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The Underutilization of Women of Color in C-Suite Positions:

A Phenomenological Study

A Dissertation Submitted in partial fulfillment of the
Requirements for the degree
Doctor of Business Administration

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California Baptist University

Dr. K. Jabs School of Business

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ABSTRACT

As societal views regarding women continue to change in the 21st century, organizations are also revolutionizing by attempting to create a more diversified workplace where women of color play an inclusive role, especially in C-suite assignments. The underutilization (insufficiency of the portrayal) of women of color in C-suite positions is reflective of a corporate culture that fails to meet diversity and inclusion policies. Hence, the development of a novel conceptual model may assist an organization in meeting these policies by understanding how to cultivate a corporate culture that positively affects an individual's behavior and intrapersonal development. The study followed a contingency principle that when an organization elects to diversify its C-suite assignments with the inclusion of a greater number of women of color, it develops a workplace that is reflective of the communities and societies it serves. Additionally, the organization has an opportunity to evaluate its corporate social responsibility and ethical standards in a manner that supports diversity and inclusion, increases profitability, and contributes to the economy. This phenomenological study examined the lived experiences of nine women of color who hold or have held C-suite positions and how they mitigated racial and gender bias. As a result, the study found three emerging themes: (a) explicit bias, (b) marginalization, and (c) hyper-invisibility. Based on these findings, this study proposed the use of the Chapman organizational influence on corporate culture, individuals, and cohesiveness (COICIC) model to fulfill the purpose of diversity and inclusion practices. The study endeavors to fill in the gaps in the literature by illustrating the value of diversity through the inclusion of women of color in C-suite positions.

Keywords: phenomenological, women of color, diversity and inclusion, executives, gender, race, marginalization, explicit bias, hyper-invisibility, cohesive work environment

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to my daughter Tiffany Chapman. Your unconditional love and continued support allow me to fulfill my dreams, work hard to achieve my goals, and successfully obtain my doctoral degree. But there is no greater level of accomplishment than being your mother. I am truly blessed and thank God every day for you. Stay on course, continue to trust in the Lord, and always remember that your steps have already been ordered. Soon we will be Dr. (Twin 1) Chapman and Dr. (Twin 2) Chapman.

Love Always and Forever,

Mommy

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

This study used a phenomenological approach to explore the influence an organization has on corporate culture, individuals, and creating a cohesive work environment (CWE) that promotes a more diversified administration in that women of color are equally promoted to C-suite positions (high-ranking executive or chief roles within an organization). As diversity and inclusion continue to become fundamental parts of modern business practices, the development of a novel conceptual model allows an organization to evolve and limits the risk of minimizing access to (a) a sustainable candidate pool, (b) a greater market share, and (c) an increase in profitability (Bernstein et al., 2020). Bernstein et al. (2020) discussed the influence organizations have over corporate culture, the individual, the group, and the cohesiveness of the work environment. The organization is reflective of the individuals who identify with the organization and hence embodies human characteristics (Mascarenhas et al., 2022; Mujib, 2017). Although the organization as an entity cannot directly influence because it is not human and therefore cannot personify human characteristics (known as anthropomorphism), it is the leaders within the organization who impact the work environment, individuals, and group collectively (Martin, 2022). The integration of conceptual models (e.g., Six Sigma, change management, and Porter's five forces) can provide a systematic process for developing and implementing successful business strategies pertaining to internal influences (Bernstein et al., 2020).

Through the exclusion of gender and color bias and with the full integration of a more diversified administration, the organization can create a corporate culture that is identifiable both internally and externally (Northouse, 2007). This corporate culture is

developed through an understanding that leadership is a process that builds relationships through administrative motivation and the authority to accomplish a uniformed set of goals and objectives. Servant, communal, executive, and transformational leadership stand apart from other leadership styles because they maintain a spotlight on an administrative practice that places a high priority on meeting the needs of the organization and its human capital (Frick, 2004). Thus far, studies indicate that these leadership styles not only produce beneficial communal results but also forecast a collection of pertinent outcomes that surpass other traditional leadership styles based on scholarly conclusions (Hoch et al., 2018; Reed et al., 2011; Sims et al., 2020).

Statistically, women hold only 8% of executive positions in Fortune 500 companies to date; although experiencing significant growth over the past 20 years, women remain underrepresented in C-suite positions in the United States and globally (Hinchliffe, 2021; Valerio, 2022). This underrepresentation, especially for women of color, falls well below the representation of White men and women as well as men of color holding executive positions (Bonner, 2018). Present day hiring and promotional practices place women and women of color at a disadvantage from the start because these are fundamental to an organization's depiction of a diversified workforce.

The introduction of gender and color reconstruct the definition of leadership by integrating a modern social meaning and the development of a strong diversity and inclusion strategy (Dworkin & Schipani, 2018). Therefore, the collaboration of gender, color, and leadership is interlaced with their systematically designed outcomes and is essential to the organizational culture in building a CWE of diversity and inclusion. The fundamental structure of gender roles is an essential, original, and primary source in

business, politics, and society and is accredited to the Greek philosophers Plato and Aristotle (Salkever, 1986). Salkever's 1986 study of Plato and Aristotle offered a fundamental (original or primary) framework that identified individualism as a contemporary critique of citizenship standards that establish a particular way of life. The Salkever study provided an approach to ascertain the causes of or discover alternatives to discriminatory male bias that characterize Western thought and traditions pertaining to women. Salkever suggested that there was a connection between equality among genders, which was void in existing methodologies, and the significance of a life of acceptance and equality within society (Dos Santos, 2018).

Contemporary leadership studies have identified that the value organizational executives place on leadership is based on potential rather than performance, which is primarily focused on the attributes male executives contribute to the leadership role (Hideg & Shen, 2019; Player et al., 2019). This study attempted to contribute to existing literature through the integration of gender inclusion, specifically of the underutilization of women of color in C-suite positions and bringing an awareness to identifying and addressing gender perception, bias, and stereotypes that create a nongender specific administration conducive to supporting a CWE. Within this leadership identification, the research focused on the underutilization of women executives in C-suite positions and provided a fundamental structure in the development of a diversified leadership structure. The uniformity of leadership requires the organization to develop and implement a universal mindset in that executive roles are no longer associated with gender epithets (Hideg & Shen, 2019). Understanding diversity and inclusion are essential in today's business operations (Player et al., 2019).

The Javidan, Bullough, and Dibble (2016) study discussed the use of diversity and inclusion not only as a way to look beyond legislation, policy, and procedure, but also as a practice of developing business strategies and performance to a degree that leverages its resources of human capital in a manner that creates opportunities to remain competitive. Hence, the collective of resources might optimize organizational performance through a requisite of multiplicity, adaptivity, and individualized collective of self-efficacies. Through this collective, the organizational structure becomes an important aspect of the work environment that may influence how its human capital evaluates their ability to achieve objectives and how this translates into their overall performance (Guarnaccia et al., 2018; Mustafa et al., 2019).

Background

Leadership styles differ from country to country, organization to organization, individual to individual, and even gender to gender. When determining individualized styles or establishing an organizational structure of leadership, one must understand the motivational factors that incentivize the organization's human capital to achieve a common goal. To be a successful leader, one will have the ability to adapt one's leadership style to perform in synchrony with the changes in business structures and to meet the needs of its human capital to create a CWE. There is a large repertoire of leadership styles (e.g., servant, communal, democratic, autocratic, laissez-faire, strategic, transformational, transactional, and bureaucratic) that can be used singularly or interchangeably to create congruency between the organization's mission, goals, and overall profitability (Harper, 2012).

The adoption, practice, and overall success of a particular leadership style is also influenced by individual characteristics, gender role, and personalized experiences. Hence, the consideration of these accentuating (underlining) collectives, which have emerged as the most notable and relevant variables influencing the authoritative process, is fundamental to each leadership style (Eagly & Diekmann, 2006; V. Schein, 2001). The focus on stereotypes has become more prominent in modern business operations, specifically in relation to gender roles and color. The perception of gender roles and color brings forth the phenomenon of a fundamental construct in that successful leaders are more exclusively identified as a male because of their dominated roles in C-suite positions that might foster bias against female leadership potential (V. Schein, 2001). As studies have continued to further the discussion of the differences in leadership styles between males and females, the results have shown that there are no distinct leadership differences (Kosicek et al., 2012; Sims et al., 2020). Male and female executives share similarities in their leadership styles because these skills are based on their behaviors and experiences that influence workplace performance. Although noting the similarities, researchers have also acknowledged the progression of a diversified C-suite administration has been slow, and women continue to experience gender barriers that require organizations to continually identify approaches that invest in the mentoring and growth of their female executives' performance (S. Braun et al., 2012; Sims et al., 2020). Further studies reveal that females demonstrated attributes that prompted more viable performance outcomes than their male counterparts, placing greater emphasis on female attributes and their gender roles.

To blur the lines between gender roles and color, corporate leaders must understand that physical descriptions fail to support the universal characteristics, cultural similarities, and individual social experiences of its senior executives. With only 41 females currently occupying executive positions within Fortune 500 companies, it is crucial to discern the bias, stereotypes, and potential discriminatory practices that hinder the progression of women elevating to C-suite positions (Hinchliffe, 2021; Valerio, 2022). For this reason, it has never been more imperative for an organization's leadership to expand on its commitment to diversity and inclusion by identifying areas of gender inequality and establishing protocols that promote a more gender diversified administration. The establishment of an altered environment that is inclusive of a more diversified senior leadership team brings forth a shared collective of distinct experiences, perspectives, and talents (Freischlag, 2019).

There are opportunities that can occur when organizations focus on their administrative structure and attempt to reduce bias based on gender and color (Liu, 2019). In 1970, Robert K. Greenleaf defined a servant leader as one who operates under a philosophy and established practice of advancing the lives of others, constructing better relationships while creating a more distinctive and compassionate life (Frick, 2004). Since this time, researchers have continued to study the effectiveness of a diversified leadership structure and have found that a servant-like characteristic has the viability to support organizational operations and builds an inclusive edifice (Hoch et al., 2018; Lemoine & Blum, 2021; Liu, 2019; Winston & Fields, 2015).

This study attempts to contribute to existing literature through the integration of gender inclusion, specifically of the underutilization of women of color in C-suite

positions, and bring an awareness to identifying and addressing gender perception, bias, and stereotypes that create a nongender specific administration conducive to supporting a CWE. Within this leadership identification, the research focused on the underutilization of women of color in C-suite positions and provides a fundamental structure in the development of a diversified leadership construct. The uniformity of leadership will require organizations to develop and implement a universal mindset in that executive roles are no longer associated with gender and racial epithets. Understanding diversity and inclusion are essential in today's business operations; organizational leaders need to look beyond legislation and focus on organizational efforts to leverage leadership's distinguished resources. Hence, the collective of resources can optimize organizational performance through a requisite of multiplicity, adaptivity, and individualized collective of self-efficacies (Javidan et al., 2016).

Research Problem

The problem addressed in this study was the gender characterization of senior leadership that is customarily associated with masculine attributes and limits women of color from advancing to C-suite positions. Leadership's consideration of an exceptionally diversified structure can reveal the issues associated with sex and gender bias within the corporation and hence emerge as contextual factors that directly influence leadership constructs (Lemoine & Blum, 2021). These constructional views create a gender division that identifies a male in a senior leader position as agentic and generally authoritative within his functions; in contrast, they support the stereotypes that ascribe the female as more communal, associated with her femininity, womanhood, and sensitivity. Therefore, the research included questions that reach beyond gender but also studied the

process and contingencies affiliated with the cultural shifts in leadership objectives, specifically pertaining to the female executive of color.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this study was to explore the association between diversified leadership structures, gender, and color pertaining to creating an organizational culture of inclusion and cohesiveness from an executive woman of color's perspective in the following categories: (a) the limited number of women of color in top leadership roles, (b) the personal experiences and developed characteristics relative to women of color and the use of leadership styles, and (c) the inclusion of women executives in creating a CWE. Although there is growing research regarding diversity and inclusion in senior leadership, there remains a gap in literature related to the issue of the underutilization of women of color in C-suite roles (Barbuto & Gifford, 2010; Gipson & Pfaff, 2017). The aim of the research was to identify the barriers and biases experienced by women of color who either hold, have held, or are attempting to secure C-suite positions within Fortune 500 companies.

Research Questions

The following research questions explore individual stereotypical perspectives of leadership behaviors pertaining to gender and color roles and whether women of color can be effective leaders in C-suite positions. The principal research question as it pertains to this study was "How does gender and color bias directly affect the promotional opportunities available for women of color in executive positions?" To explore gender bias in leadership roles, the responses supported that a diversified senior leadership configuration is viable to creating a communal culture of human services and

support the further integration of greater diversity within the male dominate C-suite positions (Gipson & Pfaff, 2017). The research questions were as follows:

1. How does gender bias define the senior leadership structure?
2. How does organizational culture affect the female executive of color leadership style?
3. How does a female executive of color leadership style affect organizational performance?
4. How does the female executive of color leadership style produce a CWE?

Significance of the Problem

The impact of the senior leadership structure on an organization and its human capital is problematic when stereotypes, perceptions, and bias limit or hinder business operations. The significance of this qualitative phenomenological study is to expound on a senior leadership structure in which female executives of color may perform at their maximum potential while serving as an effective leader. Through the identification of the universal attributes and communal qualities that unify the genders, an organization has the potential to create a culture of leadership that is not restricted by stereotypical roles. This study assessed the contribution to the field of organizational leadership by identifying the factors that contribute to the underutilization of women of color and the individualized experiences that determine the leadership styles (servant, communal, transformational, and executive) used as a universal administrative method in which gender is not a defining characteristic and has the potential to be an effective process in creating a CWE. The study focuses on the importance of mitigating the barriers and systematic practices of the *glass ceiling* and *old boys' club* for females of color

attempting to enter C-suite positions and advancing the diversity and inclusion of their utilization in executive roles that can create a culture of cohesiveness.

Definitions

Anthropomorphism. Anthropomorphism is the application of human behaviors or qualities to nonhuman inanimate objects, events, or animals (Martin, 2022).

Bias. Bias can be an inherent or learner subconscious behavior for or against a race, ethnicity, gender, or age group in a manner that is perceived as prejudicial or unfair and can directly influence and individual's decision-making process (Staats, 2016).

Cohesive work environment (CWE). A cohesive work environment is achieved when there is a mutual degree of agreement among a group of individuals (e.g., employees and management) in that all participants collectively achieve the established goals, but also contribute to the overall success of the organization (Goodwin et al., 2018).

Communal leadership. Communal leadership is a set of interrelated behaviors that directly influence the leader's internal and external networks and that are helpful, sensitive, nurturing, and assigned to female characteristics in leadership (Lamm et al., 2017).

Corporate culture. Corporate culture is an organization's systematic approach to its traditions, views, values, beliefs, and central characteristics that subconsciously leads individuals within the organization to adopt organizational practices and decisions (Pathiranage et al., 2020).

C-suite. C-suite is the term used by organizations to define their upper management positions (Holder et al., 2015).

Epoche. Epoche is the initial phase of the phenomenological reduction process in that the researcher dismisses personal beliefs and viewpoints of the phenomenon and places emphasis on the participants' perception (Moustakas, 1994).

Executive leadership. Executive leadership is the ability to manage or direct subordinates in an influential manner that fulfills the organization's goals and objectives (Lopez & Ensari, 2014).

Gender stereotypes. Gender stereotypes are social constructs pertaining to a formally established view of gender behaviors and conventional roles (Eagly & Karau, 2002).

Inclusion. Inclusion creates a workplace culture in that the organization places value and provides a systematic sponsorship of the diversity within its human capital to increase engagement and productivity (Wong, 2019).

Intersectionality theory. Intersectionality theory is the belief that individual experiences and behaviors are not defined or represented by a single category such as gender, color, or social status (Levon, 2015).

Organizational influence. Organizational influence is the concept of power in that there is an ability and willingness by the organization to impact the results of or to impose on the preferred objectives (Alsayah, 2021).

Phenomenology. Phenomenology is a philosophical development that studies and provides descriptions of phenomena as it relates to an individual's conscious experience (Moustakas, 1994).

Role congruity theory. Role congruity theory proposes that a group of individuals can be confidently assessed when its attributes maintain a close association with the group's social responsibilities (Lopez & Ensari, 2014).

Servant leadership. Servant leadership maintains a spotlight on an administrative practice that places a high priority on meeting the needs of the organization's human capital (Frick, 2004).

Thematic content analysis. Thematic content analysis is used to gather descriptive data to evaluate the research problem for the purpose of identifying emerging patterns and themes (Moreno & Quinn, 2020).

Transformational leadership. Transformational leadership is the ability to inspire change through an established behavioral pattern that influences subordinates to perform beyond their perceived capabilities (Eagly & Carli, 2003).

Underutilization. Underutilization signifies the degree to which the work, time, and dexterities of any individual or group are underused in the work force (Zenger & Folkman, 2019).

Organization of the Study

The study was organized in a manner that allows for the investigation of the underutilization of women of color in C-suite positions using a qualitative phenomenological design. The use of qualitative study design is ideal for investigating the shared lived experiences of women of color in C-suite positions and may assist organizations in integrating a systematic process that influences successful business strategies (Bernstein et al., 2020) that are inclusive of increasing the utilization of a visible talent pool of individuals, specifically for women of color (McGee, 2018).

Chapter 2 examines the extant literature on the association between diversified leadership structures, gender, and color as it pertains to creating an organizational culture of inclusion and cohesiveness from an executive woman of color's perspective. The intent is not to provide a meticulous review but to assist the reader to understand the complexity of the barriers and challenges experienced by women of color in executive positions. Chapter 3 describes the methodology for the study that includes a description of the research design, the participants, interview procedures, and the data collection and analysis process. Chapters 4 and 5 present the research findings and analysis, respectively. Chapter 5 also discusses the contributions of the study and recommendations for future research.

Assumptions

The collection and analysis of data for the purpose of constructing a narrative based on a participant's own personalized insight of a particular topic is a figurative process associated with qualitative narrative analysis (Chenail, 2012). The assumption is that there is a two-fold layer of interpretation: (a) the participant's life narrative (lived experiences) and (b) the researcher's assembly of the narrative for a reliable and objective analysis (Morse, 2015; Spiers et al., 2018). In addition, the assumption that a participant has the ability to supply substantial context to reveal patterns of universal or communal gender characteristics that flourish under a diversified leadership structure is pertinent to the study. The structure of this qualitative study is a phenomenological design that involves a formal interview process using a semistructured procedure allowing for each participant and researcher to build mutual trust so that the problem might be explored to discern the essence of the study. The study uses a systematic

process to ensure the assumptions are reasonable, requiring the development of trust and an understanding between participant and researcher that can only result from multiple interactions prior to the formal interview. This process reinforces the assumption that the participant provides an in-depth narrative, allowing for the collection of rich data with sufficient context for data saturation (Morse, 2015). This transcendental phenomenology approach allows the essence of the phenomenon to develop from the participants' experience (Moustakas, 1994).

Chapter 1 Summary

Understanding the chronological background of women in the labor force and the associated viewpoints of gender, color, and leadership style is critical to this study. The 20th century produced new opportunities in a previously foreseen highly masculine-based leadership design to include a more interpersonal, inclusive, and diversified method (Powell & Graves, 2003). During this period, a more relational, communal, and social leadership structure became commonplace and established a climate in that participants were more drawn to providing women with unique but limited leadership roles (Carlson et al., 2006). Although limitations are still evident, the 21st century is forcing an evolutionary transformation in advancing a culture of leadership that is defined by a particular set of characteristics and attributes that move beyond gender and color bias and stereotypes. By understanding the connection between the women's movement, inclusiveness of underutilization of diversity, and the need for a transformation in leadership structure, an organization can pioneer toward greater modernized objectives (Madsen & Scribner, 2017).

Present day operations require a continuance of maintenance of inclusion and diversity in that women of color occupy C-suite positions and the level of knowledge of the hierarchical conditions that secure these leadership roles (Smith, 2015). The level of education these women have achieved over the course of recent years has situated them in successful vocations as well as top administrative roles (Folta et al., 2012). Per the National Center for Education Statistics (2020), since the 1990s, women have outnumbered men in college and are predicted to continue to have greater completion rates that convert into higher enrollment numbers in postgraduate programs. In turn, women have increased their presence within United States organizations by securing 52% of white-collar managerial positions (D'Agostino, 2017). Although the women's movement continues to advance, there still remains an underutilization of women in C-suite positions.

This study explored the most notable practices that engage women executives of color in organizations by ensuring a maximum level of diversity and inclusion protocols are visible and active within the workplace. This level of acknowledgment and participation directly affects all levels of the organization's human capital, from entry-level staff to C-suite positions, therefore shaping the most appropriate leadership styles and techniques used to create, influence, and manage the most plausible CWE for the organization. Chapter 1 incorporated an overview of the design and method of the study, such as study rationale, targeted population, sample size, and instrumentation used to aid in data collection and analysis.

CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The aim of this study was to explore the association between diversified leadership structures, gender, and color as it pertains to creating an organizational culture of inclusion and cohesiveness from an executive woman of color's perspective. As research continues to embrace the concept of leadership as a service, a service in that the leader empowers and influences their human capital, there remains a gap in the literature pertaining to the issues associated with gender, color, and leadership structure (Gipson & Pfaff, 2017). As organizations attempt to manage the twin objectives of maintaining a competitive edge and upholding ethical business practices, the company's executives begin to recognize that leadership structure and corporate culture are also to the ongoing success, profitability, and increase in human capital performance (Kiker et al., 2019). Research continues to grow in the investigation of the association between leadership structure, gender, and color pertaining to the underutilization of women in leadership positions (Gipson & Pfaff, 2017). This research also furthers the exploration of diversified leadership structures as a viable approach to organizational management that is not defined by gender, specific gender traits or color, but by a greater congruency between the leadership role and the expectation for positive outcomes (Parris & Peachey, 2013).

History

The U.S. Census Bureau (n.d.) recorded that the U.S. population at the end of 2021 was 336.9 million of that 165.1 million (49%) were women. Although women make up almost half of the overall population, women of color only represent 66.04 million (40%) of the of the female populace. These numbers are reflective of an equal

balance of representation between males and females within the United States; however, this is not visible in Fortune 500 companies. With only 41 women occupying C-suite positions in Fortune 500 companies, there is a gross underrepresentation of women and women of color in C-suite positions, hence identifying that organizations are failing to meet their corporate social responsibility and ethical standards to support diversity and inclusion policies (Hinchliffe, 2021; Valerio, 2022).

In 1991, Eagly and Karau produced a novel review on the materialization of literature involving the correlation between gender and leadership (Badura et al., 2018). As time has progressed, there have been further studies that attempted to fill in the gap in literature between the paradigms of leadership structure, color, and gender role stereotypes. As society attempts to balance gender and color roles, it becomes increasingly vital for organizations to follow suit by providing leadership positions through the emergence of C-suite or executive opportunities. The researcher aimed to further explore and assess the gender and color gaps in leadership and identify a structure that embodies human characteristics relative to the underutilization of women of color in C-suite positions by interviewing participants to discern such. Servant, communal, executive, and transformational leadership styles focus on the authoritative practice of meeting the needs of others (Frick, 2004) and produce a collective of results that outperform other conventional leadership styles (Hoch et al., 2018). Therefore, the senior leadership structure must be conducive to incorporating a multifaceted strategy that identifies and eradicates the underutilization of women of color in C-suite positions.

The fundamental structure of gender roles in business, politics, and society can be accredited to the Greek philosophers Plato and Aristotle (Salkever, 1986). Salkever's

1986 study of Plato and Aristotle offered a fundamental framework in that individualism formed a contemporary critique of citizenship standards that established a particular way of life. These Greek authors provided an approach to ascertain the causes of or to discover alternatives to discriminatory male bias that characterizes Western thought and traditions pertaining to women. The Salkever study of Plato and Aristotle provided a connection between equality among genders, which was opposed to existing methodologies and the significance of a life of acceptance and equality within society (Dos Santos, 2018).

Most of the early literature on racial and gender differences within the workplace was based on the content of unequal pay and occupational mobility with minimal information and empirical knowledge on the lived experiences of women and particularly women of color (Cox & Nkomo, 1990). In May of 1955, the first publication of the Fortune 500 companies list was released. This list provided detailed information regarding the top 500 companies chief executive officers (CEOs), after-tax profits, assets, stockholders' equity, market value, and earnings per share (Hinchliffe, 2021). This list also included company milestones such as listing the first Fortune 500 female and women of color CEOs. This list included the following: (a) Katherine Graham made history in 1972 as the first woman CEO for the Washington Post, (b) Andrea Jung (East-Asian) in 1999 became the first women of color CEO for Avon, (c) in 2006 Indra Nooy (South-Asian) was named CEO of PepsiCo, (d) in 2009 Ursula Burns was the first African American CEO to lead Xerox, and (e) in 2017 Geisha Williams became the first Latin/Hispanic American CEO to head the Power, Gas & Electric Corporation (PG&E; see Table 1). As women continue to enter the workforce and seek new opportunities,

corporate leaders continue to miss the mark on ensuring a diverse and inclusive workforce by allowing antiquated practices such as the glass ceiling and old boys' club to limit the accessibility to the executive suite (Jauhar & Lau, 2018; King et al., 2017). Such metaphors (practices) are past and present contributors to the level of difficulty women, and more specifically women of color, experience in their attempts to ascend into corporate leadership (Barnes, 2017). These practices also blind the organization's leaders to the cultural biases, stereotyping, and double standards that limit the identification of the underutilization of valuable human resources.

Table 1

Fortune 500 List of the First Woman & Women of Color CEOs

Year	Ethnicity/race	Name	Company
1972	White	Katherine Graham	Washington Post
1999	East Asian	Andrea Jung	Avon
2006	South Asian	Indra Nooy	PepsiCo
2009	African American	Ursula Burns	Xerox
2017	Latin/Hispanic American	Geisha Williams	PG&E (Power, Gas & Electric) Corp.

Note. Adapted from “The Female CEOs on This Year’s Fortune 500 Just Broke Three All-Time Records,” by E. Hinchliffe, June 2, 2021, *Fortune* (<https://fortune.com/2021/06/02/female-ceos-fortune-500-2021-women-ceo-list-roz-brewer-walgreens-karen-lynch-cvs-thasunda-brown-duckett-tiaa/>).

Contemporary leadership studies identify the fact that the value organizations place on leadership is based on potential rather than performance, which is primarily focused on attributes male executives contribute to the leadership role (Player et al., 2019). Hence, there is a great deal of emphasis being placed on an increase in the number of women attempting to ascend to senior level positions based on the equity of

civil rights (Eddy & Kirby, 2020). The Chance (2021) study revealed that equality, diversity, and inclusion were paramount to granting executive seats to ethnic and gender minority groups. As women continue to campaign for promotional equity, women of color encounter greater opposition that slows their progression far below that of their White female counterparts (Chance, 2021). Further research has indicated that where there are disproportions in C-suite advancements, there are also imbalances in human capital engagement that directly affect productivity, profits, and the enlistment of a competitive advantage (Wang & Barney, 2006). Therefore, there needs to be a realignment of perceived resources by corporate leadership in that women of color are viewed as equally valuable to the corporate pipeline as other represented gender and racial groups (Eddy & Kirby, 2020).

Theoretical Framework

Theoretical framework can be defined as the explanation of the manner in which events, occurrences, or phenomena function (C. Collins & Stockton, 2018). Variations or fluctuations in descriptive explanations may occur in the foundation, scope, and influence; however, these elements become interconnected when establishing an understanding of the phenomena. There are varying research perspectives pertaining to the use of theoretical frameworks in qualitative research (Anfara & Mertz, 2015). In this study, the researcher endeavored to summarize and present an understanding of a theoretical framework using a qualitative approach to include four distinct attributes: (a) an explanation of epistemological dispositions, (b) the rationale behind the methodological decisions, (c) the theoretical construct as it pertains to the research

findings, and (d) the study's established framework. Ultimately, the theoretical framework includes the reflexive interdependence between theory and the study.

As organizations begin to incorporate gender-neutral leadership structures, the executive demographic still carries masculine attributes (Reynolds, 2011). The integration of a gender-neutral leadership structure, such as servant, communal, executive, and transformational leadership, can form a human alliance (the level of cohesiveness) so that an organization's goals and objectives can be achieved. To study a diversified leadership structure through a gender-neutral lens, gender is used as an analytical category versus a variable. This methodology facilitates an understanding of the origin of gender differences as it pertains to leadership structures, gender bias, and creating changes in organizational culture for a CWE. There were many creditable qualitative theories worthy of consideration for this study; for the purpose of this investigation, thematic content analysis, role congruity, and intersectionality theory were used. The use of these theories concludes that leadership structures have stereotypical attributes that, even unconsciously, maintain a masculine representation in leadership across multiple industries.

Corporate Culture

Corporate culture is an organization's systematic shared approach to its traditions, views, values, beliefs, and central characteristics that subconsciously leads individuals within the organization to adopt organizational practices and decisions (Pathiranage et al., 2020; E. Schein & Schein, 2017). Corporate culture is the individuals' perception of the standards that establish their work environment and influence the manner by which the individuals adapt and adjust to in order to meet organizational objectives (Pathiranage et

al., 2020). Corporate culture also influences the manner by which individuals interact with one another (Simoneaux & Stroud, 2014) and creates a bond between organizational resources and human capital building on a CWE and supporting organizational performance (Yirdaw, 2016).

To differentiate one organization from another, executives create a corporate culture that is exclusively reflective of their organizational values, beliefs, and practices (Pathiranage et al., 2020). When comparing organizational structures within a particular industry such as information technology, companies (e.g., Apple, International Business Machines [IBM], and Hewlett-Packard [HP]) fundamentally provide compatible technologies and operational environments; however, each maintains a diversified and unique corporate culture (E. Schein & Schein, 2017). Apple facilitates a culture of developing unpretentious and sophisticated state-of-the-art technology, and IBM is geared toward maintaining a long-term philosophy for innovation and a strong commitment to its human capital (Pathiranage et al., 2020). HP, on the other hand, is highly focused on innovation, originality, and the sovereignty of its human capital. Although each organization favors a corporate culture that is exclusive to its organizational governance and business management style, its effectiveness influences organizational performance and creates mandates for executive success.

Pathiranage et al. (2020) found that when an organization establishes a strategic plan that uses various executional options, this can establish a relationship between corporate culture and organizational performance. Beyond the direct influence of corporate culture on organizational performance, there is an indirect effect that the organization must also consider as the facilitator of the organization's dedication to its

human capital and recognizing it as a key fundamental resource (Nikpour, 2017). Cura (2018) found that 25% of organizational performance is affected by corporate culture, noting that the characteristics of this culture can cultivate in a manner that can significantly increase organizational performance. As studies have continued to investigate the relationship between corporate culture and organizational performance (Gorondutse & Hilman, 2019), ongoing evidence has shown that positive results can be achieved as long as the organization maintains the ability to differentiate between corporate mandate and cultural need, cultivating a balanced relationship between corporate culture and organizational performance.

Positive Versus Negative Corporate Culture

Corporate culture can have both positive and negative effects on the work environment, employee performance, and its financial outcomes (Kohll, 2018). Therefore, it is important for senior management to develop a clear understanding as to how to define, recognize, and if necessary modify and adapt the corporate culture to create an environment that facilitates employee cohesiveness and financial performance. It is within this collective that leadership finds that its corporate culture has the ability to validate the importance of its human capital, which can directly influence employee performance and in turn influence profitability. Kohll (2018) explained that the positivity found within a corporate culture leads toward developing standards for organizational performance that combined with a level of corporate accountability establishes predictable outcomes for ensuring consistent and dynamic employee commitment to all organizational activities.

As in a positive corporate culture, a negative corporate culture can significantly impact its human capital and profitability but with detrimental consequences (Richard et al., 2019). Richard et al. (2019) defined a negative corporate culture as a work environment that is characterized by its associates feeling refuted, insignificant, and immaterial. A negative corporate culture can also foster gender and racial discrimination through the use of organizational practices known as the glass ceiling and the old boys' club. Research on such discriminatory constraints gives insights into the rising reproduction of practices that are designed to hinder targeted groups from entering into senior leadership positions (Bloch et al., 2021). Such practices are reinforced by social norms that have been developed and kept in practice by a male-dominated structure that establishes gender roles (Barnes, 2017). These characterizations, in turn, result in high employee turnover rates and an unstable work environment, hence creating a cohesiveness of negativity that hinders productivity, performance, and financial outcomes (Richard et al., 2019). A negative corporate culture can be fueled by poor communication, lack of managerial support, and employee dissatisfaction. Overall, a negative corporate culture can prove detrimental to the organization; however, the ill effects can be reversible if the organizational leadership can identify and execute plans that create and cultivate a healthy and prosperous work environment.

Corporate Culture and Financial Performance

In an effort to create an effective corporate culture, organizational leaders must also understand the dynamics of its organizational performance that highlights its ultimate bottom line—financial performance. Corporate culture is fueled by the behaviors of its members in that the organization's values remain consistent (Pathiranage

et al., 2020). In creating a positive corporate culture, the organization's associates not only comprehend but also have stake in the organization.

An effective corporate culture consists of five subcultures: (a) employee-focused leadership, (b) exemplary managerial practices, (c) robust interpersonal relationships, (d) ethical policymaking process, and (e) vigorous customer service (Pathiranage et al., 2020). When leadership employs an effective corporate culture, the results are reflective in the organization's work environment, employee behaviors, enhanced operations, and improved financial performance (Hartnell et al., 2019). The effectiveness of this corporate culture creates an environment of cohesiveness in which performance and financial outcomes are a unified effort from all levels of the corporate structure. Pathiranage et al. (2020) found that 46% of corporate revenue is a direct result of an effective corporate culture and demonstrates an unequivocal correlation between corporate culture and financial performance. Hence, Pathiranage et al. argued that there is a linear correlation between corporate culture, organizational performance, and financial benefits.

Corporate Culture, Ethics, and Integrity

Operating business in the 21st century requires more than understanding business operations, industry knowledge, creative marketing techniques, modern technology, great leaders, and skilled employees (Player et al., 2019). Today's organizations require a foundation built on integrity, ethics, and a system of governance that clearly defines both its internal and external process of operations (Dal Borgo & Sasia, 2021). Dal Borgo and Sasia (2021) explained that there is a need for organizations to acknowledge the value of their purpose over company profits. Hence, Dal Borgo and Sasia explained that business

ventures must be conducted under a collective of executives who are not only capable of controlling operations and generating profits but also have a clear understanding of their responsibilities to the organization's stakeholders (e.g., employees, shareholders, consumers, communities, etc.). Ultimately, the organization's leadership must have the ability to balance their responsibilities among virtue capital and developing a foundation that functions beyond established business concepts and timeless.

Dal Borgo and Sasia (2022) defined integrity as the organization's adherence to a code of ethics that are classified as moral and inherited values that are reflective of its corporate culture. By definition, integrity should be characterized as incorruptible corporate behavior. For an organization, integrity defines the moral stricture that the organization will use to facilitate all domestic and foreign interactions, ultimately defining the organization's potential for success or demise. As such, an organization's integrity also determines the level of ethics upon which the company will build its financial structure.

Corporations spend extensive hours and exhaustive effort to build, assess, and reevaluate their mission, vision, and value statements. Many organizations live and die by the words contained in these statements because their internal and external audiences hold the organization accountable to fulfilling these established standards, especially when these statements incorporate words such as ethics, integrity, and moral values (Dal Borgo & Sasia, 2022). Difficulties in meeting these standards arise when the lines between doing what is right become blurred by doing what is expected.

An ethics-centered organization always errs on the side of doing what is right despite the consequences (Dal Borgo & Sasia, 2022). Doing what is right is often

counter-cultural to present-day societal views pertaining to the concept of what is in it for the individual or, in the case of corporate culture, what is in it for the organization. As an organization, a centralized focus is often placed on securing profits in a manner that may not align with the established concentrations of moral obligations and ethical activities. Some organizations maintain that corporations should maximize wealth by maintaining profitability as the focal point of business that directly affects the level of value the organization presents to its stakeholders and society overall (van Marrewijk, 2004). Hence, when profits outweigh the potential consequences of an organization being viewed as having a limited or nonexistent level of integrity and ethics, the impact on the organization and its associates can distort its reputation and devalue its wealth to both internal and external stakeholders.

Gender Bias

Gender bias has been experienced by women in leadership for centuries (Madsen & Scribner, 2017). Although women enter corporate America at the same rate as their male counterparts, there still is an underutilization of women in senior leadership roles and positions. With only 41 females leading Fortune 500 companies in 2021, there remains an underutilization of women in executive positions, and they are an underutilized human capital resource, especially women of color (Dworkin et al., 2018; Hinchliffe, 2021; Jackson & O'Callaghan, 2009).

The primary descriptive of gender characteristics in business, politics, and society can be accredited to the Greek philosophers Plato and Aristotle (Salkever, 1986). Salkever's 1986 study of Plato and Aristotle offered a fundamental framework in that individualism formed a contemporary assessment of citizenship norms that inaugurate a

certain way of life. These Greek authors proposed that there is a systematic approach to determine the causes of, or to discover alternatives to, a discriminatory male bias that characterizes Western ideologies and customs pertaining to women. Plato and Aristotle provided an association between the equality among genders, which was opposed to existing methodologies and the significance of a life of acceptance and equality within society (Dos Santos, 2018).

Plato is credited with a significantly more descriptive view concerning the uniformity of women and their rights than his colleague Aristotle. This is a direct result of the way that he perceived the probability that women have similar capabilities as those attributed to their male counterparts (Dos Santos, 2018). Plato established a standard of reasonability in that women of privilege within the Republic were viewed in a manner that superseded that based on legal parameters, creating worth in their ability to contribute to society not based on time but within a particular setting.

Although Aristotle maintained a more traditional perspective on the exclusion of women from governmental matters and particular social classes on the premise that female attributes create restricted pragmatic impartiality, he never questioned whether a scholarly review of equality among genders was necessary for other societal venues (Stauffer, 2008). Aristotle's inflexibility was based on a traditional naturalism in that he acknowledged gender differences as comprising social conditions that are globally evident. Aristotle clarified his view on the mediocrity of women in certain areas of society and government as a necessary defense to having a controlled establishment; however, he reiterated that in certain environments, women had the ability to contribute to an untraditional capacity.

Internal and external leadership contexts still remain a male-centric dominated discipline in today's society at the same time female leaders continue to be evaluated under archaic views pertaining to predetermined male qualities, behaviors, and characteristics (Yadav & Lata, 2018). Globally, the percentage of the female populace who hold CEO positions remains low, and the progression continues to move at a decelerated pace (Gupta et al., 2018; Jackson & O'Callaghan, 2009; Sherwin, 2014). Only 41 females lead Fortune 500 companies, and of that number, only two are women of color. The increase of women in C-suite positions has progressed over the past 2 decades from two in 2000 to the current 41 executive positions in 2021 (Hinchliffe, 2021; Valerio, 2022). Although there is a growing momentum in studies that investigate the underutilization of women in senior leadership roles (Seo et al., 2017), researchers differ in the assessment of whether the lack of female representation is due to their lacking the ability to be effective in the position or due to societal expectation (Bailey, 2014). Notwithstanding prevailing stereotypes that men are more effective leaders (Cueto, 2015; Prime et al., 2009), women have expanded their presence in C-suite positions and business proprietorship (Elias, 2018; Yadav & Lata, 2018). Although organizations continue to slowly present females with leadership opportunities through diversity and inclusion, there are still remnants of systematic discrimination based on color, gender, inequalities in pay, and harassment that plague the women's movement for further advancement.

With a dearth of women of color in executive positions, there is a lack of influence for other minority women to mirror the success of individuals with similar backgrounds (Showunmi, 2021). The concept of human capital as a resource is vital

because it is the organization's financial investment on individuals for an anticipated future return (Riley et al., 2017; Wang & Barney, 2006). A corporation's human capital is associated with its ability to perform, compete, and predict future revenues (Riley et al., 2017). Hence, the organization's human capital cannot be separated or substituted because it is integral to business operations. Therefore, women of color are imperative to the leadership structure as they are representative of both the organization's diversified internal and external communities. Yadav and Lata's 2018 study found that the disparities in executive promotions and the opportunities for equal pay for women required a considerable amount of drive, ability, patience, and tenacity to overcome the barriers associated with the stereotypes imposed to limit their professional development or hinder their opportunities for success. The study found that for a female to be an effective leader, a clear understanding of the challenges associated with entering a leadership position will persist until there is a societal change in the manner women are viewed. Therefore, gender bias requires a reevaluation of the organization's culture and managerial policies in order to have a more balanced and reformed leadership consortium free of gender and color bias (Elias, 2018; Yadav & Lata, 2018).

Inequalities in Compensation

Compensation and economic inequalities for women of color within the United States are both racially and gender influenced (Michener & Brower, 2020). The intersection of these categories (race and gender) is systematically related with broad disparities in economic outcomes. The condition of pay equity for women of color remains lower than that of their male and White female counterparts because there is still

the opinion that there is a lack of similarities in the level of overall qualifications, particularly in the areas of experience, education, and overall ability (Reese, 2019).

The inequalities in compensation between males and females continues to be a topic of discussion for most organizations. Although organizations continue to attempt to fill in the gap between C-suite employment and compensation for women, the convergence remains slow and incomplete (Guvenen et al., 2020). Since the early 1990s there has been a strong increase in women entering the labor market (Toczek et al., 2021). Although the number of women in the labor force continues to increase, there still remains an underutilization of this human capital resource in C-suite positions and in securing equal compensation as their male counterparts. The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2022) data show an increase in full-time workforce participants from a median of 103,748 in 2012 to a median of 116,156 in 2021 (see Table 2). Although there has been an increase in workforce participants over the 9 year recorded period, the representation of women remains below that of men (see Table 2).

The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2022) also compared the median weekly earnings for full-time employees after the fourth quarter for 2020 and 2021 noting the difference in the number of workers by gender, race, ethnicity, and median weekly earnings. At the end of the fourth quarter of 2021, the median weekly earnings were \$1,010, of which women earned \$930 (84.3%) compared to the \$1,103 median earned by their male counterparts (see Table 3). These earnings not only varied by gender, but there were also clear variations based on race and ethnicity.

Table 2

Median Usual Weekly Earnings of Full-Time Wage and Salary Workers by Sex, Quarterly Averages, Seasonally Adjusted

Year and quarter	Number of workers (in thousands)			Median weekly earnings					
	Total	Men	Women	In current dollars			In constant (1982-84) dollars		
				Total \$	Men \$	Women \$	Total \$	Men \$	Women \$
2012									
4th quarter.....	103,748	57,772	45,977	771	868	690	333	375	298
2013									
1st quarter.....	103,928	57,884	46,044	768	860	699	331	370	301
2nd quarter.....	103,988	57,944	46,044	777	863	706	335	372	304
3rd quarter.....	104,400	58,082	46,318	779	855	705	334	367	302
4th quarter.....	104,764	58,095	46,669	782	865	712	334	369	304
2014									
1st quarter.....	105,633	58,682	46,951	790	865	716	335	367	304
2nd quarter.....	106,342	59,486	46,855	781	860	715	330	363	302
3rd quarter.....	106,726	59,543	47,183	798	878	721	336	370	304
4th quarter.....	107,436	60,123	47,313	795	878	724	336	371	306
2015									
1st quarter.....	108,448	60,346	48,102	802	886	725	341	377	308
2nd quarter.....	108,541	60,386	48,154	803	890	725	339	376	306
3rd quarter.....	109,315	61,004	48,311	809	896	727	340	377	306
4th quarter.....	110,060	61,292	48,768	821	904	729	345	380	307
2016									
1st quarter.....	110,323	61,559	48,764	823	904	744	346	380	313
2nd quarter.....	110,921	61,770	49,152	828	913	746	345	381	311
3rd quarter.....	111,789	62,239	49,550	834	918	748	347	381	311
4th quarter.....	111,357	62,182	49,175	845	924	759	349	381	313
2017									
1st quarter.....	111,838	62,363	49,475	858	941	760	352	386	312
2nd quarter.....	113,140	62,963	50,177	863	937	782	353	384	320
3rd quarter.....	113,854	63,319	50,535	864	944	769	352	385	313
4th quarter.....	114,286	63,315	50,971	854	943	770	345	382	312
2018									
1st quarter.....	114,455	63,833	50,622	875	956	778	351	384	312
2nd quarter.....	115,535	64,185	51,349	881	963	783	351	384	312
3rd quarter.....	116,267	64,448	51,819	891	980	796	354	389	316
4th quarter.....	116,019	64,118	51,901	897	991	795	355	392	314
2019									
1st quarter.....	117,108	64,790	52,319	899	994	803	355	393	317
2nd quarter.....	117,398	65,155	52,243	913	1,004	818	358	393	320
3rd quarter.....	117,553	65,001	52,552	922	1,010	825	360	394	322
4th quarter.....	118,262	65,070	53,191	934	1,020	842	362	395	327
2020									
1st quarter.....	116,823	64,175	52,648	951	1,056	853	368	409	330
2nd quarter.....	104,386	57,867	46,518	1,008	1,091	919	393	425	358
3rd quarter.....	108,963	60,150	48,813	996	1,112	901	384	429	347
4th quarter.....	111,408	61,468	49,940	982	1,069	894	376	410	342
2021									
1st quarter.....	112,907	61,974	50,933	983	1,079	897	373	410	341
2nd quarter.....	113,549	62,412	51,136	996	1,098	905	370	409	337
3rd quarter.....	114,642	63,204	51,438	1,003	1,108	915	367	406	335
4th quarter.....	116,156	64,116	52,040	1,008	1,100	928	362	395	333

Note. From *Usual Weekly Earnings of Wage and Salary Workers Fourth Quarter 2021* [Press Release] by U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2022 (<https://bit.ly/3T6b0v6>).

Stereotypes in Leadership Roles

As women executives continue to prove their effectiveness as leaders, the stereotypical cliché of female inefficiencies as C-suite administrators remains a centralized focus on the role of congruity theory of ongoing bias toward their ability to lead (Gallant, 2014). This theoretical construct proposes that the bias toward women executives exists because of the inconsistencies between the characteristics associated

with leadership and the stereotypical gender attributes assigned to women. Normal societal focus assigns masculine characteristics to leadership structures that in turn continue to build on the inconsistency in the role as society defines the insignificance of female attributes to a leadership structure therefore limiting opportunities for advancement because of an established double standard (Eagly, 2007).

Table 3

Median Usual Weekly Earnings of Full-Time Wage and Salary Workers by Selected Characteristics, Quarterly Averages, Not Seasonally Adjusted

Characteristic	Number of workers (in thousands)		Median weekly earnings			
	4th 2020	4th 2021	In current dollars		In constant (1982-84) dollars	
			4th 2020	4th 2021	4th 2020	4th 2021
SEX AND AGE						
Total, 16 years and over.....	111,480	116,271	\$984	\$1,010	\$378	\$364
Men, 16 years and over.....	61,396	64,082	1,072	1,103	412	397
16 to 24 years.....	5,399	5,785	625	662	240	238
25 years and over.....	55,998	58,296	1,137	1,170	437	421
Women, 16 years and over.....	50,083	52,189	894	930	344	335
16 to 24 years.....	4,234	4,696	596	623	229	224
25 years and over.....	45,850	47,493	937	972	360	350
RACE, HISPANIC OR LATINO ETHNICITY, AND SEX						
White.....	85,757	88,801	1,007	1,030	387	371
Men.....	48,273	50,033	1,108	1,129	425	406
Women.....	37,484	38,767	912	939	350	338
Black or African American.....	14,298	15,228	792	805	304	290
Men.....	6,785	7,336	810	807	311	290
Women.....	7,513	7,892	775	802	297	289
Asian.....	7,493	8,002	1,261	1,384	484	498
Men.....	4,209	4,370	1,457	1,499	560	540
Women.....	3,285	3,632	1,091	1,165	419	419
Hispanic or Latino ethnicity.....	19,910	21,066	742	799	285	288
Men.....	11,868	12,578	769	845	295	304
Women.....	8,042	8,489	706	733	271	264

Note. From *Usual Weekly Earnings of Wage and Salary Workers Fourth Quarter 2021* [Press Release] by U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2022 (<https://bit.ly/3T6b0v6>).

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The Tiell et al. (2012) study found evidence that if scholastic efforts are instituted to neutralize gender bias as it pertains to leadership roles, a systematic change can occur through creating a gender balance in senior administrative positions. As research continues the evidentiary process, the results can fill in the gaps in the literature as to the theories that can provide foresight into gender, color, and leadership roles. With the evolution in defining leadership with the incorporation of gender roles and leadership methods, establishing a commonality between male and female gender characteristics can provide a greater layer of accountability as to the attributes that are relative to a particular leadership structure (Ely et al., 2011; Madden, 2011). As leadership ideologies are formed through cultural beliefs pertaining to administrators and what it means to lead, today's researchers seek leadership characteristics that are synonymous with gender roles and societal perception of gender in leadership (Johnson et al., 2008). Thus, current

studies explain that the lack of women in C-suite roles is associated with the stereotypical belief that women fail to meet the preconceived notions of being effective leaders (Hoyt & Murphy, 2016; Kaiser & Wallace, 2016). The preconceived notion that females are unfit to meet the qualifications, characteristics, skills, and level of aspiration for success as dictated by society place restrictions and gratuitous bias on a female's opportunity for C-suite advancement (Hoyt & Murphy, 2016). The long-established preconceptions are continually trusted in current business operations and create an unconscious bias holding to the prejudicial belief that women have an inability to thrive in agentic leadership roles, creating negative cogitation of the female's aptitudes (Kaiser & Wallace, 2016). As organizations begin to acknowledge and establish protocols to identify and eliminate gender bias in the workplace, studies have shown that the efforts over the last 3 decades have been gradual. As the executive landscape in U.S. corporations continues to reflect a monoculture dynamic with 82% of the Fortune 500 companies CEOs being White males, the effort to progress to a more balanced demographic setting requires focus, extensive time, and continues effort (Flory et al., 2021). Program enhancements geared toward diversity and inclusion, particularly for women of color, establish trajectories that are limited by the organizations' inability to establish policies that move in a manner that can bring effective change with a sense of urgency but also within a well-structured plan of execution (Flory et al., 2021; Kaiser & Wallace, 2016). These protocols also include the recognition and eradication of racial bias. Historically, women of color have been constrained to overcome colossal barriers. These barriers have forever been centered on racial and gender imbalance, particularly during the battle for political and human

liberties (Rosser-Mims, 2010). Even in the modern world, some of these barriers still exist, forcing a continual perseverance for equality in the workplace.

Diversity and Inclusion

As organizations continue the transition into representative bureaucracies focusing on social equity, there still remains an underutilization of women in leadership roles (Andrews & Ashworth, 2015), especially for women of color (Holder et al., 2015). The goal of a diversified workplace is to create an inclusiveness of diversified individuals or group of representatives who are reflective of the population the organization serves (Kirton & Greene, 2016). As diversity and inclusion become priorities within the human resource management arena, scholars examine the intersectionality and dimensions of the phenomena to discover the complexities associated with ensuring the inclusiveness of protective groups specifically with gender, color, and leadership roles (Nelson & Piatak, 2021).

In 1964, antidiscrimination legislation (Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964) was instituted to protect individuals and groups in an attempt to provide equal opportunities despite notable differences, such as national origin, age, race and ethnicity, religion/belief, gender, marital status, and socioeconomic status (Powell & Graves, 2003). As today's workforce continues to become more diversified, inclusion requires an organization to develop a culture in which all groups can coexist and ultimately thrive (Nelson & Piatak, 2021). Nelson and Piatak (2021) examined the inclusion efforts of human resource management using intersectionality theory to account for the variance and intersection of authoritative measures that influence the human capital experience within an organization. The results of the study found that intersectionality of the

underutilization of women and race within senior leadership outlines how a group identifies itself within a particular social construct. This identification tends to establish classifiable or categorical oppression that is fundamental to gender but can be expanded to include race. These constructs can be self-imposed or inflicted by others. Scholars have determined that diversity management not only entails the prevention of discriminatory practices but also advocates the creation of inclusive environments that embrace diversity for organizational improvement, increased job satisfaction, and gender equality (Feeney & Langer, 2016). Ultimately, a gender diversified leadership structure provides avenues in which its members have the ability to relate and work across various human capital demographics (e.g., race, color, religion, gender identity, sexual orientation, national origin, disability, and age) so that individual and collective self-efficacy creates value and brings organizational validity to continue operations within the society it serves (Javidan et al., 2016).

Leadership Styles

The effectiveness of a leadership style is dependent on the individual's understanding of the availability to use varying administration approaches to shape the organization, influence human capital performance, and produce a durable internal and external corporate structure (Badura et al., 2018). The leadership component of an organization is vital to the success of the organization, particularly if the administrators have the versatility to synchronize corporate culture and human capital in a manner that creates a CWE. The repertoire of leadership styles (e.g., servant, communal, democratic, autocratic, laissez-faire, strategic, transformational, transactional, and bureaucratic) is vast, and each style may be used independently of the others or interchangeably in an

effort to create congruency, effectiveness, and overall profitability for the organization (Harper, 2012). Although organizations have established protocols and structured processes, daily activities can change or fluctuate without notice, requiring leadership to be prepared to make decisions that alter current routines and require different approaches. Given the wealth of research and literature on leadership theories, it would be reasonable to assume that there is a concurrence on that leadership style and understanding the collective of the group's and individual's attributes are most effective in all situations (Lemoine et al., 2019). Therefore, using varying management methods styles to meet the current conditions allows the corporation the ability to positively influence the organization's human capital (Guarnaccia et al., 2018; Mustafa et al., 2019).

As organizations strategize to remain relevant within their industries, leadership structure must also be an integral part of the executive plan to revolutionize both internal and external operations (Player et al., 2019). If an organization is unable to adapt to industry changes and effectively implement business strategies, the organization's longevity is jeopardized. Adopting and incorporating the appropriate leadership structure also includes identifying a managing method that is gender neutral because executive demographic remains highly composed of masculine attributes (Reynolds, 2011). The assimilation of a gender-neutral leadership structure that minimizes and eliminates gender bias and stereotypes can form a human alliance in that an organization's goals and objectives can be more formally achieved. Using a phenomenological research method in which gender is an analytical category versus a variable (quantitative method) can facilitate an understanding of the origin of differences as it pertains to leadership, gender, and color bias while developing an organizational culture that supports a CWE. As

researchers continue to investigate leadership structures that promote gender neutrality, future studies will fill in the gaps pertaining to these phenomena (C. Collins & Stockton, 2018; Symeonides & Childs, 2015).

Self-Efficacy

Self-efficacy is a set of formidable indicators an individual uses to determine their confidence level in the delivery of effective behaviors that directly evaluate the individual's leadership performances (Goddard et al., 2015). Self-efficacy was introduced in 1997 by psychologist Albert Bandura in an effort to expound on the manner individuals' beliefs regarding their capabilities directly influence their actions (Versland & Erickson, 2017). Hence, individuals control their behaviors by instituting standards that evaluate their actions. This is an associated state that regulates behavior through the reflection of thoughts and actions. This self-examination initiates a thought process in that past events dictate future actions. Versland and Erickson (2017) found that self-efficacy is influenced by the individual's cognitive, motivational, affective, decisional processes. Although typically applied to a narrow margin of individual performance, it is universally used as a direct resource for leadership to establish behavioral standards that include but are limited to goal setting, determination, and persistency efforts.

As research regarding these phenomena continues and information is being distributed on the matter, leaders begin to assimilate self-efficacy into the organization's culture using the collective efforts to build greater levels of inclusion in the workplace, the valuing of human capital, and production of satisfactory levels of job performance outcomes to build a more proficient community (Versland & Erickson, 2017). Based on social expectations and societal roles, gender is a vital element that directly affects self-

efficacy and generates greater leader performance. The advancement of leadership within an organization begins with the individual's level of self-awareness and progresses toward understanding the manner in that the individual is allowed to successfully guide individualized performance (Paglis, 2010). The more dominant the level of self-efficacy, the greater the level of performance that generates a pronounced interest in placing immense effort in becoming a more effective and influential leader (Quigley, 2013). In this manner, leaders have the ability to construct and apply their self-efficacy to the current environment and contribute to building future leaders (Paglis, 2010). Studies have shown that self-efficacy can produce positive results that are significant to the overall culture of the organization.

Servant Leadership

Lemoine and Blum's 2021 study integrated existing research on servant leadership with the gender role congruity theory to investigate the connection between leadership and organizational outcomes. Congruent with earlier research, servant leadership is viewed as influential behaviors that are performed humbly throughout various levels of relationships, such as human capital, consumers, communities, and the organization (Schaubroeck et al., 2011). Academic literature has associated servant leadership and human capital performance as a positive outcome collaboration in that leaders focus on the development and service of both internal and external stakeholders (Eva et al., 2019). Servant leadership is assessed as a leadership style that may be more effective than conventional purposeful methods such as transformational leadership that emphasizes leader-member exchange, as it is a collaborative phenomenon (Liden et al., 2014).

The Powell and Graves (2003) study examined the 1963 and 1964 legislation (The Equal Pay Act and Title VII of the Civil Rights Act) that was designed to support the women's movement allowing for greater promotional opportunities and equal pay and barring gender discrimination. Still underrepresented in definitive higher-level (C-suite) positions, women continue to endure gender discrimination while employing leadership styles that are effective in building a CWE, are conducive to fostering individuality, and efficiently use the individual's overall character makeup (Shea & Renn, 2017). Prior literature on the impact of gender on leadership styles has been met with blended observations. Rosser (2003) recognized that a female's leadership style is linked to her individualized characteristics and ability to fully develop a CWE that builds an interconnected workplace work environment. Johnson et al. (2008) found that leadership styles are not gender-specific yet are gender-neutral and are influenced by the leader's individualized behaviors and characteristics that directly contribute to the organization's human capital response to the established environment. The Johnson et al. study also included segmentation variables such as age, ethnic origin, and gender to sustain the results that there were no substantial differentials in leadership styles between genders. The Johnson et al. study also further evaluated leadership style beyond gender to include additional segmentation variables such as age and ethnic origin to sustain the results that there were no substantial differentials between the genders. Dennis and Bocarnea (2005) recognized that individuals have the ability to transition between leadership styles, and further assessment is required on gender influences and effects on the organization both internally and externally. Continual research is vital as it further promotes women of color in leadership, provides a greater understanding of gender and leadership, and

attempts to validate the influence a leadership style has on a CWE. This study aimed to build on the existing literature and provide further data that reduce the disparity in information as to the effect of gender on creating a CWE.

Communal Leadership

Communal leadership is viewed as a fundamental part of today's society that theoretically unites individuals in a manner that inextricably links the group to the theory of social capital (Lamm et al., 2017). Therefore, the potential for gender bias within the community has the potential to be heightened through a cognitive incongruity in thoughts, especially in leadership roles. Through communal engagement there is an interactive process of interrelated activities as to the manner individuals communicate common interest in local society creating a paradox between community and organizational association in that a bond is built. Thus, communal leadership has comparable qualities with assessment or opinion types of leadership styles in that the leader's circle of influence requires the ability to mobilize the resources necessary to achieve both organization and community goals.

A communal leadership structure is created through individual investments and overall collaborated efforts from all levels of the organization. These collaborated efforts create a unit or team that is the nucleus around which an organization is built to accomplish a unified objective, goal, or mission (Goodwin et al., 2018). This type of configuration allows a team to accomplish large tasks on a greater scale than an individual can complete single-handedly. The effectiveness of a team is based on the collective abilities and actions used to complete tasks ranging from tactical behaviors to a strategic direction (Shuffler et al., 2012). In addition to the collective efforts of the

individuals within a team environment, the combination of unique perspectives and backgrounds enhances the level of creativity and ability to problem solve.

The Rosette and Tost (2010) study contributed to the ongoing debate of a female's disadvantage in leadership by specifying the contextual variables that moderate the incongruence between gender and leadership roles. The investigation determined female leaders, although at a general disadvantage in securing top-level executive roles, clearly exhibited greater success in communal leadership roles in contrast to their male counterparts. The study assessed those favorable results were unique in the female leaders pertaining to communal management skills that can be moderated by gender bias.

The Rosette and Tost (2010) study also suggested that breaking the glass ceiling may provide further advantages for women over their male counterparts because of high agentic and communal characteristics that organizations can consider more beneficial in changing the construct of being an effective and influential leader (Rosette & Tost, 2010). Today's effective leader must have the ability to function beyond the established norms of being purposeful, competitive, unequivocal, and independent. Female executives must also exhibit the ability to perceive the significance of building solid relationships, complete collaborations, and influence human capital through communication, training, and support. In the future, more studies need to be conducted on organizational culture and the stereotypes being afflicted on female executives in an effort to assist in the movement of empowering more women to secure C-suite opportunities (Ryan & Haslam, 2005).

Executive Leadership

Executive leadership has been noted as a managing style that administrators can use to influence human capital performance and positively impact the organization's financial profitability (Lopez & Ensari, 2014). Lopez and Ensari (2014) investigated the connection between leadership styles and organizational performance related to the level of influence leadership has on the company's human capital and the functionality of executing a CWE. Using executive leadership as the main initiative of the study, Lopez and Ensari found that using a collaboration of leadership styles allowed for a more formable, hypothetical, and established investigation. Using a multifactor leadership questionnaire, their study was able to establish an expressed association between leadership styles, organizational performance, and increasing communal stability.

Davis and Maldonado (2015) contributed to existing and future studies on both the underutilization of women in executive positions and the use of an effective leadership style that creates a gender-neutral organizational culture. As research continues, the identification of gender bias, stereotypes, and preconceived notions pertaining to women in C-suite positions and the effects these barriers have on promotions and retention are fundamental to female promotions and inclusiveness in C-suite positions. Sanchez-Hucles and Davis (2010) recommended that further research was required to explain the conundrum in that women are influential leaders but are systematically placed at a disadvantage in securing executive roles and breaking through the glass ceiling.

Transformational Leadership

Transformational leadership is the ability to inspire change through an established behavioral pattern that influences subordinates to perform beyond their perceived capabilities (Eagly & Carli, 2003). Transformational leadership was introduced in 1973 by James V. Downton and expanded upon by James MacGregor Burns in 1978 (Y. Cho et al., 2019). Transformational leadership alters the followers' manner of thinking in that the organization's interest supersedes their own, boosts morale, and ensures that both the followers' and organization's values align.

With the explanation of the number of women entering leadership positions within major corporations (Eagly & Carli, 2003; Hoyt & Murphy, 2016), the potential for gender bias, stereotypes, and discrimination creates a gender-based contrast in leadership style and viability requiring a more formable field of study (Hoyt & Murphy, 2016). Continued research frequently depicted women as demonstrating a more sophisticated level of leadership characteristics, particularly in a transformational leadership style, in contrast to their male counterparts (Eagly & Carli, 2003). The research discoveries that concentrate on gender and leadership demonstrate considerable diversity within the workplace (Hoyt & Murphy, 2016). The results from Hoyt and Murphy's 2016 investigation support the findings that women lead in a more democratic and participatory manner in contrast to their male counterparts. Female leaders have also been described as more dependable with the transformational leadership style that centers on the leaders' capacity to be a role model with the ability to influence, invigorate, and support their subordinates (Eagly & Carli, 2003).

Cohesive Work Environment

The foundation of a CWE is built on the conclusions drawn from societal viewpoints that are based in the deviations of color, gender, and leadership position that are vital components of the organization. These irregularities are reflective of the fluctuating biases in relation to gender and color. These research fluctuations occur when one study favors one gender's attributes over another, deducing that there must be a critical consideration in the interpretation of the data and may distort the true relationship between the leader's gender and the work environment (Carlson et al., 2006).

Intrinsically, when studies conclude that leadership styles that contain masculine attributes are preferable within the workplace, there are greater expectations placed on females to perform within these parameters and hence limit opportunities in securing leadership positions (Rudman & Kilianski, 2000). Whereas when other studies assess the female attributes as the preferred leadership style characteristics, the prospects for career advancement elevates tremendously (Carlson et al., 2006). Therefore, the overall degree to which women excel within the workplace falls in accordance with the level of female acceptance in a gender-neutral or contextual environment, thus creating a CWE where female leaders have the ability to outrival their male counterparts.

The Powell and Graves (2003) study investigated the 1963 and 1964 legislative decisions (The Equal Pay Act and Title VII of the Civil Rights Act) that advanced the women and minority movements allowing for promotional opportunities for females and individuals of color. Although still underrepresented in authoritative positions, women and minorities continued to faced gender and racial bias while developing leadership styles that supported their roles within the work environment (Shea & Renn, 2017).

Previous literature on the effect of race, gender, and leadership style on the work environment is mixed. Rosser (2003) identified that a women's management style is compatible with her individualized characteristics and ultimately creates a unified and interconnected work environment—a CWE. Johnson et al. (2008) found that leadership styles are not gender dominant, identifying that leadership styles are gender-neutral, and hence employees respond to the established environment. The Johnson et al. study not only denotes that there is no direct correlation between gender and management style but also that gender does not provide an advantage in the use of one leadership style over another. The Johnson et al. study also included segmentation variables such as age, ethnic origin, and gender to sustain the results that there were no substantial differences in the mean scores between males and females. Dennis and Bocarnea (2005) acknowledged that as management styles change, there must be further evaluation of gender influences and the internal environmental effects. Further studies are necessary to promote the progression of women in leadership and validate their influence on a CWE. This study aims to build on the existing literature and provide further data that reduce the disparity in information as to the effect of the underutilization of women of color and their influence on creating a CWE.

Contributions

Earlier research proved inconclusive when determining whether female leaders can create a more cohesive work environment as opposed to their male colleagues. During these statistical studies, it was found that there are no distinguishable characteristics across leadership styles and gender that identify a noteworthy difference between male and female executives (Carlson et al., 2006; Powell, 2011). The research

assessed that the relativity of contribution by a particular gender from an exclusive leadership style as it pertains to the communal outcomes in the interest of the organization has created a surge of interest in recent years (Lemoine et al., 2019). As interest continues to increase on the relativity between gender, color and leadership, researchers have used varying research methods to provide initial evidence for the utility of novel leadership styles (e.g., servant leadership, communal leadership, and transformational leadership) that can provide a direct contribution to existing literature (Hoch et al., 2018). Through these studies, researchers are able to combine the results of multiple studies addressing the question of whether there is an association between color, gender, and leadership style in creating a CWE, reporting measurements with an expectation of having some degree of error. This study attempts to fill in the gaps in the literature by determining the female executive's role in creating a CWE based on leadership style and attempting to provide a foundation of influence for future research.

Aim of the Study

The aim of this study is to explore and assess the gender gap in leadership, specifically for lack of women of color in C-suite positions and identify leadership structures that embody human characteristics relative to establishing a gender-neutral administration that fosters a CWE. The study attempts to fill in the gaps in the literature by determining the female executive's role in creating a CWE based on leadership structure and attempts to provide a foundation of influence for future research. This study endeavors to fill in the gaps per the literature by determining the effectiveness of women of color as senior leadership within the workplace and influencing a more

conclusive perception of her effectiveness based on the experience and value brought to the organization.

As society attempts to balance gender roles, it becomes increasingly vital for organizations to follow suit by balancing the availability of opportunities for women to secure C-suite positions. The increase in studies of novel leadership styles (e.g., servant leadership, communal leadership, and transformational leadership) can directly contribute to filling in the gaps in the literature pertaining to identifying gender-neutral management structures and answering the study's research questions regarding gender roles and the effects on organizational culture (Hoch et al., 2018; Tiell et al., 2012). The research will add to the collective knowledge in the identification of the underutilization of women of color within the corporate structure.

As attitudinal inclinations foster increasing gender equality, women and women of color remain underrepresented in C-suite positions. Although the representation of women in leadership roles has grown over the years, women remain underrepresented. With only 41 females currently occupying executive positions within Fortune 500 companies, it is crucial to discern the bias, stereotypes, and potentially discriminatory practices that hinder the progression of women, especially women of color, from elevating to C-suite positions (Hinchliffe, 2021; Valerio, 2022). Even though women are far from having equal representation in leadership roles, the face of C-suite administrators will continue to advance. Women have gained some control, and studies are finding women gaining momentum. This momentum has continued over the past 2 decades, moving from two to 41 executive positions being held in the interest of the women's movement.

Chapter 2 Summary

This study investigates whether there is a direct association between a manager's gender, color, and ascertaining a CWE. Currently, there have been limited studies establishing a correlation between these variables. The research structure is based on statistical data versus predetermined concepts or internal/external bias as it pertains to underutilization of women of color in senior leadership roles. This study endeavors to fill in the gaps in the literature by determining the effectiveness of women leaders, particularly women of color, within the workplace and influencing a more conclusive perception of their roles and their effectiveness in creating a CWE.

The research engages a systematic literature review and uses a phenomenological approach to effectively investigate the level of influence women executives have in manifesting a more CWE. Rodríguez-Sánchez et al. (2017) concluded that gender temperament impacts a visible level of cohesiveness that is clearly identifiable within a team environment. In addition, the leadership and gender structures become direct influences of manifesting a CWE and are vital to building a positive workforce (Powell, 2011). Leadership structure serves as one of the most identifiable variables that has continued to gain momentum in recent years while it enhances the relationship between management and employees (Rodríguez-Sánchez et al., 2017). The organization's servitude leadership structure is viewed as a philosophy rooted in a set of principles focused on the advancement of the lives of its human capital while building a greater associate value and creating a more unique and compassionate universe (van Dierendonck & Nuijten, 2011). Through the leadership structure, the group is led by a diversified administration in which there is a natural desire to serve first, provide an

environment for advancement, and inspire others to practice a level of domestic value and respect (Greenleaf, 1970).

In studying the underutilization of women of color in leadership roles, there are additional benefits in performing research based on corporate culture, an individual's experience, developed behaviors, and the effects these components have in creating a CWE. As diversity and inclusion continue to become fundamental parts of modern business practices, the development of a novel conceptual model such as the Chapman organizational influence on corporate culture, individuals, and cohesiveness (COICIC) assists an organization in understanding how to cultivate a corporate culture that positively affects an individual's behavior and intrapersonal development while influencing leadership styles that create a CWE. The organization's leadership structure can be more effective when it is founded in a gender-neutral state (C. Collins & Stockton, 2018). Therefore, research can be expanded to encompass leadership style, age, level of education, and years of experience providing a more formable assessment. The data of this study will provide a greater foundation for establishing studies that guide company operations in a manner that more effectively capitalizes on the organization's construct and producing positive employee outcomes. Through the inclusion of leadership styles (i.e., servant leadership, transformational, transactional, authoritarian, charismatic, etc.), the sample group can also identify the effectiveness of data in relation to women of color in C-suite position and the influence on a CWE.

Understanding that the number of women of color in leadership falls far below that of their male counterparts, creating promotional opportunities is dependent on the organization's human capital awareness, perceptions, and outlooks (Seo et al., 2017;

Wong, 2019). Gender, CWE, and leadership can establish greater efficiency in the workplace (Eicher-Catt, 2005). The researcher recommends that further research be completed to fill in the gap in the literature and provide effectiveness for the further development and integration of female leaders of color within the organizational units.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

The aim of this phenomenological study was to investigate the association between diversified leadership structures, gender, and color pertaining to creating an organizational culture of inclusion and cohesiveness from an executive woman of color's perspective in the following categories: (a) the limited number of women of color in top leadership roles, (b) the personal experiences and developed characteristics relative to women of color and the use of leadership styles, and (c) the inclusion of women executives in creating a CWE. The researcher used these categories as a grouping tool for the coded segments in an effort to decrease the number of varying pieces of data discovered through the analysis. The investigation used a phenomenological research method to identify the barriers, challenges, and influences for women of color in corporate executive positions. This study explores and possibly uncovers that information, logic, and other qualitative elements relative to the research. The study investigates the participant's lived experiences in a manner that allows the participant to willfully recollect the entirety of a past event or past events that she has unknowingly been half-conscious of through the interview (question and answer) process (Hammersley, 2000). There were many creditable qualitative theories worthy of consideration for this study; for the purpose of this investigation, thematic content analysis, role congruity, and intersectionality theory were used.

The use of a phenomenological study that investigates gender bias from a woman of color's perspective based on either a direct or indirect firsthand experience or observation as an entry-level staff member or C-suite administrator allows the researcher to determine the most applicable research methodology to use within the study. Through

an interpretative phenomenological analysis, the trustworthiness of the research is based on participant experiences and story-telling scenarios (Symeonides & Childs, 2015). Interpretative phenomenological analysis endeavors to relate phenomena to momentous individualized experiences (Gill, 2014). The Gill (2014) study's focal point related to the value of the participants regarding their career journey. The Gill study described the interpretive (hermeneutic) methodology that transcribes the participant's experience into actual written text. The literal interpretation of these experiences has the potential to change based on the number of times the encounter of perceived gender bias or stereotyping has occurred (Chenail, 2012).

Suggested Methodology

As other studies have explored how absolute gender stereotypes are associated with individualized differences (Latu et al., 2011), some studies have supported female managers as effective pioneers within the workforce (Gorman & Kmec, 2007). According to the Biernat (2003) study, attempting to identify an explicit model that can predict the influence of associations for a particular targeted outcome must identify a solid objective with common-rule measures and subjective determinants. Literature has shown that personalized associations influence study objectives and can skew data in a manner that provides inconsistencies (Kiefer & Sekaquaptewa, 2007; Rudman & Kilianski, 2000; White & White, 2006). Therefore, studies must conclude that the participants' contribution to the research must meet stringent standards when comparing males and females within the workplace (Biernat & Manis, 1994). Because an individual may tend to control his or her responses, it is the researchers' responsibility to present a

controlled study with an expectation of potential outside influence or bias contribution factor (Devine et al., 2002).

A paradigmatic and strategic methodology that operates in conjunction with the researcher's epistemology allows the study to convey the research findings in a manner that advances the reader's knowledge and develops further comprehension of a particular theory, concept, or idea (Ravenek & Rudman, 2013). The methodology establishes a systematic approach to the research that provides the reader with an interpretation that clearly accounts for a significant level of knowledge that is defined as a contributor to the subject, concept, or theory under investigation. There is a concurrence between the methodology and the researcher that creates reflexivity and becomes an integral part of the research process. Such paradigms do not position one concept over another, nor is there an explicit direct association to one paradigm or approach. The relevance of the paradigms to the research is characterized as a bridging approach to a quality assessment.

Qualitative Study—Phenomenology

Phenomenology is a philosophical development that studies and provides descriptions of phenomena related to an individual's conscious experience. Edmund Husserl (1859–1938) developed this detailed and systematic analysis to find a definitive framework of one's beliefs of the world as well as his or her existence as a result of a comprehensive system of one's own consciousness (Tassone, 2017). The focal point is to acquire a reasonable and undistorted depiction of the manner that things appear in our deliberate consciousness. Evolving from a philosophical theory of knowledge and reality, phenomenology became a research method that concentrates on consciousness

and the objectivity of an individual's direct experiences. Tassone (2017) described phenomenological research as a focused investigation into lived and learned experiences.

The use of a phenomenological approach is to edify specifics and isolate phenomena based on the participant's perception of the situation or event (Hammersley, 2000). As it pertains to human behavior, this translates into collecting profound data and observations through inductive, qualitative strategies that can include but are not limited to participant interviews, interactive discussions between the participant and researcher, and participant perceptions based on the individual's point of view. Phenomenology centers on the study of an individual's perspective based on organizing unquestionable assumptions and perceptions in a manner that provides an empirical insight into an individual's motivations and actions allowing the researcher to explore a participant's lived experiences (Moustakas, 1994). Therefore, phenomenological research methods are used to further understand humanistic behaviors using a structured observation system based on a straightforward, unencumbered, and authentic concept of the participant's past descriptive experience. The structured observation system used for this research was transcendental phenomenology, which allows for a philosophical approach to this phenomenological qualitative study.

Qualitative Study—Transcendental Phenomenology

A phenomenological study can be conducted using various approaches to organize and analyze data; transcendental phenomenology is one viable method. Transcendental phenomenology is a philosophical approach to qualitative research that was developed by the German philosopher Edmund Husserl in the early 1900s that later paved the way for American psychologist Moustakas to expand on qualitative studies

(Morrison, 1977). Moustakas (1994) maintained that the process by which the data are analyzed could be drawn by using the proper approach to gain a better understanding of an individual's lived experience, and with the discovery of similarities within the descriptive points (theme development) the researcher is able to draw conclusion (Hein & Austin, 2001). The acceptance of establishing an awareness and value of human science research within a phenomenological study requires an interpretative paradigm in that individuals can be better understood through an empirical system in which human reality is central to their past experience and is inseparable from their shaped realities (Moustakas, 1994). Through this systematic approach, Moustakas (1994) rejected the Cartesian or substance dualism, a concept whereby the mind and body are distinct and independent of one another, allowing researchers to establish a clear objective because the study concentrates on the aggregating subjective experiences of the established group of individuals. This methodology can prove advantageous once the researcher identifies a phenomenon in that the participants present a clear description of their experiences. Additionally, this approach relies on the responses provided by the participants to the questions of the how and what has transpired, delivering a personalized participant experience in that data are clearly captured creating a concrete framework for the study that can control research bias and prejudice through the use of epoche by which the researcher refrains from introducing personal judgement. To avoid bias in this study, the institution's guidelines were followed, and a phenomenological research approach was used to establish a structured process. The researcher bracketed the participants' experience and knowledge concerning the challenges and benefits related to the phenomena to allow for an unprejudicial perception of the participants' experiences.

This was inclusive of sharing the researcher's interpretation of the information received from the interviews and the use of triangulation to verify data sources. Epoche is the initial phase of the phenomenological reduction process in which the researcher dismisses personal beliefs and viewpoints of the phenomenon and places emphasis on the participants' perception. Using a transcendental methodology creates a collaboration of the researcher's description of their experience with the phenomenon (epoche) and the recognition of similarities in the participants' statements (thematic expressions) and creates a formulation of themes based on the associated similarities.

The voice of the participants is vital to the study, producing an arena in which the researcher can collect data relative to the established themes. This research method allows for the data to be analyzed through an analytical category lens versus a variable as in a quantitative method. The method facilitates an understanding of the origin of gender differences regarding to leadership, gender bias, and creating changes in organizational culture. Varying from a quantitative approach, the methodology provides the participants a systematic setting in which themes are developed using distinct and well-defined interview questions (Shank, 2009). The researcher elected the design to discover phenomena and attempt to unearth previously overlooked issues in the exploration of the experience and meaning of the experience. Ultimately, the methodology allowed the researcher to develop an understanding of the phenomenon through the lived experiences of the participants. Using this methodology allows for a level of structure that creates an obtainable critical awareness that grants the study an opportunity to make a confident difference. The methodology served as a study tool that assisted in understanding the participants' experiences rather than an informal explanation (Errasti et al., 2018). The

phenomenon is developed through the participant's experience within an indigenous environment allowing for the collection of rich data for the use of a well-vested study so the researcher can better interpret the meaning and context of findings (Errasti et al., 2018; Sousa & Oz, 2014).

Thematic Content Analysis

Thematic content analysis is used to gather descriptive data to evaluate the research problem for the purpose of identifying emerging patterns or themes (Moreno & Quinn, 2020). Through the process of immersion, the data from the study may reveal an increase in the participants' critical consciousness (Domínguez et al., 2020) through the researcher's ability to identify and finalize principal themes and subthemes (Moreno & Quinn, 2020). Through this immersion, the researcher can create an association between the themes that can provide rich data and a logical structure. The thematic content analysis of the participants' experiences is composed of coding, established safeguards for internal validity, and the identification of central themes across participants (Domínguez et al., 2020). This form of analysis allows the researcher to approach the data from a variety of angles versus using a singular methodology.

The empirical research for this study is firmly associated with the use of qualitative methods. In the field of qualitative research, a differentiation can be made among experiential and basic methodologies in that the two include some sort of critique for a standardized leadership structure (V. Braun & Clarke, 2013). Experiential methodologies aim to capture participants' experiences and viewpoints versus the researcher's expectations of preliminary categorical results that see language as an expression of a clear internal understanding of the participant's thoughts, sentiments, and

practices (Reicher, 2000). Basic methodologies challenge what experiential methodologies share for all intents and purposes with standard mainstream critical approaches (V. Braun & Clarke, 2013). Through thematic content analysis, the study connects the data using role congruity and intersectionality theories. Role congruity theory allows for a group assessment based on the group's view of its social responsibility (Lopez & Ensari, 2014).

Role Congruity Theory

Role congruity theory proposes that a group of individuals can be confidently assessed when their attributes maintain a close association with the group's social responsibilities (Lopez & Ensari, 2014). The theory functions on the fundamental idea that the human brain has a unique endeavor to create harmony through a consistent thought process of logical linkage between concepts. This theory expounds on the gender bias and stereotypes associated with leadership structures and the importance of instituting organizational solutions that shape the organizational culture.

Within a qualitative research method, role congruity provides an explanation in the context of gender involvement in an administrative and decision-making role (Tiell & Dixon, 2008). In general, the theory suggests that administrative responsibilities are stereotypically isolated along gender-ascribed lines whereby female executives are deemed to be more effective at administering activities in a communal manner than their male counterparts. Ideally, role congruity theory provides evidence that can change gender bias, stereotypes, and management practicing norms in a manner that opens the door for effective and influential leadership performance across genders. Role congruity theory is an evidentiary theory in that norms and stereotypical practices can be changed

through direct influence. In addition to role congruity theory, intersectionality theory provides a conceptualized approach to the influences of a diverse set of demographics (e.g., race, class, and gender) that intersect between personal attributes and experiences (Liu, 2019).

Intersectionality Theory

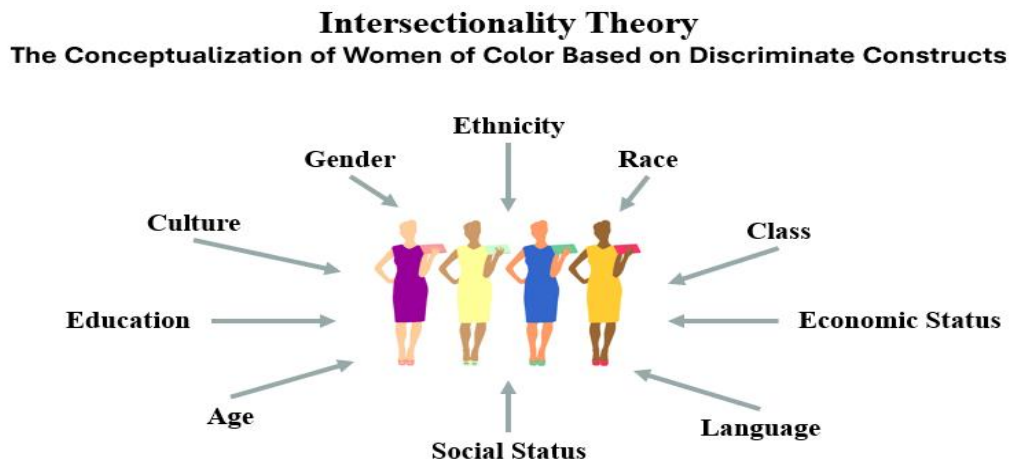
Intersectionality theory provides a structured approach for conceptualizing an individual, group of individuals, or social concerns that are influenced by various demographics such as race, class, or gender (Liu, 2019). The theory accounts for the process by which an individual interconnects their personal characteristics and experiences in an effort to comprehend the intricacy of biases the individual has encountered. Ultimately, intersectionality theory establishes that individuals are regularly impeded by multiple sources of oppression because the identity markers do not exist autonomously of one another but collectively, creating a multifaceted convergence of oppression. For women of color, the sources of subjugation (e.g., ethnicity, race, gender, culture, class, economic status, etc.) create an extraordinary involvement of a communal cultivation of bias and experiences that not only hinder opportunities for advancement but also influence individual behaviors (see Figure 1).

The integration of intersectionality theory in research provides a parallel investigation between leadership and gender that outlines the basic principles in the approach to focus on a descriptive of lived experiences and social norms. This approach is defined by the manner in which multiple systems are categorized and the method by which they intersect with one another while creating a dynamic that has a mutually fundamental methodology on individual and societal perspectives (Levon, 2015; Moradi

et al., 2020). The research data have found that there are essential principles that identify an intersectional approach that concentrates on individual lived experiences and social practices (Levon, 2015). The methodology also requires a review of the manner by which various frameworks of social categorization (e.g., gender, color, economic status, etc.) intersect through commonality and uniqueness.

Figure 1

The Conceptualization of Women of Color Based on Discriminate Constructs



Note. The identifiable discriminate constructs (e.g., gender, age, education, etc.) for women of color create a unique experience in that the collective (the sum of all parts) intersect and develop a conceptualized circle of bias. Adapted from “Integrating Intersectionality in Language, Gender, and Sexuality Research,” by E. Levon, 2015, *Language & Linguistics Compass*, 9(7), pp. 295–308 (<https://doi.org/10.1111/lnc3.12147>); “Mapping the Travels of Intersectionality Scholarship: A Citation Network Analysis,” by B. Moradi, M. C. Parent, A. S. Weis, S. Ouch, & K. L. Broad, 2020, *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, 44(2), pp. 151–169 (<https://doi.org/10.1177/0361684320902408>).

Scholars incorporate the intersectionality theory to describe the compounding effect of being a part of more than one socially disadvantaged group (e.g., gender and racial/ethnic minority; Rodriguez et al., 2016). Despite the diversified collective of assumptions, the use of intersectionality as it pertains to the study of disparity, individuality, and authoritative relations in recent history emphasizes the inseparability of

social differences (e.g., race, gender, class, ethnicity, sexuality, and nationality, etc.) and the multiple dimensions of authoritative influences (S. Cho et al., 2013).

For this study, the use of intersectionality theory as a qualitative research catalyst allowed for a more intentional type of an approach focused on understanding the understudied area of the complexity of human behavior (Charmaz, 2014).

Intersectionality theory creates a level of recognition in that the relationship between researcher and participant is central to the study, establishing a multilayer of influences of social interactions (Kassam et al., 2020). This conceptual model draws upon the interpretation of intersectionality as a social theory that is reflective of the interaction of constructs associated with race, class, and gender as interreliant systems of authority and the organizational influences on culture, the individuals, and cohesiveness (P. Collins, 2019).

Conceptual Model

A conceptual model is a systematic representation of the concepts that guide the audience in understanding the subject matter (P. Collins, 2019). As diversity and inclusion continue to become fundamental parts of modern business practices, the development of a novel conceptual model assists an organization in understanding how to cultivate a corporate culture that positively affects an individual's behavior and intrapersonal development while influencing leadership styles that create a CWE. This is all reflective of the organization building a foundation that is inclusive of establishing a corporate culture that identifies areas of underutilization based on gender and color and how the individuals' experiences influence their leadership style that is conducive to creating a more cohesive work environment.

This study utilized the conceptual model of COICIC to describe the manner by which the organizational influence for women of color is driven through thematic content analysis (see Figure 2). The primary pathway functions through a linear pathway that transitions from individual behaviors to intrapersonal development, corporate culture, and environmental influence to create a CWE. Although the primary pathway is linear, there are feedback loops between relationships such as individual behavior and interpersonal development and environmental influence and cohesiveness. These feedback loops are also influencers on the primary pathway creating relationships that are through role congruity theory and intersectionality theory. Within this COICIC model, role congruity theory proposes that a group of individuals can be confidently assessed when its attributes maintain a close association with the group's social responsibilities (Lopez & Ensari, 2014). In turn, the intersectionality theory provides a structured approach for conceptualizing an individual, group of individuals, or social concerns that are influenced by various demographics such as race, class, and gender (Liu, 2019). Collectively, the COICIC model identifies the pathways that create a corporate culture in which the directionality of influence is both linear and interconnected, allowing the organization to identify influential patterns that can hinder or promote cohesiveness.

Research Questions

The research questions are an integral part of the qualitative phenomenological study process and require a phenomenological approach that relies on both the research and philosophy of an individual's experiences (Ravitch & Carl, 2016).

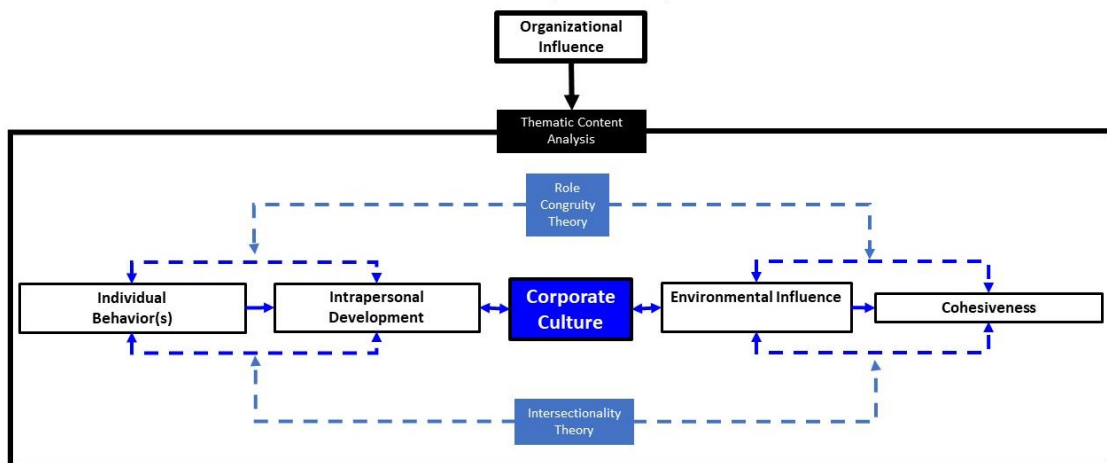
Phenomenological research can expand the researcher's comprehension of a complex phenomenon as it pertains to the learning, behavior, and communication characteristics

connected to the study (Neubauer et al., 2019). The success of the study is dependent upon the understanding of the value of a phenomenological approach. Therefore, the researcher is allowed to describe the shared phenomenon of the participants and construct a research process that aligns with the principles of the methodology and the axiom of the philosophical foundation. Because the participants' perspective has a direct influence on the phenomenon, established behaviors, and what is identified as valuable within a transcendental descriptive phenomenological study (Sheehan, 2014), these elements are also essential to the researcher's understanding their emergence (Moustakas, 1994).

Figure 2

Chapman Organizational Influence on Corporate Culture, Individuals, and Cohesiveness for Women of Color

The Chapman Organizational Influence on Corporate Culture, Individuals, and Cohesiveness (COICIC) Model



Note. The organizational influence for women of color is driven through thematic content analysis with a primary linear pathway that is inclusive of feedback loops that create interconnected relationships.

Research Design

The use of a phenomenological research method for this study allowed the researcher to elicit a descriptive of the phenomenon based on the participants' emotions, thoughts, and experiences through the evaluation of the individual's subjective responses (Creswell, 2013). A phenomenological study is a systematic approach used to focus on explicit individuals or situations in that the data comprise verbal versus numerical information (Maxwell, 2013). A phenomenological study allows for the identification of centralized themes without compromising the complexity and content of the investigation. Within the phenomenological study, the researcher is an active instrument who serves as a facilitator of the data collection in contrast to a collection through inventories, questionnaires, and applications as in quantitative research (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003). The epitome of this methodology allows for comprehensive observation of the subject matter and places emphasis on the researcher's responsibility to collect and unbiasedly interpret the study's participant experiences from a novice position (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). To avoid bias in the study, the institutional guidelines were followed, and a phenomenological research approach was used to establish a structured process. The researcher bracketed the participants' experience and knowledge concerning the challenges and benefits related to the phenomena to allow for an unprejudicial perception of the participants' experiences. This is inclusive of sharing the researcher's interpretation of the information received from the interviews with the participants for validity and the use of triangulation to verify data sources.

Essence of the Study

The structure of this study is a phenomenological design that involved a formal interview process using a semistructured procedure allowing for each participant and researcher to build mutual trust so that the problem might be explored to discern the essence of the study. The essence of the experiences shared between the participants within the study can create a ripple effect in that there is an intersectionality between individual behavior, intrapersonal development, environmental influence, cohesiveness, and corporate culture. This study employed research and valuation as systematic methodologies in the collection, analyzation, and interpretation of data to address the significance of the study and to understand the correlation between the human experience and corporate advancement for women of color (Bonner, 2018). Peterson and Skolits (2019) found that a ripple effect can intentionally or unintentionally reveal the impact of the participants' experience in a manner that encourages further discussion and engagement that can enrich and deepen the results of the study. The use of transcendental phenomenology constructs the relationship between human experiences, individual behaviors, and collective cohesiveness that might address the principal research question of this study: "How does gender and color bias directly affect the promotional opportunities available for women of color in executive positions?" The principal question for this study addressed Moustakas (1994) recommendations to ask (a) what were the experiences and (b) what was the context or situation of the experience?

Population and Participant Selection Logic

This study used a snowball sampling process in which the identified participants are women of color in C-suite positions who reside within the Los Angeles, California region. Snowball sampling occurs when the study participants assist in the recruitment of additional participants from known acquaintances (Roy et al., 2015). The sample group validates the study by identifying the gaps in literature in depicting the beliefs, emotions, and experiences of women of color in providing explicit communal modifications in C-suite corporate structure. The researcher recruited participants from social media applications (e.g., LinkedIn, Instagram, Yahoo Group, and other appropriate sources).

The researcher's sampling strategy was to target women of color who hold or have held senior-level executive positions (e.g., director, senior manager, vice president, CEO, etc.) with a minimum of 5 years of service (the average of the 41 Fortune 500 women CEOs from 2010 to 2021) using semistructured, open-ended interview questions. The intended sample size was a minimum of 10 participants or until saturation occurred at a maximum of 20 individuals. The selected sample size (10 to 20 participants) was based on the standardized numerical content that is identifiable in qualitative studies to achieve saturation, the point at which responses become redundant or recurring themes emerge from each research question (Cleary et al., 2014). The selection of a sustainable sample size minimizes the potential of deteriorating the study's progression by wasting time by securing data from a larger sample that provides minimal to nonexistent change in the results. The minimum of 10 participants selected (or until saturation was achieved) allowed for a creditable investigation. This study used a snowball sampling technique to

address possible limitations in reaching the intended sample size or saturation because of sampling a hard-to-reach population (e.g., women of color in C-suite positions).

The use of snowball sampling provided the best process to secure the objectives of this qualitative study. The researcher ensured that there were clear and well-defined participant criteria to maintain the integrity of the study and ensure the accuracy of the data collection process that included the following: must be a woman of color, must be a U.S. citizen, must be fluent in English, must be a minimum age of 40 years old, and must have a minimum of 5 years in an executive management position. The researcher estimated a 60- to 90-min interview process to secure the participant's responses. In-person contact was limited because of the current universal health conditions associated with the COVID-19 pandemic; thus, the researcher used alternative means of visual communication/video conferencing options (e.g., Zoom, Microsoft Teams, WebEx, etc.) as consented by the participants. The collection process required gathering ample data that provided a well-structured balance between the sample size and sampling strategy. As the data were collected, a predetermined systematic process was vital to code, sort, and organize the information.

Ethical Considerations

Study participants were well-versed on the purpose of this phenomenological study. A copy of the informed consent form was executed, agreed to, and signed by the participants before participating in the study (see Appendix). The difference between anonymous and confidential was visible and articulated on the informed consent form to ensure that participants understood that the study was confidential but not anonymous. Because only anonymous studies can assure complete confidentiality of participants'

identity and the content of their comments, participants were cognizant of the potential risks of being identified. Participants were recruited on a voluntary basis and were informed that they were free to leave the interview at any time, and withdrawal from the study would have no adverse ramifications. The participants were recruited using emails, letters, and in-person scripts. Study risks were assessed to be minimal. However, various techniques were employed to ensure the protection and confidentiality of the participants. All identifiable information was removed from the interview transcripts, and a numerical code was assigned to every interview. Only one file existed that connects the participants' identity with the numerical codes assigned. That file was kept securely in a password protected spreadsheet on the researcher's password-protected computer. For the purpose of this research all records were maintained for a minimum of 3 years after the research was completed and the study was officially closed. After the 3-year maintenance period, all records were destroyed accordingly.

Instrumentation

This phenomenological study used computer software programs NVivo 10 and Microsoft Excel (Office 365) to magnify the effectiveness of the research finding, analysis, and sorting of textual data while also managing and discarding immaterial information. NVivo 10 and Microsoft Excel allowed the researcher to manage and analyze the participant interview information through various formats. NVivo 10 enhanced the quality of the analysis and provided a level of trust and credit as it draws from the depth and scope of the data, hence generating a rich study. The use of the NVivo 10 software program to code, sort, and organize data allowed this study to follow a systematic analytical process to

- List and create introductory categories.
- Consolidate and merge themes.
- Cluster significant statements.
- Categorize important testimonials according to their themes.
- Create textual descriptions.
- Create structural descriptions.
- Merge textured-structured and synthesize descriptions.

Data Collection

The research methodology was a qualitative phenomenological study with a data collection approach of semistructured interviews and member checking. This system of data collection serves as a validity component that can reduce the threat of questions regarding the legitimacy of the study (Motulsky, 2021) and contribute to contemporary discussions of balancing rigor with the elasticity and diversity of a qualitative methodology (Levitt et al., 2017). For the purpose of this study, the data collection process was fundamental to analyzing the content and meaning of the data pertaining to the relevance to the study's framework, research questions, and concentration. The data collection process included

1. Engage in the epoche process as a way of creating an atmosphere and rapport for conducting the interview.
2. Bracket the question.
3. Conduct the qualitative research interview to obtain descriptions of the experience. Consider
 - a. Informal interviewing.

- b. Open-ended questions.
- c. Topical guided interviews.

Data Analysis

Data analysis is a significant part of the research process. There are numerous ways of conducting qualitative research, all of which are structured to achieve the same objectives: to clearly comprehend the collected data and to sort the data into groups or classifications for interpretation. Data analysis sorts through the collected information establishing common themes of similarities and contrasts to capture elements of the data that are applicable to the research question while allowing the researcher to explore emerging concepts and making the appropriate adjustments for the most effect and thorough investigative review (Iheduru-Anderson et al., 2022). Women of color have suffered the consequences of operational injustices and obstacles to achieving C-suite positions in modern day corporations (Whitfield-Harris et al., 2017). This qualitative phenomenological study offered women of color in executive positions the opportunity to share their lived experiences in a manner that challenges existing governing narratives that form corporate policies and practices.

Data Coding, Sorting, and Organization—NVivo 10 Technology

As themes emerge from participant interviews, the researcher is able to categorize the data through a process of systematic coding, sorting, and organizing of the descriptors into significant clusters (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The coding process begins once the data are organized and transcribed. Developing manageable classifications and coding structures are part of the initial phases in the analysis of transcribed data. Coding for this qualitative study was developed simultaneously with the interview process to assist the

researcher in remaining receptive to the participants' perceptions. Creswell and Poth (2018) found that the use of a predetermined coding system imposes restrictions and limits the full development of the study. Therefore, by allowing the codes to emerge within a natural setting, the researcher is able to detect commonly used participant verbiage to determine code names or establish labels. Through the use of computer software programs such as NVivo 10, the researcher is able to magnify the effectiveness of the research findings, analysis, and sorting of textual data while also managing and discarding immaterial information. The use of the NVivo 10 software program to code, sort, and organize data allowed this qualitative phenomenological study to follow the analytical process recommended by Moustakas (1994) to (a) list and create introductory categories, (b) decrease and eliminate themes, (c) cluster significant statements, (d) categorize important testimonials according to their themes, (e) create textual descriptions, (f) create structural descriptions, and (g) merge textured-structured and synthesize descriptions.

Data coding, sorting, and organization through the use of NVivo can produce meaningful results if managed properly (Dhakal, 2022). The use of NVivo 10 as a data collection tool for this study allowed the researcher to manage and analyze the participant interview information through various formats. Dhakal (2022) maintained that using NVivo or any computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software has the ability to enhance the quality of the analysis and supports a level of trust and credibility as it draws from the depth and scope of the data, and allowed the researcher to approach the data collection, coding, sorting, and organization to generate an in-depth and rich study.

Rigor, Trustworthiness, and Validity

Qualitative research uses rigor to establish trust and confidence in the results of a research study. It allows the researcher to establish consistency in the methods used over time (Errasti et al., 2018). It also provides an accurate representation of the population studied. Errasti et al. (2018) proposed that researchers use at least two strategies to ensure the validity and reliability in a qualitative analysis. For the purpose of this study, the researcher shared the interpretation of the information received from the interviews with the participants and used method triangulation to verify data sources. Hence, this study established rigor through selecting the appropriate method and design that provided detailed information that allow the reader to understand the researcher's election of the study's design, sampling, data collection, and analysis. Therefore, the reader has the ability to make the appropriate assessments regarding the transferability of the findings from one context to another (Tarnoki & Puentes, 2019).

In addition to rigor, trustworthiness is also essential to the study. Trustworthiness refers to the established criteria for judging the quality and usefulness of qualitative research studies (Tarnoki & Puentes, 2019). Trustworthiness is composed of a criterion for a systematically proficient and ethical practice used by the researcher. Through the use of member checks and method triangulation, the researcher is able to bring credibility to the research findings. Hence, the researcher continually ensured that after transcribing each interview, the data were shared with the participant for the review of accuracy and if necessary, further update or provide clarification. The aim of a qualitative study is to validate the argument that the research findings are significance and worth paying attention to (Iheduru-Anderson et al., 2022). The researcher was dutiful in ensuring

appropriate time was vested in the collection, processing, and analysis of the data collection to maintain credibility.

Triangulation

Triangulation refers to the use of numerous strategies or data sources in qualitative research to foster a thorough comprehension of phenomena (Abdalla et al., 2018). Triangulation is also used as a qualitative research method that assesses validity by merging information from various sources. The main strategy of triangulation is group classification for the purpose of a thorough evaluation of the qualitative study. Abdalla et al. (2018) identified four categories of triangulation: (a) method triangulation, (b) investigator triangulation, (c) theory triangulation, and (d) data source triangulation. These categories are defined as follows:

- Method triangulation is the use of multiple qualitative procedures to evaluate the study through the use of interviews, observations, document analysis, or any other feasible methods to assess potential changes that may draw similar conclusions that establish validity (Abdalla et al., 2018).
- Investigator triangulation is the use of multiple investigators within a related field who collaborate in the research of a particular study utilizing the same qualitative method (interview, observation, case study, or focus groups) in an effort to either arrive at the same conclusion to establish validity (Abdalla et al., 2018).
- Theory triangulation is the use of multiple professional perspectives to interpret a single set of data/information in an effort to allow for varying viewpoints to be used to interpret and draw similar conclusions in an effort to establish validity (Abdalla et al., 2018).

- Data triangulation is the use of different data sources in an effort to categorize and evaluate each group within the study (Abdalla et al., 2018).

Member Checking

Member checking is known as a validity or trustworthiness check that has become a prerequisite for rigorous qualitative research (Motulsky, 2021). As part of the research design, member checking has been viewed by editors, peer analysts, dissertation committees, institutional review boards, and research management as a validity component that can reduce the threat of questions regarding the legitimacy of the study. Member checking allows for the solicitation of participant feedback as it pertains to the researcher's interpretation of the data and is needed to document the rigor of the qualitative research. Member checking contributes to contemporary discussions of balancing rigor with the elasticity and diversity of a qualitative methodology (Levitt et al., 2017). Levitt et al. (2017) identified two approaches to member checking: (a) transcript review and (b) theme summary reports. Transcript review allows the participant to assess the validity of the researcher's interpretation of the data collected and correct, delete, edit, or add to the transcript. Theme summary reports provide an analysis of the findings to the participants across cases or a summary draft of the entire report. Each approach allows for further dialogue between the participants and researcher that bolsters the credibility of the research (Chase, 2017). The role of the researcher is pertinent to establishing trust between themselves and the participants as well as in the validation of the research.

Role of the Researcher

The researcher is a pivotal part of the qualitative phenomenological study as they function as a data collection instrument (Erlingsson & Brysiewicz, 2013). It is aphoristic that the researcher's main responsibility is to endeavor to do no harm and address the auxiliary needs of the individuals who elect to participate in the study (Brownsword, 2007). In addition, as the researcher, one must maintain the integrity of the study, eliminating personal bias to protect the data from an unjustified personal influence of intrinsic experiences. The channels used to mitigate and maintain the integrity of the study involves an approach that strengthens the validity of the data and assists in identifying relationships with the research design (Morse, 2015).

Limitations

Phenomenological research has the ability to enhance the understanding of the significances associated with individuals or a group of individuals while promoting the engagement of further studies that may develop new theories (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Limitations to the research can result from complexities found in the analysis and interpretation of the data that may lower validity and reliability as well as require additional time and resources for further data collection (Spiers et al., 2018). For the purpose of this study, there were specific features of diversity (e.g., gender, color, age, level of education, etc.) used in the collection of data. All diversity variables were not captured within this study, hence presenting a gap for future research to explain those variables not identified or covered in the study. The limitations to this research could result from the data being strongly associated with a specific theory that may produce results predictability and research bias in anticipated data. Limitations could become

identifiable through the research design and elements discovered by the researcher that are outside of the study's control and could directly influence the findings. Potential limitations to the study include the following:

- the researcher's personal bias,
- the inability to reach the intended sample size or saturation,
- the inability to interview participants in person may limit the participant's comfort level,
- complexities in the analysis and interpretation,
- lower validity and reliability,
- additional time and resources, and
- all diversity variables were not captured within this study.

The use of alternative interview methods (e.g., Zoom, Microsoft Teams, surveys, etc.) also limits the researcher's ability to view and assess the participant's body language. Although the interview questions were open-ended, the participant may not have been able to express all potential experienced bias due to how the question was asked or time restrictions. This may limit the opportunity for the researcher to identify additional themes.

The researcher established safeguards against personalized bias in an effort to protect the data from an unjustified personal influence of intrinsic experiences with gender stereotypes. The channels used to mitigate this limitation and maintain the integrity of the study involve a continued peer review of the interview process and the subsequent assessment of the results by a combination of peer and committee members.

This approach strengthened the validity of the data and assisted in identifying relationships between gender, color, and leadership of the research design (Morse, 2015).

Delimitations

Delimitations refer to the boundaries of the research study based on the researcher's decision of what to include and what to exclude. Delimitations narrow the study to make it more manageable and relevant to what the study is attempting to investigate. The research design was specifically limited to a population of women of color in executive positions in Los Angeles, California. The aim of the study was to interview only women of color volunteers who hold or have held senior leadership positions (e.g., senior leadership, corporate executives, C-suite administrators, board of directors, human resources, etc.). These women were able to provide a narrative based on individual experiences from a subordinate to executive perspective and their attempts to break through the glass ceiling. The population was delimited because of program intervention for a controlled demographic sampling. However, age was a controlled variable because it accounts for a participant's characteristics within the study. The following delimitations were included in the study:

- woman of color
- U.S. citizen and fluent in English
- minimum age of 40 years old, and
- minimum of 5 years' experience in an executive management position.

Chapter 3 Summary

The purpose of this chapter was to answer the following research questions:

1. How does gender bias define the senior leadership structure?

2. How does organizational culture affect the female executive of color leadership style?
3. How does a female executive of color leadership style affect organizational performance?
4. How does the female executive of color leadership style produce a CWE?

The use of a phenomenological method was applied to answer the research questions using various variable testing (interview questions) that incorporated identifiable influences (themes) that fell within the scope of the study (Price & Van Vugt, 2014). Chapter 3 provided the reasoning for the use of the methodology, population, data collection, analysis, and instrumentation used to answer the research questions. This study was designed to identify the gender and color gaps in executive positions pertaining to women of color in the following categories: (a) the limited number of women of color in top leadership roles, (b) the personal experiences and developed characteristics relative to women of color and the use of leadership styles, and (c) the inclusion of women executives in creating a CWE. The investigation used a phenomenological research method to identify the barriers, challenges, and influences for women of color in corporate executive positions. Through this methodology, the study provided information, logic, and other qualitative elements relative to the research design. The study investigated the participants' lived experiences using qualitative research in a manner that allows the participant to willfully recollect the entirety of past events that she has unknowingly been half-conscious of it (Hammersley, 2000).

CHAPTER 4: RESEARCH, DATA COLLECTION, AND FINDINGS

The aim of this phenomenological study was to investigate the association between diversified leadership structures, gender, and color (race/ethnicity) pertaining to creating an organizational culture of inclusion and cohesiveness from an executive woman of color's perspective in the following categories: (a) the limited number of women of color in top leadership roles, (b) the personal experiences and developed characteristics relative to women of color and the use of leadership styles, and (c) the inclusion of women executives in creating a CWE. This chapter provides the results from the participant interviews pertaining to the aim of answering the principal research question of the study: "How does gender and color bias directly affect the promotional opportunities available for women of color in executive positions?" The principal question for this study addressed Moustakas' 1994 recommendations to ask what were the experiences and what was the context or situation of the experience? This study analyzed the lived experiences of women of color in both current and past executive leadership roles, which allowed the researcher to identify the three main themes as defined in Table 4: explicit bias (gender and race), marginalization, and hyper-invisibility.

Research Methods and Data Collection Procedures

This investigation used a phenomenological research method to identify the barriers, challenges, and influences for women of color in corporate executive positions. Through this methodology, the study provided information, logic, and other qualitative elements relative to the research design. The study investigated the participants' lived experiences using qualitative research in a manner that allowed the participant to

Table 4*Key Theme Definitions*

Theme	Definition
Explicit bias	Explicit bias is a conscious prejudice and behavior an individual exhibits toward certain groups (Triana et al., 2019).
Marginalization	Marginalization is the condition or process that forestalls an individual or group of individuals from complete participation in society socially, economically, or politically. (England et al., 2020).
Hyper-invisibility	Hyper-invisibility is the concept that an individual can stand out within a group; however, the individual can also be treated as nonexistent in that their presence, views, contributions, or knowledge are insignificant (Humphrey, 2017).

willfully recollect the entirety of past events that she has unknowingly been half-conscious of (Hammersley, 2000). This study used computer software programs NVivo 10 and Microsoft Excel (Office 365) to magnify the effectiveness of the research finding, analysis, and sorting of textual data while also managing and discarding immaterial information. NVivo 10 and Microsoft Excel allowed the researcher to manage and analyze the participant interview information using various formats. NVivo 10 assisted in augmenting the quality of the analysis and provided a level of trust and credibility because it drew from the depth and scope of the data, hence generating a rich study. The use of the NVivo 10 software program to code, sort, and organize data allowed this qualitative phenomenological study to follow a systematic analytical process to

- list and create introductory categories,
- decrease and eliminate themes,
- cluster significant statements,
- categorize important testimonials according to their themes,
- create textual descriptions,

- create structural descriptions, and
- merge textured-structured and synthesize descriptions.

Data Collection

The collection process required gathering ample data to provide a well-structured balance between the sample size and sampling strategy. As the data were collected, a predetermined systematic process was vital to code, sort, and organize the information. For the purpose of this phenomenological qualitative study, the data collection methodology used a direct person-to-person online interview technology (Zoom). The online technology (Zoom) allowed for direct access to the participants despite locality within the United States, reducing time constraints and travel expenses (e.g., gas, airline tickets, hotels, car rentals, meals, etc.). The researcher confirmed that the participants had access to the internet and if necessary were able to download the Zoom application to their cellular device (e.g., cell phone, tablet, etc.) to reduce potential delays. In the case that the participant needed alternative interview options, the researcher would recommend online surveys (Google Docs) to be completed and submitted to the researcher with a follow-up phone interview to review, confirm, and update the responses. The researcher needed to record and transcribe all participant responses that were delivered via email or writing for participant review and accuracy confirmation. In anticipation of potential issues (e.g., internet connectivity, lack of access to, knowledge of, or familiarity with, or refusal to use technology, etc.), the researcher created an action plan (potential issues), as a guide to minimize or eliminate the potential risks (researcher response) by providing resolution options (see Table 5).

Table 5*List of Potential Interview Issues and Researcher Responses*

Potential issue	Researcher response
Screen freezing or audio failure during interview.	Restart application by both participant and researcher. If issue persists, walk through potential resolution options. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use alternative online application (Skype, Microsoft Teams, WebEx, etc.). • Recommend a face-to-face if participant is located in California. • Recommend the completion of an online survey (Google Docs) and telephone interview. • Reschedule interview.
Participant uses other online application (Hangouts, Skype, etc.).	Researcher to download technology.
Participant does not use any form of visual communication (Zoom, Microsoft Teams, Skype, etc.).	Researcher to make recommendations of potential cost-free options and provide assistance in downloading and utilization of the technology.
Participant does not use any form of visual communication (Zoom, Microsoft Teams, Skype, etc.) and refuses or is unwilling to download.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recommend a face-to-face if participant is located in California. • Recommend a face-to-face if participant is located in California. • Recommend the completion of an online survey (Google Docs) and telephone interview.

Note. Potential participant interview issues and research responses.

Presentation and Analysis of Data

This study collected data from a target population of nine women of color who are currently holding or have previously served in C-suite positions (e.g., director, senior manager, vice president, CEO, etc.) with a minimum of 5 years of service. The researcher used snowball sampling that provided the best process to secure the objectives of this qualitative phenomenological study. The researcher ensured that there were clear and well-defined participant criteria to maintain the integrity of the study and ensure the

accuracy of the data collection process. The researcher performed 675 min (11 hr and 25 min) of participant interviews.

The researcher constructed a data analysis plan with a research design that produced an environment whereby the participant was comfortable and open to discussing her lived experiences for the purpose of data collection. Using a composite structural description as an analysis process allowed this phenomenological study to employ imaginative variation. The use of imaginative variation in conjunction with composite textual description of each research participant allowed the researcher to represent the group as a whole based on communal lived experiences. Using a composite structural description provides a systematic approach to understanding how the participants as a collective acknowledge what was experienced (Moustakas, 1994). From this composite structural description, three key themes evolved: explicit bias (gender and race), marginalization, and hyper-invisibility.

Participant Demographics

With only 41 females leading Fortune 500 companies in 2021, two of which are women of color, there remains an underutilization of women in executive positions and presenting an underutilization of one of the organization's most valued human capital resources (Hinchliffe, 2021; Valerio, 2022). This study collected data from nine women of color who are currently holding or have previously served in C-suite positions (e.g., director, senior manager, vice president, CEO, etc.) with a minimum of 5 years of service. Participation requirements consisted of the following: (a) must be a woman of color, (b) must be a U.S. citizen, (c) must be fluent in English, (d) must be a minimum age of 40 years old, and (e) must have a minimum of 5 years in an executive management

position. Each participant works and lives within various regions of the United States—California, Hawaii, Mississippi, Nevada, and Puerto Rico (see Table 6) because the original target area (Los Angeles, California metropolitan area) provided a limited eligible population. Although each participant’s employment industry, age, and years of service as executives varied, there was a commonality in their lived experiences. The participants provided diverse interpretations and perceptions regarding organizational culture and the challenges encountered as women of color in executive roles. In addition, the participants provided recommendations for future women of color who desire to enter into C-suite positions.

Participant Privacy, Confidentiality, and Data Protection

Because only anonymous studies can assure complete confidentiality of participants’ identity and the content of their comments, participants were made cognizant of the potential risks of being identified. Participants were recruited on a voluntary basis and were informed that they were free to leave the interview at any time, and withdrawal from the study would have no adverse ramifications. Study risks were assessed to be minimal. However, various techniques were employed to ensure the protection and confidentiality of the participants. All identifiable information was removed from the interview transcripts, and numerical codes were assigned to every participant. The researcher used de-identification to separate the participants’ personal information from the collected data (e.g., P1, P2, P3, etc.). Only one file exists that connects the participants’ identity with the numerical codes assigned. That file was kept securely in a password-protected spreadsheet on the researcher’s password-protected computer. For the purpose of this research, all records were maintained for a minimum

of 3 years after the research was completed and the study was officially closed with the California Baptist University Internal Review Board. After the 3-year maintenance period, all records were destroyed accordingly.

Table 6

Participant Demographic Data

Participant (P) ID	Age	Location (state)	Ethnicity/race	Position title	Years of experience	Education
P1	40	Puerto Rico	Puerto Rican	Naval division commander	12	Bachelor's degree
P2	61	California	Hispanic	Vice president of financial Operations	15	High school diploma
P3	65	Hawaii	Pacific Islander	Chief executive officer	24	Bachelor's degree
P4	50	Nevada	African American	Vice president of human resources	11	High school diploma
P5	69	Mississippi	African American	Bureau director (retired)	20	Master's degree
P6	54	California	Ghanaian	Vice president of financial services	10	Bachelor's degree
P7	59	California	African American	Chief assistant director of nursing	23	Master's degree
P8	42	California	African American	Chief healthcare administrator	17	Doctoral degree
P9	59	California	African American	Vice president of human resources	8	Master's degree

Note. P = Participant; participants included nine women of color, ages 40-65 years, residing in the United States with more than 5 years of executive experience.

Participant Interviews

The participant interviews were conducted using both telephone and Zoom (a visual communication/video conferencing methods). In-person contact was limited

because of the current universal health conditions associated with the global COVID-19 pandemic and the participants' comfort level. Informed consent was obtained prior to the start of participation in the study. The consent form was emailed with specific instructions prior to the first meeting, allowing the participant ample time to read and review the document and have any questions or concerns addressed prior to securing a signature and date. Upon the expressed consent to participate, the individual was issued a participant identification number (e.g., P1, P2, P3, etc.) to conceal the participant's identity and maintain confidentiality. At the initial interview, the informed consent form was reviewed, read aloud, and an inquiry was made by the researcher to ensure the participant understood the information contained therein. This level of communication allowed the researcher to address any additional participant questions or concerns. A signed copy was provided to the participants for their records. The consent form was maintained in a secure locked file cabinet by the researcher for 3 years from the date of the studies completion after which time all forms were destroyed.

Interview Process

The researcher opened the interview with demographic questions securing the following information: (a) name and contact information, (b) location, (c) age, (d) identified ethnicity/race, (e) position title, (f) years of experience, and (g) level of education. The researcher used semistructured, open-ended interview questions to allow for a two-way communication system that provided opportunities for more in-depth information. The researcher used NVivo 10 and Microsoft Excel (Office 365) as a data collection tools for this qualitative phenomenological study. NVivo 10 allowed the researcher to manage and analyze the participant interview information through various

formats. NVivo 10 enhanced the quality of the analysis and provided a level of trust and credibility because it drew from the depth and scope of the data generating a rich study.

The purpose of the investigation was to identify the biases (e.g., gender and color) that contribute to the underutilization of woman of color in executive positions. The investigation found three relative themes (explicit bias, marginalization, and hyper-invisibility) that are directly associated with the participants' lived experience that motivated the individuals to excel in a male-dominated environment. Through this investigation, the researcher was able to analyze a constructive pattern that identified dynamics that can be replicated by other women as well as studied further to create corporate policies that promote greater inclusion and diversity within top executive positions and Fortune 500 companies.

Interview Questions

The principal research question as it pertained to this study was "How does gender and color bias directly affect the promotional opportunities available for women of color in executive positions?" To further the results of the study, the participant interview questions were developed to examine this phenomenon:

1. Explain how your past experiences have been contributing motivators in striving for and securing your executive (C-suite) position.
2. Explain any professional bias you have experienced that you believe hindered, decelerated, and/or directly affected your progression in securing your executive (C-suite) position.
 - 2a. Explain the actions you took to address the bias and the outcome(s) as it pertains to the action(s).

- 2b. Explain how this experience shaped, altered, and/or affected your behavior toward the organization, leadership, and work environment.
3. Explain how your personal and professional characteristics have been influenced by the organizational culture practices.
 - 3a. Explain how this culture has influenced and shaped your leadership style.
4. Explain how women of color in C-suite positions directly or indirectly affect organizational value (e.g., corporate culture, cohesiveness, organizational and financial performance, etc.).
5. Describe your leadership style.
 - 5a. Explain how your leadership style addresses organizational bias.
6. Explain how you view the underutilization of women of color in C-suite positions.
 - 6a. Explain how your leadership style promotes diversity, inclusion, and creates a CWE.
7. Describe a time when you resigned a position due to discrimination and/or bias.
 - 7a. Explain how this experience shaped, altered, and/or affected your attitude, behavior, and/or leadership style.
 - 7b. Explain how you addressed the resignation during your interview.
 - 7c. Describe how the response was received during the interview.
8. What were the three main requirements in accepting a new position?
 - 8a. Explain how the new employer met these requirements.
9. Was the new position a lateral move, promotional opportunity, or step down?
 - 9a. Explain how accepting this position shaped, altered, and/or affected your attitude, behavior, and/or leadership style.

The use of these open-ended questions was useful in understanding the participant's lived experiences that pertained to the study's investigation of the underutilization of the women of color in C-suite positions. The questions were helpful in revealing the three key themes (explicit bias, marginalization, and hyper-invisibility) as described within the study. Based on the participant responses, the researcher was able to further explore the research topic in a more in-depth manner as the participants were able to elaborate when necessary, providing greater perspective and further clarity. The researcher closed the interview with a summary question: "What advice would you give to other women of color seeking to secure C-suite positions?" The question allowed the participant to provide a supplementary narrative she believed would include formidable recommendations for future women of color who desire to enter into C-suite positions.

At the conclusion of each interview, the researcher ensured that the contents, also known as field notes, were transcribed immediately and saved according to the established data security process. The researcher then commenced to analyze the data using thematic content analysis that allowed for the identification of the key themes (explicit bias, marginalization, and hyper-invisibility) that were discovered during the investigation. These themes were descriptors that grouped the repeated concepts allowing the researcher to identify the immersion because of the repetition of ideas, attributes, descriptors, elements, and concepts (Scharp & Sanders, 2018). Hence, the key themes became implicit topics that directly answered the study's research questions:

1. How does gender bias define the senior leadership structure?
2. How does organizational culture affect the female executive of color leadership style?

3. How does a female executive of color leadership style affect organizational performance?
4. How does the female executive of color leadership style produce a CWE?

Thematic Content Analysis

For the purpose of this phenomenological study, the use of thematic content analysis provided an organized approach to research the experiences of women of color that directly or indirectly affect promotional opportunities. Thematic content analysis allowed the researcher to gather descriptive data to evaluate the research problem for the purpose of identifying emerging patterns or themes (Moreno & Quinn, 2020). Through the process of immersion, the study was able to increase the participants' critical consciousness (Domínguez et al., 2020) through the researcher's ability to identify and finalize principal themes and subthemes (Moreno & Quinn, 2020). Through this immersion, the researcher was able to create an association between the themes (explicit bias, marginalization, and hyper-invisibility) that provided rich data and a logical structure. The thematic content analysis of the participants' experiences comprised coding, established safeguards for internal validity, and the identification of central themes across the study's participants. This form of analysis allowed the researcher to approach the data from a variety of angles versus using a singular methodology. The empirical research for this study was firmly associated with the use of qualitative phenomenological method.

Intersectionality Theory

For the purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study, intersectionality theory provided a structured approach for conceptualizing the participant's lived

experiences in securing C-suite positions that were influenced by two main demographics: gender, and race. The theory accounted for the process by which the participants interconnected their personal characteristics and experiences in an effort to comprehend the intricacy of biases that were encountered. Based on the participant responses, there was a commonality of a collected and multifaceted convergence of oppression based on gender and race. The investigation also concluded that women of color experienced a source of subjugation (e.g., ethnicity, race, and gender) that created an extraordinary involvement of a communal cultivation of bias and experiences that not only hindered opportunities for advancement but also influenced individual behaviors.

Role Congruity Theory

For the purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study, role congruity theory allowed the researcher to confidently assess that the participants' attributes collectively maintained a close association with the group's social responsibilities. The theory functions on the fundamental idea that the human brain has a unique endeavor to create harmony through a consistent thought process of logical linkage between concepts (Lopez & Ensari, 2014). Therefore, the researcher expounded on the theory as it pertained to gender bias and stereotypes based on a direct association with leadership structures and the importance of instituting organizational solutions that have the ability to shape the organizational culture. Based on the participants' responses, role congruity theory provided an explanation such that the context of gender involvement in an administrative and decision-making role followed a more communal platform. Ideally, this platform promotes a conceptualized approach that influences a diverse set of demographics (e.g., race and gender) that intersect in a manner that creates a more

universal environment so that individual experiences, organizational culture, and established leadership are equally balanced to create a CWE.

Theme Emergence

Three key (main) themes emerged from the participant responses: explicit bias, marginalization, and hyper-invisibility. The researcher was able to deduce the themes through inductive coding that occurred throughout the interview process. The recognition of reoccurring themes was identifiable through the use of transcript review and confirmed through NVivo 10 that performed audio transcription supporting the identification of the themes. The themes were identified early in the participant interview process as commonalities in the participant responses, and experiences immediately became rhythmic. From the emergence of the three themes, most participants reported marginalization as a key factor that limited or hindered promotional progression although explicit bias and hyper-invisibility were also viewed as significant influences that impeded their progression in securing C-suite positions. Data saturation was reached by the ninth participant interview because of the quality of the participants' shared life accounts that ensured rigor and established a confidence in the emerging themes (explicit bias, marginalization, and hyper-invisibility). These themes provided an accurate representation of the population that was studied. The researcher determined there were adequate data from the study to develop a robust and valid comprehension of the study phenomenon. This segment of the study provides insight based on the participants demographics, interview question responses, data support, theme development, and findings.

Key Theme—Explicit Bias (Gender and Race)

Explicit bias is a conscious prejudice and behavior an individual exhibits toward a certain group (Triana et al., 2019). Through the interview process, participants were able to identify those lived experiences in which they were exposed to bias (discrimination) based on either gender or race when attempting to secure an executive position (see Table 7). Most (five of nine) participants believed that explicit bias played a role in their motivation for securing (Interview Question 1), resigning (Interview Question 7), and changing (Interview Question 9) their executive position. While answering Interview Question 1, Participant 1 stated,

I have always been forced to work harder than my male counterparts and take on more responsibilities to be seen. Even when I was the best, I still wasn't good enough. This keeps me motivated to get to the top where I can make a difference.

While answering Interview Question 7, Participant 9 stated,

I resigned a position where I was making fantastic money, but the blatant disrespect and racial epithets were way more any person could stand. When standing up for myself everyone would say it was just a joke and take it easy. HR was of no help, and I had to make a decision to move on.

Only a few (one of nine) participants believed that explicit bias played a role in their process to secure an executive position (Interview Question 2), characteristics being influenced by the organization's culture (Interview Question 3), and requirements to accept a new position (Interview Question 8).

Table 7*Key Theme—Explicit Bias (Gender and Race)*

Interview question	Participant (P)	Participant response
1. Explain how your past experiences have been contributing motivators in striving for and securing your executive (C-suite) position.	P1, P3, P5, P6, P7	P1: “Always seen as a Black woman, even though I’m Puerto Rican, the Black stereotypes were prevalent and always made known that I was the ‘angry Black women.’ I have always been forced to work harder than my male counterparts and take on more responsibilities to be seen. Even when I was the best I still wasn’t good enough. This keeps me motivated to get to the top where I can make a difference.”
2. Explain any professional bias you have experienced that you believe hindered, decelerated, and/or directly affected your progression in securing your executive (C-suite) position.	P9	P9: “Being a woman and a woman of color, I always have to be on top of it, experiencing racism in the workplace is a part of everyday life. My physical appearance, especially wearing my natural hair, has resulted in a lot of side looks and unsolicited comments from my white counterparts who advise and have advised that upper executives may not be ready for how I present myself.”
3. Explain how your personal and professional characteristics have been influenced by the organizational culture practices.	P5	P5: “Having progressed through times when your boss could speak to you how they wanted, say whatever they wanted to say, and call you the most derogatory racial slurs, it would be a lie if I said that the organization’s culture didn’t faze me when I know it did. These experiences made me behave like someone who is totally different from who I really am. The culture made me have to have tough skin, work harder than most to be seen beyond the color of my skin, and prove that I wasn’t what they thought the typical Black person was.”

Table 7 (continued)

Interview question	Participant (P)	Participant response
4. Explain how women of color in C-suite positions directly or indirectly affect organizational value (e.g., corporate culture, cohesiveness, organizational and financial performance, etc.).	P5, P6	P6: “When companies speak of diversity and inclusion and don’t have a true representation in upper management it fails to tap into a talent base that can further the business. Women of color bring more than just helping to meet a new business policy. Women of color have a resilience that other people don’t have. Women of color bring different perspectives based on culture, backgrounds, experiences, etc. We have been brought up and trained to bring something to the table and so we do.”
5. Describe your leadership style.	N/A	N/A
6. Explain how you view the underutilization of women of color in C-suite positions.	P4, P5, P7	P4: “Knowing that the symptoms of racism are still prevalent and how difficult it is to change business internal practices, but we miss the mark when we don’t use all of our valuable talent, especially from that of minority women. A business can’t just talk about diversity and inclusion or just hire us for lower end positions to show that they are adhering to the norm. We have to change at the top, too.”
7. Describe a time when you resigned a position due to discrimination and/or bias.	P1, P5, P6, P8, P9	P9: “I resigned a position where I was making fantastic money, but the blatant disrespect and racial epithets were way more any person could stand. When standing up for myself, everyone would say it was just a joke and take it easy. HR was of no help and I had to make a decision to move on. I struggled for a while, but it was the best decision I could have made.”

Table 7 (continued)

Interview question	Participant (P)	Participant response
8. What were the three main requirements in accepting a new position?	P1	P1: “Being in an industry where women, especially women of color, are viewed as the low man on the totem pole, the position had to provide an environment where my race and gender were viewed as a weakness. I needed a place where I was valued for my experience and what I could bring to the table.”
9. Was the new position a lateral move, promotional opportunity, or step down?	P1, P5, P6, P8, P9	P5: “The position I accepted was a promotion that led to me serving my state for 20 years.”

Note. Five of nine participants believed that explicit bias played a role in their motivation for securing (Interview Question 1), resigning (Interview Question 7), and changing (Interview Question 9) their executive position. One of nine participants believed that explicit bias played a role in their process to secure an executive position (Interview Question 2), characteristics being influenced by the organization’s culture (Interview Question 3), and requirements to accept a new position (Interview Question 8).

Participant 5 stated the following when answering Interview Question 3:

When your boss could. . .call you the most derogatory racial slurs, it would be a lie if I said that the organization’s culture didn’t faze me when I know it did.

These experiences made me behave like someone who is totally different from who I really am. The culture made me have to have tough skin, work harder than most to be seen beyond the color of my skin, and provide that I wasn’t what they thought the typical Black person was.

Key Theme—Marginalization

Marginalization is the condition or process that forestalls an individual or group of individuals from complete participation in society socially, economically, or politically (England et al., 2020). Participants noted that the level of marginalization was equal or greater than explicit bias because it gave a sense of isolation from the mainstream (see

Table 8). A majority (seven of nine) of the participants reported that marginalization played a role in the organization's culture influencing their characteristics (Interview Question 3), how women of color in executive position influenced the organizations value (Interview Question 4), and requirements for accepting a new position (Interview Question 8). While answering Interview Question 3, Participant 6 stated, "When a company doesn't recognize your talent, experience, and potential ... [it] forces you to compromise in some ways in order to fit in and masquerade around as someone else until you become that person." In response to Interview Question 4, Participant 7 stated, "As a Black woman I have to assimilate but also stand out from the crowd. If the company puts you in a box you have to make sure you scratch your way to the top and be seen." While answering Interview Question 8, Participant 5 stated, "The three criteria I wanted for my next position were acknowledgement, equal opportunity for advancement, and mentorship."

Only a few believed that marginalization played a role in their motivation for securing (Interview Question 1; three of nine participants) and resigning from (Interview Question 7; two of nine participants) their executive position. While answering Interview Question 1, Participant 2 stated, "Forced to always start at the ground level even when they always recognized my qualifications for supervisory or higher positions ... forced me to work harder to prove that I deserve the position." In response to Interview Question 9, Participant 3 stated,

My new position was a promotion; I opened my own business and have been able to be the change that I wanted throughout my career. I make sure that diversity

and inclusion are more than just words on paper and that everyone has an opportunity to grow.

Key Theme—Hyper-Invisibility

Hyper-invisibility is the concept that an individual can stand out within a group however be treated as nonexistent in that their presence, views, contributions, or knowledge are insignificant (Humphrey, 2017). Although hyper-invisibility is less common than explicit bias and marginalization, the feeling of invisibility forces the participant to need confirmation or sponsorship. The lack of acknowledgement was identified by six of the nine participants as key to the feeling of being nonexistent; although they did not use the direct terminology of feeling invisible, the researcher concluded from the interviews that there was a common theme of hyper-invisibility (see Table 9). For most questions, only one to three of the participants directly reported hyper-invisibility played a role. For example, some (three of nine) of the participants reported that hyper-invisibility played a role in their leadership style (Interview Question 5). Additionally, only a few (two of nine) of the participants reported that hyper-invisibility played a role in getting a new position (Interview Question 9). While answering Interview Question 5, Participant 3 stated, “I believe I use a servant leadership style. Understanding the feeling being invisible it’s important to use the negatives experienced in your life to help other shine and discover who they are and where they belong.” In response to Interview Question 9, Participant 4 stated, “The job I took was a promotion. Being overlooked, feeling like I wasn’t good enough, and if I didn’t exist made me go get the job I wanted and not just stay stuck. Persistence is key.”

Table 8*Key Theme—Marginalization*

Interview question	Participant (P)	Participant response
1. Explain how your past experiences have been contributing motivators in striving for and securing your executive (C-suite) position.	P2, P8, P9	P2: “Forced to always start at the ground level even when they always recognized my qualifications for supervisory or higher positions so I always forced me to worker hard to prove that I deserve the position.”
2. Explain any professional bias you have experienced that you believe hindered, decelerated, and/or directly affected your progression in securing your executive (C-suite) position.	P1, P2, P5, P6, P7, P8	P8: “As a woman of color I’m always underestimated, questioned if I can do this or that, or if I understand what’s being asked, can I articulate, etc. Once they find out that I have my PhD, I always get the ‘Oh, I didn’t know that, but do you know how to do this or that?’ I’m always being curtailed by one of their assumptions and told to step back, watch and maybe I can do it next time.”
3. Explain how your personal and professional characteristics have been influenced by the organizational culture practices.	P1, P2, P3, P6, P7, P8, P9	P6: “When a company doesn’t recognize your talent, experience, and potential you’re going to be affected, especially if they want you to simulate into their culture. You listen to the static that ‘if you only’ forces you to compromise in some ways in order to fit in and masquerade around as someone else until you become that person - fake it until you make it.”
4. Explain how women of color in C-suite positions directly or indirectly affect organizational value (e.g., corporate culture, cohesiveness, organizational and financial performance, etc.).	P1, P2, P3, P4, P7, P8, P9	P7: “As a Black woman I have to assimilate, but also standout from the crowed. If the company puts you in a box you have to make sure you scratch your way to the top and be seen. I bring, or should I say we bring, value both to the business and community because we are able relate, educate, and make transitions into almost any department because we are eager to grow and advances well as bring financial value if allowed to.”

Table 8 (continued)

Interview question	Participant (P)	Participant response
5. Describe your leadership style.	P1, P2, P6, P7, P8, P9	P1: "I have an authoritative leadership style due to the conditions of racism and bias that I have been exposed to throughout my career. I use it to empower other minorities and challenge those in authority trying to counteract gender and racial bias."
6. Explain how you view the underutilization of women of color in C-suite positions.	P1, P2, P3, P6, P9	P2: "Great question. I think that when a company doesn't use key people to lead their companies they miss the mark. Underutilizing women of color is a mistake because they bring a lot to the table. They have experiences and insight that is overlooked by leaving them on the floor."
7. Describe a time when you resigned a position due to discrimination and/or bias.	P2, P3	P3: "Working in a male-dominated environment there was a boys' club that minimized my value to the company. Constant harassment and verbal abuse began to take a toll on me and I really thought I was stronger than that and could handle it. Unfortunately, no one cared and I had no other recourse than to quit."
8. What were the three main requirements in accepting a new position?	P2, P3, P4, P5, P7, P8, P9	P5: "The three criteria I wanted for my next position were acknowledgement, equal opportunity for advancement, and mentorship."
9. Was the new position a lateral move, promotional opportunity, or step down?	P2, P3	P3: "My new position was a promotion; I opened my own business and have been able to be the change that I wanted throughout my career. I make sure that diversity and inclusion are more than just words on paper and that everyone has an opportunity to grow."

Note. Seven of nine of the participants reported that marginalization played a role in the organization's culture influencing their characteristics (Interview Question 3), how women of color in executive position influenced the organizations value (Interview Question 4), and requirements for accepting a new position (Interview Question 8).

Table 9*Key Theme—Hyper-Invisibility*

Interview question	Participant (P)	Participant response
1. Explain how your past experiences have been contributing motivators in striving for and securing your executive (C-suite) position.	P4	P4: “The workplace dynamics and views of women in general made it hard to break into an executive position because the industry is highly male dominated and being a single Black mother seemed to give even more reason as to why I should not be promoted. This made me even more eager to get to the top.”
2. Explain any professional bias you have experienced that you believe hindered, decelerated, and/or directly affected your progression in securing your executive (C-suite) position.	P3, P4	P3: “Found that being a mother and married to a U.S. Marine made me invisible to upper execs because they thought that this would stop me from being at work and available like the men on the team. But, they were always calling out and I ran circles around them and they still were promoted before me.”
3. Explain how your personal and professional characteristics have been influenced by the organizational culture practices.	P4	P4: “Working in an industry where being heard is only beneficial if someone else can take credit for your work and you being seen takes overwhelming effort; one has to adapt. You develop characteristics that conform to the business environment. The conformation is not always for the best if you lose yourself.”
4. Explain how women of color in C-suite positions directly or indirectly affect organizational value (e.g., corporate culture, cohesiveness, organizational and financial performance, etc.).	N/A	N/A

Table 9 (continued)

Interview question	Participant (P)	Participant response
5. Describe your leadership style.	P3, P4, P5	P3: "I believe I use a servant leadership style. Understanding the feeling being invisible it's important to use the negatives experienced in your life to help other shine and discover who they are and where they belong."
6. Explain how you view the underutilization of women of color in C-suite positions.	P8	P8: "I think it is crazy, frustrating and sad that a company would overlook or not explore the possibility that they have a minority (women of color) lead their teams. Companies waste a lot of time and resources searching for the best people and more often than none there's a power play right in their mist."
7. Describe a time when you resigned a position due to discrimination and/or bias.	P4, P7	P7: "Not recognized for my job and performance and upper management taking credit for my work made my days long. But when you are recognized and told that you stand out because you have beautiful dark skin like coffee made my job unbearable so I resigned. The funny was that they didn't even know I was gone and had the nerve to call and ask why I was out. When I told them, they asked why I was so sensitive and maybe it was the best thing I could have done."
8. What were the three main requirements in accepting a new position?	P6	P6: "The three main things would be: a platform where everyone can be seen for what they contribute to the organization, promotions based on merit and not who fits the mold, and an organization that coaches its employees up and not tear them down."

Table 9 (continued)

Interview question	Participant (P)	Participant response
9. Was the new position a lateral move, promotional opportunity, or step down?	P4, P7	P4: "The job I took was a promotion. Being overlooked, feeling like I wasn't good enough, and if I didn't exist made me go get the job I wanted and not just stay stuck. Persistence is key."

Note. One to three of the participants directly reported hyper-invisibility played a role. Three of nine of the participants reported that hyper-invisibility played a role in their leadership style (Interview Question 5). Additionally, only a few (two of nine) of the participants reported that hyper-invisibility played a role in getting a new position (Interview Question 9). The lack of acknowledgement was identified by six of the nine participants as key to the feeling of being nonexistent, although they did not use the direct terminology of feeling invisible the researcher concluded from the interviews there was a common theme of hyper-invisibility.

Chapter 4 Summary

This chapter described the data collection and findings of this qualitative phenomenological study. Using a well-defined interview process, the researcher was able to structure this qualitative study within a phenomenological design that involved a formal interview process using a semistructured procedure. This process allowed for mutual trust between the participants and researcher to explore and discern the essence of the study. The essence of the experiences shared between the participants in the study created a ripple effect in that gender and race were relative to the promotional opportunities available for women of color. Three key themes (explicit bias, marginalization, and hyper-invisibility) evolved through inductive coding elicited from the interview process. Chapter 5 examines the key themes, presents major and unexpected findings, and proposes conclusions, recommendations, research implications, and future recommendations.

CHAPTER 5: FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to investigate the association between diversified leadership structures, gender, and color pertaining to creating an organizational culture of inclusion and cohesiveness from an executive woman of color's perspective. The data collection methodology used a direct person-to-person online interview technology (Zoom). The researcher used computer software programs NVivo 10 and Microsoft Excel (Office 365) to magnify the effectiveness of the research finding, analysis, and sorting of textual data while also managing and discarding immaterial information. The research questions explored individual stereotypical perspectives of leadership behaviors pertaining to gender and color roles and whether female executives can be effective leaders in C-suite positions. The principal research question for this study was "How does gender and color bias directly affect the promotional opportunities available for women of color in executive positions?" The study used a snowball sampling process in that the identified participants are women of color in C-suite positions who reside in the United States because there was a dearth of available participants in the Los Angeles, California region. The researcher's sampling strategy targeted women of color who hold or have held senior-level executive positions (e.g., director, senior manager, vice president, CEO, etc.) with a minimum of 5 years of service and used semistructured, open-ended interview questions.

Although research has continued on the underutilization of women of color in C-suite positions, there still remains a gap in literature (Barbuto & Gifford, 2010; Gipson & Pfaff, 2017). The aim of this study was to ascertain the tools necessary to uncover the barriers that hinder the progression of women of color in securing C-suite positions and

to answer the principal research question. This chapter focuses on the relevant components that concluded the study: major findings, unexpected findings, conclusions, implications for action, recommendations for further research, concluding remarks and reflections.

Findings

This qualitative phenomenological study was vital as it investigated the underlying factors that hinder women of color from securing C-suite positions and provided a revitalized understanding of the underutilization of a truly inclusive and diversified leadership team. Over the years, studies have investigated the barriers and challenges women in general must navigate in an effort to solidify positions of stature (McGee, 2018). These barriers and challenges are exacerbated for women of color. As diversity and inclusion continue to become fundamental parts of modern business practices, the development of a novel conceptual model allows an organization to evolve and limits the risk of minimizing access to (a) a sustainable candidate pool, (b) a greater market share, and (c) increase profitability (Bernstein et al., 2020). Organizations that elect to develop a conceptual model that can guide their understanding of how to cultivate a corporate culture that positively affects an individual's behavior and intrapersonal development while influencing leadership styles that create a CWE also create opportunities for continued profitability (Bernstein et al., 2020; Kohll, 2018). Through the exclusion of gender and color bias and with the full integration of a more diversified administration, the organization can create a corporate culture that is identifiable both internally and externally (Northouse, 2007). This corporate culture is developed through an understanding that leadership is a process that builds relationships through

administrative motivation and the authority to accomplish a uniformed set of goals and objectives. To discover gender bias in leadership roles, the responses solidify that a diversified senior leadership configuration is viable to creating a communal culture of human services and support the further integration of greater diversity within male-dominated C-suite positions.

Understanding the ethical considerations of doing the right thing requires the organization to evaluate its culture based on its history (ideology), structure (organizational practices), and text (written policies and procedures). These concepts can undermine or enhance the organization's culture and ethical meaning, which in turn develops a narrative of communal meaning for its human capital. The cultivation of a symbiotic behavior between organizational culture and the individual within the organization is vital to its ongoing success and financial stability (Lopez & Ensari 2014). As diversity and inclusion continue to become fundamental parts of modern business practices, the development of a novel conceptual model such as the COICIC assists an organization in understanding how to cultivate a corporate culture that positively affects an individual's behavior and intrapersonal development while influencing leadership styles that create a CWE. This is all reflective of the organization building a foundation that is inclusive of establishing a corporate culture that identifies areas of underutilization based on gender and color and how the individuals' experiences influence their leadership style that is conducive to creating a more cohesive work environment. When an organization elects to diversify its C-suite assignments with the inclusion of a greater number of women of color, it develops a workplace that is reflective of the communities and societies it serves. Additionally, the organization has an opportunity to evaluate its

corporate social responsibility and ethical standards in a manner that supports diversity, increases profitability, and contributes to the economy.

The underutilization of women of color in C-suite positions was explored throughout this study. The results evolved from participant interviews with an aim to answer the principal research question of the study, “How does gender and color bias directly affect the promotional opportunities available for women of color in executive positions?” Three key (main) themes emerged from the participant responses: (a) explicit bias, (b) marginalization, and (c) hyper-invisibility. The researcher was able to deduce the themes through inductive coding that occurred throughout the interview process. The recognition of reoccurring themes was identifiable through the use of transcript review and confirmed through NVivo 10 that performed audio transcription supporting the identification of the themes. The themes were identified early in the participant interview process as commonalities in the participant responses and experiences immediately became rhythmic.

Chapman Organizational Influence on Corporate Culture, Individuals, and Cohesiveness

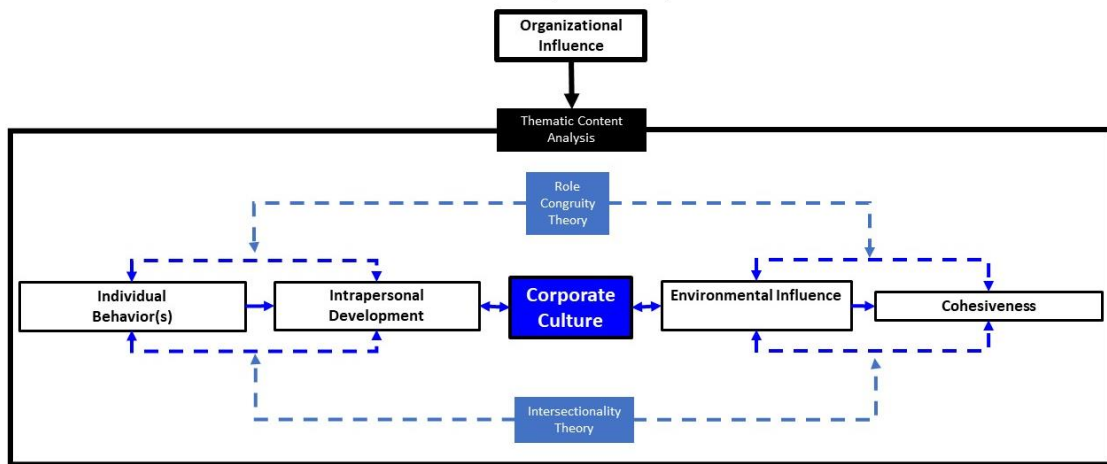
As diversity and inclusion continue to become fundamental parts of modern business practices, the development of a novel business model such as the COICIC may be beneficial to an organization. The use of COICIC can assist an organization in understanding how to cultivate a corporate culture that positively affects an individual’s behavior and intrapersonal development while influencing leadership styles that create a CWE. This qualitative phenomenological study used the COICIC to describe the manner by which the organizational influence for women of color is driven through thematic

content analysis, intersectionality, and role congruity theories (see Figure 2, repeated for ease of reference).

Figure 2

Chapman Organizational Influence on Corporate Culture, Individuals, and Cohesiveness for Women of Color

The Chapman Organizational Influence on Corporate Culture, Individuals, and Cohesiveness (COICIC) Model



Note. The organizational influence for women of color is driven through thematic content analysis with a primary linear pathway that is inclusive of feedback loops that create interconnected relationships.

The primary pathway functions through a linear track that transitions from individual behaviors to intrapersonal development, corporate culture, and environmental influence to create a CWE. Although the primary pathway is linear, there are feedback loops between relationships such as individual behavior and interpersonal development and environmental influence and cohesiveness. These feedback loops are also influencers on the primary pathway creating relationships through role congruity theory and intersectionality theory. Within this the COICIC model, role congruity theory proposes that a group of individuals can be confidently assessed when its attributes

maintain a close association with the group's social responsibilities (Lopez & Ensari, 2014). In turn, the intersectionality theory provides a structured approach for conceptualizing an individual, group of individuals, or social concerns that are influenced by various demographics such as race, class, and gender (Liu, 2019). Collectively the COICIC model identifies the pathways that create a corporate culture in that the directionality of influence is both linear and interconnected, allowing the organization to identify influential patterns that can hinder or promote cohesiveness. Based on the participants' responses to the interview questions (Interview Question 2b), nine out of nine participants found that the organization's culture shaped, altered, or directly affected their behavior toward the company, leadership, and work environment (see Table 10).

Relevance of Leadership Style and Creating a Cohesive Work Environment

To be a successful leader, one must have the ability to adapt one's leadership style to perform in synchrony with the changes in business structure and to meet the needs of its human capital to create a CWE. There is a large repertoire of leadership styles (e.g., servant, communal, democratic, autocratic, laissez-faire, strategic, transformational, transactional, and bureaucratic) that can be used singularly or interchangeably to create congruency between the organization's mission, goals, and overall profitability (Harper, 2012). This phenomenological study concluded that the participants adjusted their leadership style based on their lived experiences and in an effort to create a CWE. The researcher found that there is a cocreation of value between the participant's leadership style and a CWE based on the participants' interview responses. According to this conception, the main point of interaction occurs between the leader and the environment that is created.

Table 10*Participant Responses to Organizational Culture, Leadership, and Cohesive Work Environment*

Interview question	Participant (P)	Participant responses
2b. Explain how this experience shaped, altered, and/or affected your behavior towards the organization, leadership, and work environment.	P1	“Being constantly reminded of my so called deficiencies and having no direction as how to improve created animosity, towards my leadership, distain towards the organization, and ultimately I became bitter and in turn it negatively affected everyone around. It wasn’t a good environment and took a toll.”
	P4	“I was always over overlooked and it made me microaggressive towards the company and management. Looking back it made it uncomfortable for everybody because we all started to hate going to work. Me, because of how I was being treated, and my people because they didn’t know how to respond to my mood swings. It took a long time to learn to not take it personal and just change my thought process.”
	P5	“Again the workplace dynamics and views of women in general made it hard to always wanting to just take it on the chin and then turn around and motive your team with a smile on your face. After a while, it wears you down, you look at the company differently and your people suffer.”

Note. Participant (P) responses identify the organization’s culture as an element that shapes, alters, or directly affects an individual’s behavior toward the company, leadership, and work environment.

This qualitative phenomenological study found that of the nine participants, the following leadership styles were identified: one servant leader, one authoritative leader, one communal leader, and six transformational leaders. Although each participant identified a main or prominent leadership style, each participant did acknowledge there is

a need to know one's audience and be equipped to fluctuate between others.

Interchangeability can provide an environment in which change can occur based on an established behavioral pattern that influences subordinates to perform, as noted by participant responses to Question 5. Participant 3 stated, "I believe I use a servant leadership style. Understanding the feeling being invisible it's important to use the negatives experienced in your life to help other shine and discover who they are and where they belong." Participant 1 stated, "I have an authoritative leadership style due to the conditions of racism and bias that I have been exposed to throughout my career. I use it to empower other minorities and challenge those in authority trying to counteract gender and racial bias." Participant 6 stated, "I think that using a transformational leadership style opens the door for me to provide my people with a place of comfort, safety, and feeling valued . . . I try to be the change that lets people feel valued. I want to make sure they do not experience my life if I can help it.

The collaboration between leadership style and CWE can serve as a catalyst to creating a chain that integrates its human capital into valuable resources. Of the nine participants, one identified as a servant leader, one identified as a communal leader, and seven identified as transformational leader. This qualitative phenomenological study identified a structure that embodies human characteristics relative to the underutilization of women of color in C-suite positions whose leadership styles focus on the authoritative practice of meeting the needs of others (Frick, 2004) and produce a collective of results that outperform other conventional leadership styles (Hoch et al., 2018). Therefore, the senior leadership structure must be conducive to incorporating a multifaceted strategy that identifies and eradicates the underutilization of women of color in C-suite positions.

Significance of the Study

The significance of this qualitative phenomenological study was to expound on a senior leadership structure where both male and female executives (specifically female executives of color) might perform at their maximum potential while serving as an effective leader. The use of a qualitative phenomenological study allowed the researcher to focus on the analysis of the participants' lived work experiences while gaining as much data as possible from a relatively small sample size. The use of a phenomenological research method allowed for a more flexible approach because it enabled participants to express themselves while providing data. The potential risks associated with the study were identified as minimal. That is, the risks identified for the participation in this study were no greater than those related with normal daily life and activities. The potential study benefits are expected to enhance the knowledge of how to create a talent pool in which race and gender no longer limit an organization's potential to have a truly diverse and inclusive leadership team.

The researcher is aware and acknowledges that responses to the interview questions and the recall of their lived experiences, may have been stressful and cause anxiety. The researcher made every effort to ensure a safe and comfortable environment for the participants. The benefit of the study is the opportunity to contribute to the field of organizational leadership by identifying the factors that contribute to the underutilization of women of color and seek to focus on the importance of mitigating the glass ceiling for females of color attempting to enter C-suite positions.

Conclusions

This qualitative phenomenological study examined the underutilization of women of color in C-suite positions and contributed to the investigative research on the value of creating a diversified, inclusive, and cohesive work environment. The findings resulted from a well-structured interview process that allowed the participants to respond in a manner that solicited responses that described lived experiences impacted by the biases that have or are limiting C-suite advancements. Despite the described challenges faced by the participants of this study, these women of color had the ability to strategically excel and secure their executive positions. Although the expressed experiences may have initially hindered their trajectory to securing C-suite positions, their fortitude for advancement remained untainted.

Implications for Action

The significance of this phenomenological study was to expound on a senior leadership structure in which both male and female executives (specifically female executives of color) can perform at their maximum potential while serving as effective leaders. The use of a qualitative phenomenology study allowed the researcher to focus on the analysis of the participants' lived work experiences while gaining as much data as possible from a relatively small sample size. The use of phenomenological research method allowed for a more flexible approach because it enabled participants to express themselves freely when detailing their lived experiences in a well-structured manner that provided the data for analysis. The potential study benefits are expected to enhance the knowledge of how to create a talent pool in which race and gender no longer limit an organization's potential to have a truly diverse and inclusive leadership team. The

benefit of the study is the opportunity to contribute to the field of organizational leadership by identifying the factors that contribute to the underutilization of women of color and seek to focus on the importance of mitigating the glass ceiling for females of color attempting to enter C-suite positions.

Recommendations for Further Research

The research design for this qualitative study examined the careers of nine women of color who hold or have held senior-level executive positions (e.g., director, senior manager, vice president, CEO, etc.) with a minimum of 5 years of service. In an effort to continue to fill the gap in literature, future research should focus on (a) the underutilization versus the underrepresentation of women of color within the corporate structure, (b) the need for organizations to evaluate the demographical make-up of their leadership, (c) the need for organizations to routinely evaluate their diversity and inclusion policies, and (d) the identification of areas of improvement related to creating more opportunities for women of color. Continued research allows for more current and updated information which identify extenuating factors that limit opportunities and can solidify the value of diversity and inclusion within C-suite positions. Additionally, further research into the systematic practices (e.g., the glass ceiling and old boys' club) used to hinder the ascension of women of color into C-suite positions is crucial to providing tools in navigating and mitigating past such barriers.

Concluding Remarks and Reflections

As a doctoral candidate, the researcher was challenged by this study and the research process to stretch beyond her comfort level, raising the bar of her potential. This journey allowed the researcher to respect her level of confidence in her knowledge and

ability to contribute and impact her profession, community, and future generations. Also, knowing the importance of education, establishing goals and obtaining them, and ensuring that one needs to lead by example, the researcher believes this journey has truly opened a new door of anticipated encounters. It is my prayer that this lived experience can be drawn upon and create themes that are valuable to those who come behind me in hopes that they surpass me.

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APPENDIX

Informed Consent Form

California Baptist University Research Consent Form

Research Title: The Underutilization of Women of Color in C-suite Positions: A

Phenomenological Study

Faculty Advisor: Dr. Maurice Ivy

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This is an official invitation to participate in a research study. Prior to your agreement to participate, it is important that the investigator clearly explain the following items:

- The purpose of this study is to explore gender and color biases experienced by executive women of color and the motivational factors to secure C-suite positions in male-dominated industries.
- Ten (10) participants will be part of the study.
- Your participation will require one 60–90-minute interview session that will be conducted either in person, video conferencing, or by phone depending on the participant's location and stated preference.
 - All interviews will be recorded to ensure accuracy and maintain the integrity of the data collected.
- All information collected will be kept confidential, except as required by law.
 - All responses are held in the strictest confidence and are solely for the use of this research study.
 - At no time will there be any references made that directly identify you (the participant) or your company affiliation.
 - Your information will have a numerical identifier in order to maintain confidentiality.
- There will be **no** compensation for participation in this research study.

Special Note: This study is not anonymous, and hence there is a risk of your identity being exposed.

- Potential study risks: The risks associated with the study have been identified as minimal. That is, the risks identified for the participant in this study are no greater than those related with normal daily life and activities.
- Potential study benefits: The study is expected to enhance the knowledge of how to create a talent pool in that race and gender no longer limit an organization's potential to have a truly diverse and inclusive leadership team.

Your participation in this research study is completely voluntary. You maintain the right to stop and withdraw from the study at any time. Your election to withdraw from the study will not have any adverse ramifications. If you have questions about your participation in this research study or about your rights as a research participant, please feel free to discuss them with the study investigator. You may also contact the California Baptist University Institutional Research Board (IRB), a committee tasked with the review of research and the protection of human participants, if there are questions about the nature of the research, your participation, or your rights as a research participant via email at IRB@calbaptist.edu.

You will be asked to sign this form (or authorize via e-mail) to show that the research study and the information above have been discussed with you and that you agree to participate in the study.

Upon request, you will receive a copy of this signed form and the summary of the study that will be discussed with you.

Subject's Name [print] Subject's Signature Date