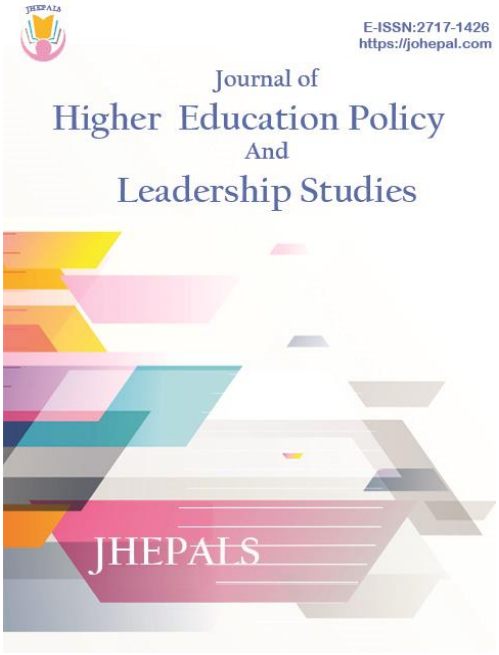
Journal of
Higher Education Policy
And
Leadership Studies

JHEPALS (E-ISSN: 2717-1426)

https://johepal.com



Advice from a Seat at the Table: Exploring the Leadership Resilience Development of Black Women University Deans

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Article Received **2021/02/06** | Article Accepted **2021/03/31** | Published Online **2021/04/10**

Cite article as:

Lewis-Strickland, K. (2021). Advice from a seat at the table: Exploring the leadership resilience development of black women university deans. *Journal of Higher Education Policy and Leadership Studies*, *2*(1), 29-43. DOI: https://dx.doi.org/10.29252/johepal.2.1.29

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[DOI: 10.52547/johepal.2.1.29]

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Journal of Higher Education Policy And Leadership Studies (JHEPALS)

E-ISSN: 2717-1426
Volume: 2 Issue: 1
pp. 29-43
DOI:
10.29252/johepal.2.1.29

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Abstract

In recent years, black women have begun to take more prominent university leadership roles at predominantly white institutions. Unfortunately, their progress is relatively slow, and their experiences have not garnered much historical attention in the university leadership literature. Hence, this study described the leadership resilience experiences of black women before becoming a university dean. The conceptual framework includes Black Feminist Thought and Constructivist Self-Development Theory which guide the two central research questions, how do black women describe their leadership resilience experiences before becoming a dean? And how do black women describe their leadership resilience experiences after becoming a dean? A qualitative methodology with a narrative study design encouraged eight black women university deans in the Southern United States to describe their experiences. Two data collection techniques, semi-structured individual interviews and focus groups increased the validity of the results. The study found that most participants described their leadership resilience experiences as opportunities to engage in introspection, speak up, strive for personal growth, and utilize feedback. Participants also shared their definitions of leadership resilience.

Keywords: Leadership Resilience; Resilience Development; Higher Education Leadership; Black Women Leadership; Leadership Development

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Introduction

The workforce continues to diversify, and universities must develop and implement experiences to prepare students to engage in a global workforce. To do so, universities must utilize diverse leaders and their experiences to create necessary curricular and co-curricular experiences for student's development. According to the U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) black women held about 16,000 university management positions compared to the 180,000 positions held by white women and men, and more than 9,000 positions held by black men (2017). Although the need for diversity in leadership exists, especially in decision-making roles, black women continue to be grossly underrepresented in these positions. Their unique position as racial and gendered minorities create multiple levels of oppression (Hooks, 1984) they must learn to navigate in the workplace successfully. Existing literature has extensively explored the challenges black women face in leadership (Ribeiro, 2016; Holder, Jackson, & Ponterotto, 2015) and the critical role of mentoring in combating these challenges (Beckwith, Carter, & Peters, 2016; Hancock, Grappendorf, Wells, & Burton, 2017; Bystydzienski, Thomas, Howe, & Desai, 2017; Gamble & Turner, 2015; Sheridan, Murdoch, & Harder, 2015). However, the limited number of black women in leadership and management positions creates limited opportunities for aspiring black women to receive valuable leadership advice and guidance. This requires many black women to identify additional tools needed for obtaining leadership positions. Exploring the larger organizational leadership, resilience was found to be a tool for black women to overcome workplace challenges (Beckwith et al., 2016). Therefore, this study explored black women's leadership resilience development experiences to encourage, support, and inform aspiring black women to gain leadership positions.

Hegemonic environments, cultures, and norms can lead to the disenfranchisement of minority populations. University leadership is a traditionally homologous, white masculine dominated environment which creates superiority towards experiences, perspectives, and cultures associated with the 'valued' white masculine identities. These experiences define leadership traits and competence embedded in organizational policies, norms, and practices found throughout university departments and leadership levels. Thus, perpetuating the white masculine leadership standard enforcing the hegemonic masculine environment creating challenges for minority populations. Positively, in recent years, research including black women's leadership experiences have become the focus of many studies. However, it is essential to continue to extend the limited existing research regarding leadership development.

The impact of racism and discrimination on black women's low representation in leadership positions is extensively documented. Black women's multiple minority identities create a 'double jeopardy' of oppression (Davis & Maldonado, 2015) they must learn to navigate. The literature includes the exploration of racial microaggressions (Holder et al., 2015), the perception of black women's competence as leaders (Rosette, Koval, Ma & Livingston, 2016), and the navigation required due to lack of a 'valued identity' (Armstrong & Mitchell, 2017; Enke, 2014). Generalizing white or male perspectives creates the acceptance of white and male as 'valued identities.' The lack of a 'valued identity' excludes black women's perspectives and experiences, making it difficult to access a white male-dominated network. Walker and Melton (2015) explored the intersectionality of race and gender of minority lesbians in athletic administration, finding that white lesbians, despite being sexual identity minorities, can still gain access to the important hegemonic male-dominated social networks based on their race, unlike black women. This supports the notion that white women

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may gain access to the hegemonic power structure via their race, but black women do not hold this valued racial identity. Studies, such as Armstrong and Mitchell's (2017), discuss black women's devalued identities and this connection with their workplace experiences. Hence, the lack of a 'valued identity' creates an opportunity for black women's exclusion from leadership experiences or social networks.

As racial and gendered minorities, black women face discrimination twofold. This 'double jeopardy' creates unique perspectives and experiences compared to black men, white men, and white women. Unfortunately, these experiences lead to negative stereotypes that can support glass and concrete ceilings that prohibit black women from leadership opportunities. Black women's devalued identities place them on the periphery, allowing the traditional mainstream hegemonic perspectives to frame the leadership and organizational literature. Limited knowledge regarding black women's leadership experiences requires additional attention. An area where additional knowledge is warranted is in university leadership. To explore this phenomenon, the study was guided by two broad research questions: how do black women describe their leadership resilience experiences before becoming a dean? And how do black women describe their leadership resilience experiences after becoming a dean? This article will explore the first research question in depth.

Background

Mentoring

Previous studies found that race and gender create barriers for black women not experienced by their counterparts (McDowell & Carter-Francique, 2017), a lack of role models and mentors exists (Gamble & Turner, 2015), and feeling voiceless and invisible is prevalent (Davis & Maldonado, 2015). Many black women participating in the above studies indirectly or directly identified mentorship, or the lack thereof, as an essential professional development factor. In the expanded university leadership literature, researchers explored the role of mentorship and professional development (Bystydzienski et al., 2017), the development of mentoring programs (Ghosh, 2015), and the mentoring of students (Hancock et al., 2017; Park, Park, Williams, & Morse, 2017). Examining diversity in university leadership literature states the importance of mentoring as a means for marginalized individuals to ascend to leadership positions (Bystydzienski et al., 2017; Gamble & Turner, 2015; Sheridan et al., 2015).

Collective organizational leadership literature surmises that through effective informal and formal mentorship relationships, black women can exchange information to learn from and gain advice from other black women who have successfully navigated workplace and leadership barriers (Davis & Maldonado, 2015; Dickens & Chavez, 2018; Nixon, 2017; Oikelome, 2017). Unfortunately, in a quantitative study conducted by Lim, Clarke, Ross, and Wells (2015), it was found that black women receive fewer beneficial mentoring experiences than black men. Exchanging beneficial personal experiences is imperative for recruiting and retaining black women who aspire to university leadership positions. Therefore, information exchange is vital to overcoming the stereotypes and associated glass and concrete ceilings prohibiting black women's leadership development to the top and lower-level senior-level decision-making positions.

Leadership Resilience

To date, expanding research has identified resilience as a part of psychological capital essential in the workplace (Luthans, Youssef-Morgan, & Avolio, 2015). As recognition for 'resilience' has

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increased, fields such as organizational behavior and education have identified its importance to overall organizational effectiveness. The study of resilience in leadership has only recently begun to receive attention; thus, numerous similar definitions exist. Reed and Blaine (2015) defined a resilient leader as someone who demonstrates 'the ability to recover, learn from, and developmentally mature when confronted by chronic or crisis adversity.' Smith (2017) conducted a study finding the traditional definition of resilience having a past focus, such as 'bouncing back,' as incomplete and should have a future focus with a 'degree of persistence towards the future goal.' Smith (2017) surmised resilience in a leadership context should be: 'conquering the past, controlling the present, and having the courage for the future' (p. 15).

Organizational resilience encompasses leadership resilience literature. The literature notes an interaction with an obstacle or adversity shapes leadership development (Howard & Irving, 2014). Resilience studies include understanding the leadership resilience implications for women's professional development utilizing a quantitative methodology (Reed & Blaine, 2015), and the role of faith in resilience development (Cunningham, 2015) as well as numerous studies in the nursing field exploring resilience to overcoming burnout in their highly stressful field (Kim & Windsor, 2015; Rushton, Batcheller, Schroeder, & Donohue, 2015). To date, many studies in the education field explore medical students (Farquhar, Kamei, & Vidyarthi, 2018), minority students (Debb, Colson, Hacker, & Park, 2018), first-generation students (Alvarado, Spatariu, & Woodbury, 2017), and professors (Kunnari, Ilomäki, & Toom, 2018); nevertheless, studies regarding higher education staff and resilience are scant. Redmond, Gutke, Galligan, Howard, and Newman (2017) explored the professional journeys of seven Australian women college administrators and revealed resilience to be a key factor in advancing despite numerous work and life obstacles. Another study identified resilience and faith as essential factors for eight women at a faith-based university to process and navigate involuntarily job loss and secure another position (Cunningham, 2015). Thus, these studies reveal that, to some extent, resilience is an essential component for individuals in higher education administration positions and women in leadership positions. Although this information is beneficial to resilience development, it does not identify or explain how resilience is developed or successfully obtain leadership positions. Nguyen, Kuntz, Näswall, and Malinen (2016) found that leadership behaviors focused on fostering self-management skills and supporting staff with new challenges were key predictors of resilient behavior.

Similar to the broader resilience literature, leadership resilience has numerous varying definitions. Nevertheless, an inclusive definition resembles Smith's (2017) perspective that leadership resilience should engage and conquer the past, sustain and control the present, and have the confidence and courage for the future. This definition seems appropriate to guide the exploration of black women's leadership resilience. They must rectify past hostile workplace and professional experiences to exert control over and direct their current leadership experiences and emotions to succeed. These women must also develop and maintain the courage and confidence to overcome impending definite obstacles of the future. Although resilience frameworks in organizational behavior literature exist, resilience knowledge in a higher education setting is scant.

Methodology

This study explored the described leadership resilience experiences of black women before becoming university deans. Therefore, this study's design is qualitative and included a series of semi-

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structured open-ended questions to understand the phenomenon. The study utilized semi-structured research questions to describe the participant's leadership resilience development experiences, how they thrived in difficult situations, and what strategies they used to overcome these experiences. Given the type of research questions and purpose of this study, a narrative inquiry was appropriate for identifying and defining their experiences from their standpoint. The storytelling component was an essential aspect of narrative inquiry needed to uncover each individual's subjective experience (Wang & Geale, 2015).

This study utilized individual, one-on-one, in-depth, semi-structured interviews and focus groups as appropriate data collection tools. The goal was to provide participants the chance to share their narratives and add depth to the leadership and resilience literature regarding black women's leadership resilience development experiences. The focus groups were used as a follow-up method to inquire further into the results derived from the individual interviews and a tool to potentially gleam additional information and clarity of findings.

Participants

This study utilized purposive and snowball sampling techniques. Purposeful sampling data collection was used to identify and select participants with information-rich experiences related to the phenomenon (Palinkas, Horwitz, Green, Wisdom, Duan, & Hoagwood, 2015) with the ability to reflect, describe, and provide insight regarding leadership resilience. Study participants met the following criteria: (a) self-identify as female, (b) self-identify as black or African American, (c) be a university Assistant, Associate or Dean, (d) be in the role at least three years, (e) currently employed a four-year institution in the Southern United States as defined by U.S. Census, (f) and score at least a minimum 'average' score on the R@W (Resilience at Work) scales and subscales.

Once institutional review board (IRB) approval was obtained, the researcher sought to recruit a purposive sample of 12 women, to account for attrition and meet the university sample requirements. The researcher explored Southern institutional websites to create a list of potential volunteers with their institutional emails. After numerous rounds of the initial emails, the researcher utilized the snowball method to recruit their colleagues to participate in the study. Potential participants received emails describing the study's purpose, study requirements, consent form, and an invitation to participate. Once participants completed the online consent form, they received the Resilience @ Work Scales, identified participants that exhibit at least 'average' levels of resilience were admitted into the study, and were asked to provide pseudonyms. The R@W scales were scored on a rolling basis until eight participants were selected.

Once admitted into the study, the researcher utilized a web-conferencing platform to call each participant at the agreed upon date and time. The semi-structured interviews were conducted and recorded via IRB procedural guidelines. The individual interviews yielded 848 minutes of data; interviews ranged from 63 mins to 161 mins. Each interview was transcribed by hand into the MAXQDA platform and resulted in 115 pages of transcriptions.

The eight study participants had a range of educational backgrounds and experience. Three participants with a Doctor of Education (EdD), four participants with a Doctor of Philosophy (PhD), and one participant currently pursuing a Doctor of Philosophy (PhD). The participant's tenure ranged from 3 – 9 years, with an average of 6.5 years in a dean position and 52.5 total years experience; one participant was employed at a Historically Black University and College (HBCU), and seven were employed at Predominately White Institutions (PWI). Of the eight participants, four were Assistant

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Deans, three were Associate Deans, and one was a Dean. Table 1 summarizes the sample demographics.

Table 1.

Participant Demographic Information

Pseudonym	Doctorate	Years in Role	Role		University Classificatior
Ruth	PhD	9	Associate Dean	PWI	Ruth
RJ	PhD	5	Associate Dean	HBCU	RJ
Lianne	PhD	5	Assistant Dean	PWI	Lianne
Ashley	Pursing PhD	3	Assistant Dean	PWI	Ashley
Rosa	EdD	3	Associate Dean	PWI	Rosa
GenStrong	PhD	9	Dean	PWI	GenStrong
Florence	EdD	9.5	Assistant Dean	PWI	Florence
Vanessa	EdD	9	Assistant Dean	PWI	Vanessa
Total years		52.5			

Conceptual Frameworks

This study's methodology and purpose required a framework that encouraged participants to share sensitive and personal self-defined and self-valued narratives to understand leadership resilience. Therefore, Black Feminist Thought and Constructivist Self-Development Theory provided a context for black women to describe their experiences and empower their voices; while allowing the researcher to understand black women's adaptive strategies, skills, and abilities, which became tools implemented in challenges before and after becoming a university dean. Black Feminist Thought (BFT) is the appropriate feminist theoretical framework allowing black women to share and explain their experiences based on black women's culture. This critical social theory has the significance to clarify the standpoint of and for black women (Collins, 1986) to provide a self-defined and self-valued view of black women's experiences. Crenshaw (1989) stated that any feminist analysis excluding an intersectional viewpoint could not sufficiently address the black women's experiences. Black Feminist Thought is a framework "shaped and produced by the experiences black women have encountered in their lives" (Collins, 1986, p. 469) and the existence of commonalities among the experiences of black women.

The study utilized a second theory, Constructivist Self-Development Theory, a theory rooted in adaptation literature that highlights the impact of a traumatic event on self-development (Saakvitne, Tennen, & Affleck, 1998). The theory emphasizes the ongoing process of adaption and thriving by understanding the impact on five areas of self-affected by a challenging experience: frame of reference, self-capacities, ego resources, central psychological needs, cognitive schemas (McCann & Pearlman, 1990). Empowering black women to share their leadership resilience narratives and processes to thrive and overcome challenging experiences discloses how these women prevent a negative relation "between one day's pain and the next day's productivity" (Saakvitne et al., 1998).

Empowering black women to describe their experiences provides understanding from their vantage point and contextualizes their identities within a social context, such as higher education (McDowell & Carter-Francique, 2017). Together, the conceptual framework empowered black women to describe their experiences from their standpoint, providing an avenue for the researcher to understand the defined adaptive strategies and tools black women utilize to thrive before gaining a university dean's leadership position. The present study required participants to share sensitive and personal self-defined and self-valued narratives to understand the phenomenon.

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Data Analysis

To identify and summarize broader similar themes from the individual interviews and focus groups, the researcher listened, transcribed, and reviewed each transcript. Braun & Clarke's (2006) six-step thematic analysis was used to identify broader ideas, key sentences, and phrases that became codes organized according to the research questions and related to the conceptual frameworks. The analysis process began with coding Ruth's list of ideas, keywords, and phrases from her interview. For each subsequent individual interview, similar ideas, key sentences, and phrases based on the conceptual framework's themes were combined; and differing ideas, key sentences, and phrases remained in a larger list of outliers. This continued until each individual narrative was initially coded and collated with the larger data set. MAXQDA, a qualitative data analysis tool, was beneficial in this process as it showed a visual representation of initial assembled and individual outlier potential, or candidate, ideas, key sentences, and phrases. As the codes are assembled, the researcher thought about each code's linear and hierarchical relation and potential theme based on the context of the stories and the conceptual framework's themes, resulting in theme-piles.

The trustworthiness of the data solidified the validity and reliability of the data. The data was obtained by reassuring the participants that any personal identifiers would be removed from the data to facilitate an open and candid conversation. The study's dependability was achieved with a purposive sampling and following the interview guide approved by a three-member expert panel. Member checking of individual interviews was another tool employed to support the dependability of this study. The researcher asked all participants to review their interview transcripts and provide any edits or comments regarding the narratives. Only one participant, Ashley, noted any changes, including grammatical edits, removal of a conference identifier, and clarifying her comments. Dependability was achieved with the researcher's reflexivity before and during data collection and analysis. Reflexivity encouraged participant expertise and self-knowledge (Sandvik & McCormack, 2018). The researcher informed participants that the researcher was a black woman in her early career and leadership pipelines to thwart threats to confirmability. Along with this, the researcher objectively listened to the participant's narratives, despite if the researcher shared the same perspective on leadership resilience or challenging experiences.

Results

Research question 1. How do black women currently working at Southern four-year institutions describe the leadership resilience experiences they encountered before becoming a university Assistant Dean, Associate Dean, or Dean?

Each participant directly stated how they defined leadership resilience. See Table 2 for the participant's definitions. Understanding how the participants defined leadership resilience helps to understand the frame of mind for each participant. Participants describe their leadership resilience experiences before becoming a university dean as opportunities to build and maintain a sense of purpose. A few participants shared how important a sense of self was. However, three said that being open-minded to learning from others, speaking up, and engaging in self-care is important to developing and maintaining what is important and what motivates resilience. Other descriptions of

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their experiences include opportunities to seek feedback to improve self and those around you, chance to be a student of your and others lives and experiences, an opportunity to prove yourself, recognize feelings of vulnerability, learn not to take things personally. Therefore, participants described their leadership resilience experiences before becoming a university dean to build and solidify a sense of self and purpose, necessary for future leadership experiences.

Research question 1.1. How do Black women leaders describe the ways that their leadership resilience experiences enabled them to thrive in positions before becoming a university Assistant Dean, Associate Dean, or Dean?

Participants focused on striving for personal growth by taking initiatives and engaging in reflection and introspection to enhance leadership resilience that enabled them to thrive in their positions before becoming a university dean. All participants discussed how reflection and introspection influenced their experiences before becoming a dean. GenStrong and Lianne believed that introspection was something that they developed, but GenStrong continued to say that introspection is intertwined with leadership. Rosa and Ashley shared that for introspection to be effective, individuals have to be ready to do the work of introspection. Six participants noted that they or advised that other black women should focus on striving for personal growth rather than trying to focus solely on climbing the professional ladder. Lianne believed that opportunities would come to them based on their purpose and personal growth. Other ways that their leadership resilience experiences enabled them to thrive include using constructive criticism to their benefit, learning the power of no, effectively handling outsider challenges, and developing a leadership voice.

Research question 1.2. What strategies do Black women describe they used to develop resilience in their positions before becoming a university Assistant Dean, Associate Dean, or Dean?

The participants noted that before becoming a university dean strategy such as learning and being discerning, building a community, and representing for self through effectively managing perceptions helped develop resilience. RJ and Ruth explicitly discussed the concept of discernment, but every participant expounded and agreed to the importance of discernment during the focus group. Five participants explicitly discussed the importance of community and its varying degrees of closeness. The other three discussed important alliances, leaning towards the importance of connecting with others. Seven participants shared that managing their perception was an important ego resource for self-protection. Four participants shared that they either feel they have to represent or are automatically a representation of all black women, making it even more necessary to manage their perception using their sense of purpose. One participant, GenStrong, shared that she "always resented the notion of being an exception. That would always upset [her] and [she] make[s] it very clear that no [she's] no representing every black woman, [she is] this black woman". A few participants highlighted that recognizing your work's impact is another strategy to develop resilience before becoming a university dean.

Discussion

Definition of Leadership Resilience

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This study confirmed that the participant's leadership experiences are impacted by their race and gender, supporting recent literature. Whether implicitly or explicitly, every participant in this study shared their race and gender impacted their leadership experiences, which coincides with existing research (Hague & Okpala, 2017; Rosette et al., 2016; Diehl & Dzubinski, 2016; West, 2015; Beckwith et al., 2016; Davis, 2016). This supports that participant's narratives to be valid and beneficial to answer the research questions. The participant responses are valid and beneficial to advance the knowledge of leadership resilience, focusing on the developmental milestones of cognitive, social, and to an extent, emotional development. Therefore, understanding the participant's definitions of leadership resilience is necessary to understand their reference frame.

The literature review revealed two identified definitions of resilience found in the organizational literature. Firstly, Smith (2017, p.15) defined leadership resilience as the ability to "conquer the past, control the present, and have the courage for the future." Lianne and Rosa specifically used these components in their definitions of leadership resilience, noting the ability to move forward as a defined component of leadership resilience aligning with Smith's (2017) component "to have the courage for the future." Secondly, the literature review revealed that a resilient leader has "the ability to recover, learn from, and developmentally mature when confronted by chronic or crisis adversity" (Reed & Blaine, 2015). GenStrong explicitly identified the "ability to quickly recover from" and "understand what is happening, Florence included the term "regroup" to define leadership resilience, and Ashley's nod towards "having a short memory" supports Reed and Blaine's (2015) definition of recovery and ability to learn from challenging experiences. Both definitions, Smith (2017) and Reed and Blaine's (2015), included reflecting upon past experiences and incorporating learnings into future experiences. The participants placed a strong emphasis on moving forward, regrouping, using phrases such as 'moving forward', 'quickly recover,' 'center oneself,' and 'having a short memory.' Hence, the similarity between the participant's definitions and the literature review.

Although there is a similarity among the definitions, participants also provided additional defining terms of leadership resilience. Respectively, RJ enriched the definition by including the "ability to center oneself," and Vanessa also included an important aspect of "self-protection, " which emphasizes self-care and self-soothing methods. This illustrates that, according to the participants of this study, leadership resilience requires inner resources to overcome challenging situations or experiences.

This study provided a voice for eight black women to share their leadership resilience development experiences through narratives. The findings will be discussed in terms of themes. Themes were derived from the participant's responses to the research questions designed framed by the conceptual frameworks. Four themes were identified:

Introspection

GenStrong and Rosa shared that finding comfort with introspection is vital to building self-awareness necessary for leadership resilience. Some participants noted that introspective was innate, while others noted they needed to build this resource. Effective self-reflection or introspection requires that individuals are ready to engage in the work to bring up complex thoughts or emotions, as Rosa mentioned. Whether innate or developed, introspection is a key tool to learn early in a black woman's career. To do so, black women must continuously explore and revisit their values and standards to identify their purpose. This process will help black women to identify and communicate their values, which will help to mitigate problems (Armstrong & Mitchell, 2017). However, to know

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and recognize values and standards, black women must be knowledgeable about themselves. Self-awareness helps identify and connect with individuals to build and cultivate networks beneficial to pursue opportunities before and after becoming a university dean. The values and standards discovered and solidified through this process can help black women to identify the types of experiences beneficial to their individual leadership development. But black women must be willing to take risks and speak up for themselves in order to engage in beneficial leadership development experiences.

Speaking Up

This ability to speak up can help black women to obtain vital leadership. Studies found that many black women mistakenly assumed early in their careers that sitting back (Hague & Okpala, 2017) and believing their hard work would get them noticed (Gamble & Turner, 2015) would propel their leadership ascension. Each participant noted that speaking up was vital to them receiving feedback, career, and personal development opportunities. Each participant in the study agreed that speaking up for themselves was crucial to their leadership resilience development. The research included participants that admittedly wished they took more risks in their career and incorrectly thought their hard work would get them noticed for opportunities. Eventually, individuals realized they should take risks to move up the ladder (Gamble & Turner, 2015). Black women's multiple minorities invoke feelings of voicelessness and isolation (Davis & Maldonado, 2015), especially in leadership positions (Melon-Galvez, 2017). Taking a risk and speaking up are proactive tools to help black women thrive in their leadership experiences before becoming a dean. This finding aligns with the research that proactive personalities are a significant predictor of employee resilience (Nguyen, et al., 2016). Speaking up not only encourages black women to be more risk-tolerant and ask for leadership opportunities, but also helps to combat early feelings of isolation and voicelessness.

Strive for Personal Growth

Black women in this study described striving for personal growth by taking initiatives and engaging in reflection as leadership resilience experiences that enabled them to thrive in their positions before becoming a university dean. Participants found that striving for personal growth was by far more beneficial for their career than seeking career ladder ascension. Many noted that professional opportunities were readily available and more aligned with their self and purpose by speaking up and seeking personal growth. Striving for personal growth is a self-awareness skill that helps black women to meet their psychological needs as an ego resource (Saakvitne & Pearlman, 1996). The research found that some black women struggled with their personal need to feel fulfilled (Gamble & Turner, 2015). Using introspection to identify personal growth areas to find fulfilling leadership opportunities and experiences is a way to combat this struggle. Continually engaging in introspection and seeking personal growth is a process black woman can engage in to build and continue foundational leadership resilience behaviors.

Utilize Feedback

Consistent with this study, research iterates that networking is a great way to "unlock doors for opportunity" (Hague & Okpala, 2017, p. 6). These networks can help aspiring black women to seek opportunities related to their purpose, values, and standards for feedback to improve and learn from self and surrounding individuals. It is important to note that beneficial networks and communities are both familial or collegial. Seeking and utilizing feedback to improve work processes is resilient

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employees' behavior (Kuntz, Malinen, & Näswall, 2017). Participants agreed that constructive criticism can be beneficial. Black women should use constructive criticism to better themselves and to garner support for their ideas or initiatives. Although all participants agreed that utilizing feedback throughout their career was valuable, there was spirited debate regarding constructive criticism and feedback. Many participants utilized the term 'constructive criticism' in their narratives as a positive influencer. However, GenStrong fervently challenged the other participants to reflect on constructive criticism as she stated that constructive criticism does not exist, but feedback does. Therefore, seeking and utilizing feedback is a leadership resilience experience that enables black women to thrive before becoming a university dean.

Implications

This study's findings offer numerous practical implications that potentially offer black women aspiring to leadership positions tools to help build their leadership resilience. Society, societal needs, global demographics, and college student populations are continuously diversifying. Therefore, university leadership needs to diversify to create opportunities that align with these individual's needs. This study showed that black women must build a strong sense of self through introspection and self-reflection before becoming a university dean. This sense of self helped black women identify and engage with their purpose throughout their career. Purpose-driven acts led the participants to seek personal growth opportunities rather than focusing on career ladder opportunities. These tools and experiences helped the participants to address and overcome invalidation.

The study also revealed suggestions for universities to diversify leadership pipelines. Studies on black women's leadership development experiences discuss mentorship overwhelmingly (Bystydzienski et al., 2017; Ghosh, 2015). To add additional practical strategies, participants felt that universities should seek to create conducive environments that provide black women with the opportunity to address and reduce experiences of invalidation. According to the participants, a conducive environment is one that experiences align with the institution's mission and vision, understands their informal description of leaders and leadership, and includes diversity officers at the departmental or unit level rather than the institutional level. Universities must be mindful that, although black women have similar experiences, they are not monolithic and vary to certain degrees. This may help universities to create conducive environments that foster leadership and employee resilience in black women.

Conclusion

A limited number of black women currently hold university leadership positions. Diversifying leadership is highly important in developing and implementing experiences to prepare students to engage in a global workforce. Although highly beneficial, mentoring is not the only tool aspiring black women can utilize to ascend to leadership. The participants in this study believed that leadership resilience requires inner resources to overcome challenging situations or experiences. Therefore, introspection, speaking up, striving for personal growth, and utilizing feedback are essential strategies to building foundational leadership resilience. The limited number of black women in decision making roles requires aspiring black women to take their leadership development into their own hands and begin working to set a foundation for resilience.

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Limitations

There are several limitations of this study that require discussion and attention. A limitation of the study was the sampling method. This study utilized purposive and snowball sampling rather than random sampling. This limitation limited the generalizability of the study's findings to the population as a whole, but to a smaller population of black women in university dean positions, specifically at four-year institutions in the Southern United States. The second study limitation was the factor of time. The study utilized a screening scale, semi-structured interviews, and focus groups during the participants' limited engagement. Utilizing additional qualitative designs that require prolong interaction with the participants may yield additional or corroborated knowledge. This limited interview interaction still yielded beneficial information as the researcher sought to develop reflexive engagements central to the interview process. This reflexivity encouraged greater participant expertise and self-knowledge (Sandvik & McCormack, 2018). The third limitation related to the type of data collected. Data for this study was solely based on the participant's perceptions and retelling experiences, providing an additional limitation.

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