is the purpose/value of family stories?

3. Please tell me a story about leadership in your family. The story can be long or short and can include as many or as less people as you see fit.

   Follow-up: Now, I’ll ask you to tell me the story of that memory of leadership in your family in as much detail as possible. Speak to the environment, the place, the people, what happened, your feelings about the matter and what occurred because of it.
Follow up: What kinds of other stories/life experiences were told to you?

4. Tell me about your experience as a Black woman leader at a PWI (graduate student, faculty, staff or admin.).

5. Now tell me a story about an occurrence you had at a PWI during the experiences you just described. Tell this story in vivid detail. Include what stuck out to you, what feelings you experienced, what you felt about the people involved. Who did you confide in about your experience? What was the end result?

6. Did you witness other Black women leaders endure similar experiences?

7. In what ways have you used your family stories (i.e. histories, legacies, core values, beliefs, rituals, etc..) at PWIs in higher education?

8. How have your family stories influenced your leader identity at PWIs in higher education?

   Follow up: In your family, what is the most significant memory of comprehending what it means to be a Black woman who leads?

   Follow up: Can you describe the ways in which you have used your family stories at PWI’s to affirm your identity and experiences as a Black woman who leads?

9. How have your family stories influenced how you navigate the politics of the academy?

10. Tell me about a time your family’s stories empowered you in your professional experience (i.e., Black woman leader in higher education at a predominately White institution)?

Artifacts:

11. What does this photo/artifact (and family story) tell you?

12. In what ways do you feel this relates to your professional life?

13. What does this person, place, or item represent? Why?

14. What else do you think I should know about your family stories?

15. What story will you curate as part of your legacy?
Appendix C — Photo-and-Artifact Narrative Caption and Prompt

Photo-and-Artifact Narrative Caption and Prompt

Summary

Over the next few days, immerse yourself in your family stories, histories, and legacies before the scheduled interview. This may prompt you to visit family members and experience photo albums, collect certain mementos, heirlooms, or other objects, i.e., artifacts. Essentially, you will reflect and recall significant family stories about survival, triumph, resistance, overcoming, empowerment, struggle, identity, and more. Feel free to jot down notes or reflections. Then, complete the following steps:

1. Collect 3-5 photographs and/or artifacts that represent those family stories.
2. Take pictures of each photograph and artifact.
3. Using this form, respond to the prompts below for each photograph and/or artifact.
4. Email your completed forms two days before your scheduled interview to sterlingel@umsystem.edu.

Key Terms

Storytelling - The values, behaviors, aspirations, goals, and fears preserved from one generation to the next.

Family - Family of origin, extended family, kinship, or friend.
   • Anyone significant in your life
   • Anyone you share a deep relationship with
   • Family is not limited to your family of origin

Family Storytelling - Socializes family members toward specific values, assumptions, and behaviors.

Retrospective Family Storytelling - The recollections of storytelling in the family.
Photo-and-artifact Narrative Caption and Prompt Form (PANCP)

Place a picture of your photograph here:

1. Caption the photograph

2. Answer Narrative Prompt One
   a. What is the significance of this person, place, or item in the photo?
   b. What family story is this person, place, or item in the photo connected to?

3. Answer Narrative Prompt Two
   a. Who is the person in the photo (i.e., sister, friend, mother, etc.)?
   b. Describe the place in the photo (i.e., geographic location, neighborhood, etc.)?
   c. What is the item? Describe it. Who did it originally belong to?
Photo-and-artifact Narrative Caption and Prompt Form (PANCP)

Place a picture of your artifact here:

1. Caption the artifact

2. Answer Narrative Prompt One
   a. What is the significance of this artifact?
   b. What family story is this item connected to?

3. Answer Narrative Prompt Two
   a. What is the artifact? Describe it. Who did originally it belong to?
### Table 1

*Participant Demographics*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Level of Education</th>
<th>Marital Status</th>
<th>Children</th>
<th>Religion</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dr. Naomi</td>
<td>African American</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>PhD</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Christianity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dr. Miriam</td>
<td>African American</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>EdD</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>NC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Priscilla</td>
<td>African American</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>Master’s Degree</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Christianity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leah</td>
<td>African American</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>Master’s Degree</td>
<td>P</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Catholicism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dr. Beth</td>
<td>African American</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>EdD</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Christianity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hannah</td>
<td>African American</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>Master’s Degree</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>NC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dr. Ruth</td>
<td>African American</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>PhD</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Christianity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hadassah</td>
<td>African American</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>Master’s Degree</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Christianity-Baptist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mary</td>
<td>African American</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>Master’s Degree</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Christianity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rachel</td>
<td>African American</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>Master’s Degree</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Christianity</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. S=Single  M=Married  P=Partnered  NC=Non-Denominational Christian
Table 2

*Career Demographics*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Employment Position</th>
<th>Institution Type</th>
<th>Location of Institution</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dr. Naomi</td>
<td>Researcher</td>
<td>Org, PWI</td>
<td>Northeast</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dr. Miriam</td>
<td>Director</td>
<td>Private, PWI</td>
<td>Midwest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Priscilla</td>
<td>Staff/Faculty</td>
<td>Private, PWI</td>
<td>Midwest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leah</td>
<td>Administration</td>
<td>Public, PWI</td>
<td>Midwest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dr. Beth</td>
<td>Administration</td>
<td>Public, PWI</td>
<td>Midwest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hannah</td>
<td>Staff</td>
<td>Private, PWI</td>
<td>Midwest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dr. Ruth</td>
<td>Faculty</td>
<td>Private, PWI</td>
<td>Midwest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hadassah</td>
<td>Staff</td>
<td>Public, PWI</td>
<td>Midwest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mary</td>
<td>Staff</td>
<td>Public, PWI</td>
<td>Midwest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rachel</td>
<td>Director</td>
<td>Public, PWI</td>
<td>Midwest</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Table 3

**Participant Photographs and Artifacts**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>#</th>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Description of Artifact/Photo</th>
<th>Caption</th>
<th>Family Story Connection</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dr. Naomi</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Photo</td>
<td>Father and Uncles</td>
<td>“Broken Promises”</td>
<td>Relationship with my father and men of the family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Photo</td>
<td>Mother, Sister, and I</td>
<td>“Momma’s Blues and Hues”</td>
<td>Self-love and Colorism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Photo</td>
<td>Great Grandmother’s Garden</td>
<td>The “Great Migration”</td>
<td>Family Migration and Resilience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dr. Miriam</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Artifact</td>
<td>Earned degrees</td>
<td>“Paving the way: BGC”</td>
<td>My family didn’t value education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Photo</td>
<td>Grandma, Mom, and Aunts</td>
<td>“I come from STRENGTH”</td>
<td>Black women’s resilience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Photo</td>
<td>Current family</td>
<td>“Creating my own legacy”</td>
<td>Creating my own lane and BGC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Artifact</td>
<td>Scripture: Jer. 29:11</td>
<td>“Paving the way: BGC”</td>
<td>Family values: church and prayer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Photo</td>
<td>“Sista” friends</td>
<td>“Sisterhood and Black Excellence”</td>
<td>I value authentic relationships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Priscilla</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Photo</td>
<td>Niece and Mother</td>
<td>“T-Shirt Across Generations”</td>
<td>Family Reunions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Artifact</td>
<td>Mirror from Grandmother</td>
<td>“I See You”</td>
<td>See me, see you</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----</td>
<td>-----</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leah</td>
<td>Photo</td>
<td>Grandmother at my 6th grade graduation</td>
<td>“The Importance of Education”</td>
<td>Family viewed education as the key to the “good life”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Photo</td>
<td>Mother and Daughters</td>
<td>“I got all my sisters with me!”</td>
<td>Known as Miss Tori’s 5 beautiful daughters</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Photo</td>
<td>Family members</td>
<td>“Loves of my life”</td>
<td>Always walk in God’s light</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Photo</td>
<td>Portrait of self</td>
<td>“Early Years”</td>
<td>Education broke the poverty cycle</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Photo</td>
<td>Photo album from work staff</td>
<td>“We were a center of kindness”</td>
<td>The value of extended family</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dr. Elizabeth</td>
<td>Artifact</td>
<td>Painting of kindergarten graduation</td>
<td>“Little Elizabeth”</td>
<td>Fulfilling my great grandfather’s dream of reading and writing</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Photo(s)</td>
<td>Holding hands</td>
<td>“May May’s Hand”</td>
<td>Shifting atmospheres to love</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hannah</td>
<td>Artifact(s)</td>
<td>Grandfather’s military belongings</td>
<td>“#grandfather #armylife #leader”</td>
<td>Loyalty, dedication, and service</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Artifact</td>
<td>Mother’s degree</td>
<td>“#firstgeneration #studentmom #overcomer”</td>
<td>Family legacy of overcoming</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Artifact</td>
<td>Quote in a plaque</td>
<td>“#faith #presson”</td>
<td>The Lord helps during tough times</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dr. Ruth</td>
<td>Photo</td>
<td>Family of Origin</td>
<td>“Family”</td>
<td>Love, commitment, sacrifice</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Artifact</td>
<td>Brother and Sister portrait on mouse pad</td>
<td>“Just Us”</td>
<td>Keep going for our family legacy</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Artifact</td>
<td>Box secures firearm, money, and important documents</td>
<td>“Metal Box”</td>
<td>Responsibility and leadership</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Artifact</td>
<td>12” Thick Crystal Vase</td>
<td>“Crystal Vase”</td>
<td>Represents my mother’s strength and beauty</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Artifact(s)</td>
<td>Handmade set</td>
<td>“Cream and Sugar Set”</td>
<td>Friendship: Gift from an employer turned friend</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Artifact</td>
<td>Photo from an art party</td>
<td>“Sunday Morning”</td>
<td>Family traditions</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Photo</td>
<td>Debutante memories</td>
<td>“Debutante Ball”</td>
<td>Coming of age</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Photo</td>
<td>Bible, hair scarf, and friends</td>
<td>“At the heart of it all”</td>
<td>Church family</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Artifact</td>
<td>22-song playlist</td>
<td>“OG’s making memories”</td>
<td>Family gatherings</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Artifact</td>
<td>Bible: family heirloom</td>
<td>“Family Bible”</td>
<td>Carrying on the responsibility of keeping God at the center</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Photo</td>
<td>Mother and Son</td>
<td>“My College Graduation”</td>
<td>We made it</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Photo</td>
<td>Husband and family</td>
<td>“Photograph”</td>
<td>A love that heals</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Artifact</td>
<td>An Etta James Song</td>
<td>“At Last”</td>
<td>The makings of a family free of dysfunction and trauma</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Photo</td>
<td>Grandmother</td>
<td>“Matriarch—our very first educator “</td>
<td>Family legacy of education</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rachel</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Photo</td>
<td>Aunt</td>
<td>“The first family wedding”</td>
<td>Family legacy of marriage and weddings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>-------</td>
<td>------</td>
<td>---------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Photo</td>
<td>Aunt</td>
<td>“Laura gets her Master’s Degree”</td>
<td>Family legacy of education</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. BGC=Breaking Generational Curses
Figures

Figure 1

_A photo collage of Queen Esther and her descendants._
Figure 2

*The Intersectionality of Themes*

**THEME 1**
Navigating Spaces in Higher Education

*Subthemes:*
- Navigating White Spaces
- Navigating Other Black Women Leaders
- Navigational Strategies

**THEME 2**
The Therapeutic Nature of Family Storytelling

*Subthemes:*
- Know Thy Self
- Spiritual Compass

**THEME 3**
Redefining Leadership

*Subtheme:*
- Leading in Love

The Emancipatory Knowing of Black Women Leader’s in Higher Education
Figure 3

Navigating Spaces in Higher Education

**Theme 1:** Navigating Spaces In Higher Education

- Self Doubt
- Impostor Syndrome
- Exhaustion
- Humiliation
- Comparison
- Code-switching
- Fear
- Stress

Spaces That Embrace White Supremacy

- Abuse
- Exploitation
- Microaggressions
- Racism
- Surveillance
- Terrorist
- False Narratives

Navigating Other Black Women Leaders

- Self-Affirmations
- Unconditional Love
- Grounding
- Prayer

Weeds

Soil Fertilizer (Family Stories)

Producing Shade
Figure 4

The Therapeutic Nature of Family Storytelling

THE THERAPEUTIC NATURE OF FAMILY STORYTELLING

THEME 2

SIDE A
01. I'm grounded in family
02. Family reminds me of who I am and where I come from
03. My safe space is family
04. My family uplifts and empowers me
05. Family is how I navigate oppressive spaces
06. I bring my family to my workspace and classroom
07. Creating new spaces is my mission
08. I'm unlearning whiteness
09. My Black womanhood is rooted in who I got it from
10. I come with gifts, talents, and blessings

SIDE B
11. Family stories are therapeutic
12. I'm an overcomer
13. I'm learning to love myself
14. Jeremiah 29:11
15. I had a praying grandmother
16. Family is my mirror
17. I'm overcoming my thinking of impressing people
18. I'm embracing my natural self
19. God is my safe space: I'm grounded in the Lord
20. My story is peace, love, health, and a clear mind
Figure 5

Redefining Leadership

**Okra Stew Leadership Recipe**

**INGREDIENTS**
- Compassionate Love
- Family Stories
- God
- Griot Culture
- Humility
- Prayer
- Sankofa
- Self-Love
- Servant Leadership
- Unconditional Love

**DIRECTIONS**
- Witness love
- Love yourself
- Keep good intentions
- Assume good intentions
- Lead with love
- Lead in love
- Be truthful
- Be honest
- Be transparent
- Listen compassionately
- Pour into others
- Respect others
- Give people autonomy
- Promote work-life balance
- Serve students
- Serve staff
- Reach back for what is at risk of being left behind
- Lead with passion, patience, compassion, and mercy
- Know you can love anybody

**NOTES**
- Consider your follower’s families
- Create healthy workspaces
- Help develop your followers
- Help others navigate challenging spaces
- Create teachable moments