

Public Abstract

First Name:Vida

Middle Name:A.

Last Name:Mays

Adviser's First Name:Paul

Adviser's Last Name:Watkins

Co-Adviser's First Name:Ruth Ann

Co-Adviser's Last Name:Roberts

Graduation Term:SP 2013

Department:Educational Leadership

Degree:EdD

Title:AFRICAN AMERICAN WOMEN IN PUBLIC HIGHER EDUCATION
ADMINISTRATIVE LEADERSHIP IN THE STATE OF MISSOURI:
PERSPECTIVES ON A HALF CENTURY OF PROGRESS

Unless it is a meeting of the executive staff of a historically black college or university (HBCU), one might observe that there are very few, if any, African American women leaders in public higher education administration. There are substantive research reports to support the claim that African American women are underrepresented in administrative positions of authority in institutions of higher education. This study explores the lived experiences of six African American female administrators in Missouri public higher educational institutions using the Black Feminist Thought theory as espoused by Patricia Collins as the framework to examine their leadership. The conceptual lens of race, gender, and class offers an opportunity to view the ways in which these women are empowered to employ leadership and use their positional authority.

This study contributes to the literature a perception that African American women administrators in public higher education regarding their experiences. It also examines democracy or lack thereof regarding the legitimate or genuine authority of African American women in public higher education administration. This qualitative study offers a glimpse into the lives of six African American women leaders in Missouri public higher education administration.

The results reveal that positioning of African American women administrators Missouri public higher education is perceived as strategic and perhaps even stereotypical. The term 'pigeonhole' was used in several instances to reference the types of positions African American women in public higher education find themselves. Participants also recognized that positional authority and decision making as leaders or even managers, is representative of who they are and the perspective that is called for at the time decisions are required. Additionally, the use of diversity and equity among institutions suggests a multicultural institution with fair policies and practices and yet, the women in this study contradict this assumption and at times even defended the practices by dismissing them as the culture of the institution, or the area. Courageousness and cautiousness among these leaders suggests that the outsider-within perspective has helped these women navigate, and use to their advantage, positional authority.

This study provides insight into the leadership of six African American women administrators' in public higher education in the state of Missouri. They offer their own recommendations to institutions regarding recruitment of African American women, hiring practices, stereotypes, and diversity. Putting the recommendations from these women in perspective, using Collins (1999) Black Feminist Thought Theory, I submit that research using this theoretical concept, continue. In doing so, using a qualitative research approach would capture the complexity of African American women in higher educational administration and aid in recruitment and retention efforts.