

CALIFORNIA BAPTIST UNIVERSITY

Riverside, California

UNDERREPRESENTATION OF AFRICAN AMERICAN WOMEN IN SENIOR
LEADERSHIP: A QUALITATIVE STUDY

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

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Division of Online and Professional Studies

Department of Business Administration

February 2023

UNDERREPRESENTATION OF AFRICAN AMERICAN WOMEN IN SENIOR
LEADERSHIP: A QUALITATIVE STUDY

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by

Tameeca M. Williams

Underrepresentation of African American Women in Senior Leadership: A Qualitative Study

by

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has been approved by the Dr. Robert K Jabs School of Business in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree Doctor of Business Administration

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this qualitative study was to investigate the phenomenon of underrepresentation of African American women in senior leadership. The researcher incorporated three theories: intersectionality, fair representation, and cognitive diversity to research a possible symbiotic relationship toward African American women's low representation. The use of these theories assisted the researcher in being able to take a comprehensive look into the lived experiences in various forms to address perceived barriers confronted by African American women when attempting to obtain senior leadership positions. Furthermore, these theories afforded the researcher opportunities to explore how race and gender factored into the trajectory of African American women's career paths. The study focused on the experiences of 11 African American women ages 35-59 who were interviewed using Zoom videoconferencing and telephone conferences. The researcher utilized 16 open-ended questions that were recorded with permission and transcribed into NVivo10 to capture coded themes to aggregate data for possible congruency with the selected theories. The researcher discovered six significant themes: professional growth, validation, sponsorship/mentorship, credibility, authenticity, and networking. Additionally, the researcher discovered two unexpected themes, 'tokenism' or a 'oneness' aspect., which are described in the paper. The study displayed a theoretical construct that allowed participants to discuss personal accounts, including attributes that contributed to biases, stereotypes, and assumptions within organizational attitudes and behaviors impacting African American women's advancement to senior leadership positions. The researcher recommends further investigation into the underrepresentation of African American women in senior leadership in professional settings.

Keywords: Intersectionality theory, fair representation theory, cognitive diversity theory, Race, gender, African American women, sponsorship, mentorship, diversity, inclusion

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This study would not be possible without God's favor. I'm incredibly humble and owe a great deal of gratitude to many who have contributed to my doctoral journey and attainment. To my committee chair, Dr. Henry Petersen, thank you for your wisdom, patience, understanding, and guidance and most importantly being the champion I needed during times of imaginable personal challenges. To committee member, Dr. Riste Simnjanovski, thank you for your input and guidance during my doctoral journey. I would also like to thank Dr. Lisa Chapman for her support and dedication to ensuring my success and most of all, her prayers. Additionally, I would like to give a huge thank you to Dr. Maurice Ivy, for his beyond supportive guidance and mentorship. Dr. Ivy, I have learned a great deal from you and because of you, I understand the true meaning of walk the walk and talk the talk. You have always extended yourself to me no matter what or when I needed your attention, guidance, mentorship, and overall friendship during personal traumatic times and academic challenges. I will never be able to thank you enough in ten lifetimes but understand, you have inspired me to keep going and to always stay hungry for knowledge and reach back to others. Lastly, I want to thank my editor, Dr. Mary Davis for her undeniable attention to detail and assistance in getting this dissertation right and tight, thank you so much. To God be the glory.

DEDICATION

First, I want to give praise to my lord and Savior for blessing me with his angels of protection watching over my family and me during this journey. I dedicate this body of work to the loves of my life, my wonderful, beautiful, and intelligent children, Swintayla Williams and George Williams Jr., who have kept me motivated with their words of encouragement, school stories, patience, laughs, and hugs and most importantly, their love. Additionally, I dedicate this study to George Williams Sr. for showing me how strong, focused, determined, and resilient I was then and now. I would also like to dedicate this study to my parents, Marica Denise and Eric Randolph-Wilder for their love, always keeping me lifted and continual words of encouragement with pursuing my dreams and never quitting. A special thank you to Joshua Laisure for his unwavering support, prayers, and being my sounding board and rock during challenging times and feelings of discouragement truly meant a lot.

I will never be able to say thank you enough for all the support and love that has been poured out to me during this journey. But what I can say is, I love you all from the bottom of my heart. No matter whether you were near or far, your words reached me and gave me the strength to keep pushing on those many late nights. Thank you for believing in this dream and me. I am blessed with you all. Thank you, my heavenly father, for my family and blessings bestowed upon me.

“With God all things are possible.” Matthew 19-26.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Representation of African American women's role in resource attainment and representation concerning African American women's accomplishments are critical, particularly within the workforce (Banks, 2019). Banks explained it as a bifurcation of race and gender. The two are examined separately to understand how each entity affects women in obtaining the necessary funds for career acceleration. Thereby placing African American women's resource procurement at a disadvantage compared to their European American women counterparts. According to Ong, Jaumot-Pascual, and Ko (2018), the complexities faced by African American women have a direct impact on achieving leadership positions of authority and making progress in the workplace. As a result, Ong et al. (2018) investigated African American women's engineering representation by attempting to secure capital access to support further training and educational skill sets required within their fields.

Hill and Wheat (2017) contended that resource obtainment heavily influenced senior executive leadership due to training availability, mentorship, and location (Hill & Wheat, 2017). Their study examined 12 administrators and four institutional presidents, in which mentorship and leadership investigated the underrepresentation of African American women in executive-level roles. The impact revealed a diverse perspective of benefits. As a result, they deduced that mentorship and training opportunities available to upper-echelon executives carrying out their due diligence regarding imagery diversification amongst the ranks by fortifying equal accessibility to preparatory training contributed to career progression. Thus, that depicts the populace's matters regarding race, gender, and cognitive transparency is critical and must be acknowledged for full

diversity and inclusion (Menold & Jablokow, 2020). Race and gender obstacles hinder African American women across disciplines and industries within American corporate organizations, including higher learning institutions (Oikelome, 2017). Unfortunately, that does not reflect the populace and display the transparency of organizations regarding diversity and inclusion within the workplace and communities served (Menold & Jablokow, 2020). Lisa Wardell, an African American woman President and Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of Adtalem Global Education, oversees network connections with the organization's apropos training programs.

To include working with large and small companies with certifications and academic curriculum building in diversification training, strategic management, gender diversity, and team performance, which addresses diversity within the organization, affords increased leadership opportunities for future generations (Edmondson et al., 2020).

Additionally, CEO Wardell guides problem resolutions focusing on a company's race and gender representation across the board about women of color, specifically African American women's roles, responsibilities, and educational latitude within an organization. According to Kelemen, Matthews, Zhang, Bradley, and Liu (2020), African American women face everyday challenges that have permeated American corporate businesses that span the medical, financial, and business settings.

Women getting the needed experience required are essential to ensure appropriate preparatory training is available to increase their professional profile; so they get tapped for them. Besides, the prerequisites to get moving are not new to researchers and specialists. Accordingly, senior administration tutelage, essential sponsorship, and high-

profile tasks are requested. Notwithstanding, organizations need to furnish absolute senior authority in preparing programs with a recharged desire to move quickly (Huang et al., 2019, p.6, para, 5).

According to Dickens and Chavez (2018), board members proclaimed that members must fully comprehend the business layout to include broad perspectives of the business market. Moreover, Curtis (2017) ascertained that the road to leadership dictates a crescendo of concerted voices and inventiveness that support diversity. In expressing women's values, specifically-African American women's values, might include their "worldly views, ingenuity, innovative thinking, and personal life experiences" (Curtis, 2017, p. 33).

Moreover, Scarborough, Lambouth, & Holbrook (2019) ascertained that today, various diversity initiatives surround women and people of color inequities to which affirmative action initiatives may have contributed. It is noteworthy to mention the redaction of the term affirmative action when discussing hiring practices and promotions, to name a few, primarily because the phrase is increasingly politicized and polarizing (Scarborough et al., 2019). Likewise, societal, and historical norms continually drive African American women's expectations on navigating, responding, and behaving within society and the business world.

Furthermore, racist and gender biases and stereotyping perpetuate the very behaviors employed towards defining and addressing African American women concerning their position on the leadership ladder (Finkel, 2019). This research attempts to explain the underrepresentation phenomenon concerning African American women's attainment toward and within senior leadership positions. Additionally, the researcher

will discuss three theories, intersectionality, fair representation, and cognitive diversity to include their relation to African American women in senior leadership roles.

Background

Climbing the leadership ladder and African American women's representation in the workplace is not a new issue for scholars and researchers. However, despite the need for corporate acknowledgment of mandates, laws, regulations, and initiatives, there remains an unrealized gap within corporate America in decreasing the inequities faced by women, specifically African American women, concerning professional development and promotion (Carter & Peters, 2016).

Creating an inclusive environment for African American women is critical. Conversely, the needle for progress has slowly moved concerning race and gender issues within the United States (Dickens & Chavez, 2018). Therefore, many U.S. corporations are recruiting and reaching out to African American women and men (AAM) to display inclusiveness and diversity by engaging in initiatives that provide transparency of the companies' objectives and corporate social responsibilities. Those initiatives are beneficial internally that include minorities, specifically African American women (Dickens & Chavez, 2018). The background section of Chapter 1 provides the research foundation leading to the problem and purpose statements.

Discrimination remains in corporate America with the trajectory toward people of color and women, primarily African American women (Dickens & Chavez, 2018). Leadership roles held by African American women remain grossly understated, including the state of African American women functioning in a predominately orchestrated predominantly European American corporate arena (Dickens & Chavez, 2018).

In a 2018 study by the Center for Talent Innovations, *Being Black in Corporate America*, African American women faced additional challenges and hurdles concerning workplace training and resource allocation (Center for Talent Innovation, 2019).

While European American women reportedly faced gender bias concerning job positions, Moorosi, Fullers, & Reilly (2018) asserted that Black women leaders' constructions of success are overcoming barriers of their racialized and gendered histories to being in a position where they can lead. By providing education for their Black communities, they can inspire a younger generation of African American women that is inclusive, fair, and socially just. Moreover, the problem is identifying the problem and how best to address African American women's role in the workplace (Moorosi et al., 2018).

Statement of the Research Problem

The problem addressed is African American women's underrepresentation in senior leadership roles. For this study, the researcher will interview African American women, providing a narrative form of their lived experiences in their current positions and a goal of attaining senior-level leadership roles within their perspective organizations. In addition, to include their perceived challenges and hurdles uniquely related to African American women's representation within organizations.

The researcher intends to investigate and explore how African American women's lived experiences factor into attaining senior-level positions and the associated challenges and barriers affiliated with African American women, noting that all obstacles and difficulties may not be investigated or revealed.

The researcher intends to explore specificities concerning African American women's discernment of representation and obtain a more in-depth comprehension of the constraints that impede opportunities for African American women when attempting to take place at the table of senior leadership. Women of all ethnicities are scarce in leadership roles, with African American women having the widest margin of marginalized groups (women, women of color [WOC], disabled, LGBTQ+, etc.) represented (Moorosi et al., 2018). This researcher would be remiss not to note that research on the disabled apropos senior leadership roles is scarce. The underrepresentation of African American Women in senior leadership roles is not confined exclusively to the United States; the impact of the lack of diversification and shared higher leadership positions are global (Davis & Maldonado, 2015). The Global Gender Gap Report (2020) (see "Appendix A" in their key findings) reported aggregated data by the world economic forum, which serves as a baseline to understand the gender parity between men and women in education, health, economy, and politics.

The report explained that the average interval of equality is 68.6%, which shows furtherance from the previous year's reporting. However, the report also notes that a 31.4% separation remains in previously mentioned areas, emphasizing the prominent gap within the political arenas.

Furthermore, the report consisting of 153 countries showcases the need for companies to act swiftly with governments formulating policies [internally] that support the recruitment of talent (of both men and women and WOC). Likewise, integrating programs that promote knowledge, skills, and assessment (KSA) training to include external training opportunities promotes diversity amongst the leadership. Thus, it

displays the organization's outreach by structuring it in a diversified manner. In addition, the urgency and significant impact inclusiveness amongst individuals yields increases in benefits and value to individuals and organizations. Moreover, the 2020 report outlining the global gender gap will take an estimated 99.5 years to close within 108 countries as technology, healthcare, and the economy advance. Meanwhile, Iceland is the most gender-equal country in the world, followed by Norway (84%), Finland (83%), and Sweden (82%), to name a few (Global Gender Gap Report, 2020).

Diversification of African American Women in Senior Leadership

The problem of diversification relative to African American women's leadership, according to Beckwith, Carter, & Peter (2016), is that organizations' definitions and evaluations of leadership capabilities and competence are based mainly on male-dominated preference. Additionally, societal presumptions about the roles of men and women persist, with women still viewed as primarily responsible for household matters rather than work-related matters. Meyerson and Fletcher (1999, p. 192) posited that it is essential for businesses and corporations to tackle organizational structure. Researchers Nooks-Wallner (2008); Carter & Peters (2016) ascertained, to investigate a relationship between diversification and amelioration of African American women leadership roles, requires a deeper exploration into diversity initiatives and skill development programs affecting increased lateral movement surrounding diversification and African American Women and WOC.

Moorosi et al. (2018) ascertained that analyzing gender and race in a qualitative study of African American Women in several semi-structured interviews boiled down to familiarity among African American women. Familiarity aspects comprise cultural

make-up, financial standing, social capital access, social networking, and career ambitions. Moorosi et al. (2018) deduced in their study that African American leaders successfully embraced challenges and gendered ideologies to position themselves to advocate for and educate black communities. Additionally, the women emphasized the need to inspire the upcoming generational leadership to welcome all-inclusive, non-discriminatory, and equitable leadership.

Davis (2012); Davis and Maldonado (2015) contended that race and gender could not be segregated, and African American women's discrimination and organizations addressing diversification issues go hand-in-hand. Thus, American corporate arena(s) aiming to bridge the gap on diversification concerns examine the influences that both drive African American women but also tackle perpetual stereotypes, which, according to Bandura (1982, 1986, and 1997) proclaimed stereotyping could be conquered by possessing self-efficacy (Beckwith et al., 2016, p. 10). Moreover, addressing workplace inequities supports decreasing what Catalyst (2014) described as the "otherness" for African American women, which generally means they are the only ones of their race and gender (p.2). Having self-efficacy applies to defining African American women and their value and ability to perform in the setting and take on leadership roles (Moorosi et al., 2018). So, why is this still a problem in corporate America in viewing African American women as subpar to their European American women counter partners?

In 1989, Kimberle Crenshaw, a law professor, coined the term intersectionality, which essentially overlays and intersects identities and behaviors apart from an individual standard mannerism. Intersectionality typically occurs amongst African American women code shifting, which relates to altering voice inflections, accents, body

movement, and even dialect to fit expectations of what is perhaps viewed as professional behavior and speech in the workplace (Curtis, 2017). According to Young and Barrett (2018), there is inherently no accurate structure concerning any linguistic syntax. Instead, notions about acceptable composition are modes of societal prejudice in which varieties of "language associated with marginalized speakers" are typically viewed as flawed, where the linguistic standards of socioeconomic aristocrats are unquestioned (p. 20).

Code shifting, according to Young, and Barrett (2018), posited that although the practice of code shifting has emerged in settings of higher learning institutions and corporate America, the researchers argued code-switching supports "*legalized linguistic racial segregation*" (p.4). Moreover, African American women bring further insight and perspectives into the workplace; Curtis (2017) ascertained that a shift of personal identities is required for African American women to be accepted into both leadership and society.

Higgins (2017) contended that workplace competency and various perspectives amongst leadership roles are necessary for increasingly diverse organizations. Furthermore, corporations constructing diversification in senior leadership yield increased opportunities for globalization addressing social justice issues concerning business relations (Tamunomiebi & John-Eke, 2020). Including the representation aspect and increased imagery fosters awareness of the underrepresentation of African American women in corporate America (Higgins, 2017).

African American Women are hidden gems for corporations when looking at inclusion, diversification, and representation within all levels of leadership (Bokat-

Lindell, 2020). Furthermore, supporting and representing the diversity of our populace is essential for organizations to support inevitable and continual growth (Akpapuna, Choi, Johnson, & Lopez, 2020). Specifically, recruitment and retention of talent is essential to strategic formation, implementation, and forging lasting relations within the industries and communities served (Scarborough et al., 2019). Therefore, there is a vital need for purposeful studies, attention, discussions, and acknowledgment of African American women's leadership (Scarborough et al., 2019). Employee organizational makeup increasingly demands a critical examination of workplace culture (Bokat-Lindell, 2020; Chen, 2020; Jan et al., 2020; Khaja, 2020; Stern, 2020). Racial equity, leadership advancement, and recruiting a diverse workforce are part of restructuring organizational attitudes and behaviors. (Akpapuna, Choi, Johnson, & Lopez, 2020).

An organization's ability to connect and have representation that reflects the populace assists in bridging the gap of African American women in senior executive leadership (Akpapuna et al., 2020). Finkel (2019) contended that diversification in various representations of African American women representing the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, questioning, and the plus symbol (LGBTQ+) represent other sexual identities. Pansexual and other individuals not included in the acronym within the queer community are included in the underrepresented group amongst African American women. According to Thacker and Barrio-Minton (2021), minority women that identified as LGBTQ+ have encountered adverse interactions within the workplace, such as "microaggressions, tokenism, and lack of support" in professional development (p. 36). Furthermore, Thacker and Barrio-Minton (2021), citing Bryan (2018), proclaimed that obscurity and censure amongst African American women within the LGBTQ+

community expressed emotions of isolation, underrepresentation, and depreciation, specifically within professional development programs (Bryan, 2018).

Finkel (2019) discovered that upon research on the aforementioned, individuals who expressed the workplace experience had increased scrutiny levels. They were frequently questioned concerning capabilities in task execution. This contributed to discriminatory attitudes and inequities towards African American women and the LGBTQ+ community. Likewise, Young and Barrett (2018) explained that a code language is employed when minorities attempt to occupy space within a predominantly male-dominated European American environment, demonstrating cultural shifting.

Conversely, code language passively aggressively attacks people, particularly minorities, by offering a complimentary tone encompassing a negative undertone (Curtis, 2017). Such a phenomenon causes concern and may discourage stereotypes of African American women (AAW) within organizations across multiple industries—specifically in male-dominated fields and disciplines (Bryan, 2018).

Purpose Statement

This study aimed to conduct a phenomenological study to identify the underrepresentation of African American women and their presence in senior leadership roles. The study included discussions of organizations that employed diverse environments or were in the process of diversification. The study addressed the underrepresented African American women including current literature that offered an analytical and comprehensive view on the lack of African American women's presence in senior leadership roles. The study explored the obstacles that impeded the advancement of African American women, which speaks to the underrepresentation. This qualitative

phenomenological exploration study of the underrepresentation of African American women in senior leadership reflected progress hindrance and dearth of advancement of senior leadership roles was examined by providing in-depth analysis and possibly added to the existing body of knowledge. Furthermore, the data aggregated within the research offered additional perspectives on the African American women's limits or utter absence. The data also illustrated how the lack of representation might have a lasting impact on current and aspiring leaders among African American women in the workplace.

The critical attention given to African American women's representation sheds light on the unique barriers to career progression and success (Finkel, 2019). For both African American and European American women, gender, as explained by Curtis (2017), is the one area where common ground is shared when referencing discrimination and inequalities with leadership. The contrast is the lived experiences navigating the workforce, which notably vary significantly in approach and attitude (Curtis, 2017).

Curtis (2017) promulgated when discussing and examining the lived experiences, including, and not limited to, family dynamics, varying backgrounds, cultural and religious aspects, and educational successes acquired not as a monolithic entity. Each separate experience is a part of heritage, struggle, and traditional attributes that support the range of perspectives amongst heterogeneous groups of African American women. Similarly, Curtis (2020) explained that the lived experience of African American women serves as somewhat of a guided structure, relating to expected behaviors and attitudes, internal and external, of their specific groups. Corporate leadership may view the behaviors as unprofessional and atypical. Such views may, in some instances, negatively influence and direct the pendulum of promotion to senior leadership roles (Curtis, 2020).

However, Smith, Watkins, and Carlton (2019) deduced that African American women who displayed atypical behaviors reduced the perceived biases of higher echelon leadership, while increasing opportunities for selection into senior roles (Smith et al., 2019). Likewise, performing research into a marginalized group such as African American women of their specific experiences offer not only an in-depth analysis of why under-representation occurs in an intersectionality form. Research possibly prompts discussion amongst scholars on gendered ideologies, the structure of labor, position of power, and cathexis (Wells & Kerwin, 2017).

For instance, Adib and Guerrier (2003) performed a narrative study with several African American women that disclosed the salience of shifting identities. The women explained in the study that their experiences, whether multiple identities were emphasized or not, minimizing their cultural and ethnic behaviors is one way that African American women attempt to conform to corporate expectations. Moreover, the women noted that corporate America expects senior leadership to exhibit specific predetermined attributes that may not include minorities and women of color (Adib & Guerrier, 2003).

The researchers discussed women and racial minorities within the senior athletic administrative areas aspiring to obtain an athletic director position at the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) Division 1 level. Their study offered support for the underrepresentation of people of color, particularly among African American males (AAM), but African American women were not even viewed as potential senior level administrators.

The Institute for Diversity and Ethics (TIDES) revealed in a 2020-2021 study that educational institutions with Division 1 level departments that received higher grades on

the Racial and Gender Report Card (RGRC) than lower college levels concerning gender and race hiring practices obtained an RGRC score of B-, a significant increase, from 10% to 12% for race. Additionally, educational institutions in the same grading category received an F- for gender, with European Americans holding 10%, Hispanics at 0.9%, and Black women at 1.5%. Still, it only reached slightly higher marks than the college level of C-minus to C-plus, with AAM making up 22.3% of athletic administrative positions and African American women in the Division 1 level holding two spots for every 30 director positions (TIDES, 2021).

African American women (AAW) in the workplace, as mentioned, face specific challenges and barriers that are unique. Thus, it is essential that African American women seek appropriate mentorship and training programs to support obtaining the credentials and experience required to assume senior leadership and boardroom positions (Dickens & Chavez, 2018). Access to resources that support increased educational and job opportunities is essential (Dickens & Chavez, 2018). Furthermore, corporations' acknowledgment of diversity issues impacting African American women, including code-shifting their identity and language is vital to cultural embracement (Smith et al., 2019). Moreover, for corporations to exhibit transparency and receptive attitudes toward diversity, research might be conducted to address the concerns of African American women and marginalized groups; openness is required to yield success in the workforce (Dickens & Chavez, 2018).

Research Questions

The lack of representation of African American women (AAW) senior-level leadership within organizations across multiple industries—specifically in male-

dominated fields and disciplines drew the researcher to investigate the possible cause(s). The impetus for the research was to investigate the phenomenon among the participants that exhibit similar characteristics and lived experiences and how those lived experiences affect possible leadership attainment.

According to Creswell and Creswell-Baez (2021), qualitative research assists the researcher in narrowing down the purpose statement to specific questions that aggregated data will provide answers for the study versus presenting hypotheses as in quantitative research. The following questions related to the research:

1. What structural societal barriers factor into the underrepresentation of African American women in senior leadership positions?
2. Are less African American women's engagement in executive and career-enhancing preparatory programs affected by resource attainment?
3. How does genetic endowment factor into individual thinking toward senior leadership attainment?

Significance of the Problem

Disparities among African Americans are evident in almost all facets of life, spanning education, healthcare, STEM fields, law enforcement, and political arenas (Bleich et al., 2019). Discriminatory behaviors and actions that refute the essence of a just and fair society are not new topics for researchers and scholars. Flores, Martinez, McGillen, & Milord (2019) posited that racial, gender, and social status incongruity is well reported such as with higher learning and employment. However, the fight to address and eradicate such behaviors proves difficult and leads researchers to discover various aspects concerning racism and discrimination (Bleich et al., 2019).

The impact of oppressive actions has led to an outpouring of shifting among African American women within the United States despite the country being more diverse than ever (Flores et al., 2019). Moreover, Kears, Goll, Jensen, Wise, Witt, Humener, Korndorffer & Pugh (2020) ascertained that shifting populace demographics supports increased diversity and inclusivity measures. Kease et al. (2020) performed a study among 67 medical-surgical associations to study their diversity, inclusive programs, and efficacy in increasing presidential leadership representation. Kears et al. (2020) revealed significant disparities in African American women possessing presidential positions at the time of reporting.

According to the Bureau of Labor and Statistics [BLS] (2022), African Americans are grossly underrepresented in senior leadership positions. For instance, in top executive positions, the BLS reported 1,780 employed, with 29% women, 85% European American (White) women, and 5.9% Black or African Americans holding top executive roles. The problem continually inhibiting African American women from full and just representation falls into a multitude of hurdles stemming from societal constructs to organizational behaviors and attitudes toward diversity and inclusion (Flores et al., 2019). Knowing that diversity remains a continual evolution toward a balanced societal structure, African American women will continue to confront and navigate within the workplace and society to combat hurdles with underrepresentation (Sanchez-Hules & Davis, 2010).

Definitions

There are terms employed within the investigation called intersectionality theory (overlapping and intersecting of identities, specifically geared towards African American

women), fair representation theory (addressing discrimination based on race and gender), and cognitive diversity theory (examines varying modes of diverse thinking and problem solving) so, for the purpose of this study the following terms were defined:

African American Female/Male. This term describes a person of African ancestry (Lewis, Akhu & Hunter, 2021).

Code Switching (CS). This term explains the quick switching or adjustment of personal behaviors such as voice tone (McCluney, Durkee, Smith, Robotham & Lee, 2021).

Code Language (CL). A term used to display specific vernacular (Armstrong & Mitchell, 2017).

Cognitive Diversity Theory. This theory focuses on the inclusion of people with different styles of problem-solving skill sets (Syed, 2021).

Conscious Competence. The understanding of what is demanded and applying knowledge (Greenberg & Greenlee, 2022)

Critical Race Theory (CRT). A theory that emerged post-civil rights era to research the lack of equality and improvement in the lives of African Americans and minorities had not improved (Barnes, 2015; Bryd, 2012; Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Harris, 2012).

Discrimination. A term used to describe biases and preferential treatment towards a specific group membership that includes racial barriers, i.e., African Americans and minorities (McCluney, Durkee, Smith, Robotham & Lee, 2021).

Epoche. A term used in the research process calls for setting aside personal biases, preconceived ideas, and judgments (Moustakas, 1994).

Ethics. A term used to examine business activities and circumstances in addressing concerns of right and wrong (de Barkker, Rusche & Ponte, 2019).

Fair Representation Theory (FRT). This term addresses discrimination based on race and gender and allows labor organizations to represent all members fairly (Fanning, 1977).

Gender. A term describes a biological difference between a man and a woman (McCluney et al., 2021).

Globalization. A term used to explain the characterization of society's inevitable developmental era with interrelated changes such as technology, economics, and politics (Sandu, 2012; Siddiqua, Hussain, Qasim & Javed, 2018).

Intersectionality Theory (IT). Term coined by law professor Kimberle Crenshaw in 1989, which examines the overlapping and intersecting of identities, specifically for African American women.

Leadership. This term describes the ability to develop a vision that is structured into organizational realities (Silva, 2016).

Mentorship. This term describes the ability to lead and guide others (Son, 2016).

Race. A term used to describe a social construct based on an individual's skin color (Mitchell, Steele, Marie & Timm, 2017).

Racism. A term described as conscious and unconscious actions that negatively impact and are harmful to marginalized groups (Harper, 2012).

Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT). Formed by scholars Lent, Brown, and Hackett (1994). Examined three areas of African American women's career advancement.

First, what were their career intentions? Second, educational and career requirements, and three, career achievements.

Sponsorship. A term used to describe an individual in a higher level of position that advocates for another individual (McGee, 2018).

Unconscious Competence. A term used to explain behaviors and actions as second nature (Greenberg & Greenlee, 2022).

Workforce Diversity. A phrase used to explain organizational employee demographic make-up (Greenberg & Greenlee, 2022).

Organization of the Study

In Chapter 1, the researcher introduced a research problem topic relating to the underrepresentation of African American women in leadership positions. Including a conceptual model of theories discussed to supply a visual display of connection. The main theories are intersectionality, fair representation, and cognitive diversity. Chapter 2 provided a literature review of theories and how they impact African American women that span multiple fields. Additionally, the chapter addressed challenges and hurdles encompassing microaggressions, value questioning, and leadership capability. Chapter 3 offered a layout of the methodology chosen that best investigates the lived experiences and representation of African American women. Chapter 4 discussed the results of the interviews conducted and revealed themes. Chapter 5 discussed results, recommendations from the researcher, and the need for further research into the underrepresentation of African American women in leadership.

Conceptual Foundation of the Study

In today's ever-growing economy amongst various organizations spanning multiple disciplines, upper-echelon leadership recognizing that women constitute a significant asset is critical (Maxwell, 2020).

Investigating the underrepresentation of African American women in leadership lends to the much-warranted discussion of white privilege and the status of predominately European American men in positions of power. Including the discriminatory biases, sexism, and gender exclusivity precludes African American women and women of color (Maxwell, 2020). Examining the phenomenon through the lens and perspectives of African American women demands expanded specificities relating to their challenges experienced in the workplace environment brought to light. Likewise, regarding the unavoidable inevitable substantial shifts of workforce diversity, which challenges the *status quo* of the comfortability of white corporate America and the *resistive attitudes* directed at women of color and minorities attaining leadership roles, why is this? As (Greenberg & Greenlee, 2022; Maxwell, 2020) explained, the timorous actions of many patriarchal leaders' stem from centuries of well-documented racism and bigotry in many, if not all, societal constructs.

Moreover, the fatigue that many African American women experience (black tax) and the censorious need to engage themselves in conversations and actions to steer the perceived collective thinking of African American women's worth and capability are possibly viewed less within an organization (Kabir, 2020). Thus, advancement for African American women has been at the cost of sacrificing family life, such as

postponing family planning, operating in lower-paying positions in many cases despite obtained qualifications, and, at times, self-identity conflicts.

Mindset of Leadership

There is a possible notion that organizational leaders today acknowledge to a certain degree that the workplace functions within a spectrum of thinking (Greenberg & Greenlee, 2022). With the introduction of multifaceted ideas and differences provide additional support for what researcher and scholar Dr. Carol Dweck explained as mindset growth. Mindset expansion dissects the dynamics of human actions, behaviors, communicational styles, cultural backgrounds, and integral complexities that diverse thinking provides, further expanding cultural understanding and appreciation. In addition, this can lead and inspire followers and teams in workforce growth (Dweck, 2012; Pedron, 2020). Furthermore, leaders who understand the various dynamics in the workplace are better equipped to embrace a gamut of thinkers and problem solvers. Doing so may shift negative interactions and lexicon relating to African American women occupying senior leadership positions (Kabir, 2020). Moreover, African American women's advancement to higher leadership positions and authority accompanies the many hurdles of race, class, and gender (Smith et al., 2019).

Including the duality of worlds African American women navigate within which (as cited by Bell and Nkomo, 1999; Collins, 1986, 1999, 2000; Smith et al., 2019, p.2) explained as *an "outsider within" status.* That is, African American women co-exist in a world of highly educated black women in a community where education and status are not standard; furthermore, the corporate environment with no solid place to truly belong. Globalization and expeditious economic growth require that leadership combat racial

biases toward African American women and encourage mindset growth on the superiority hubris of corporate America and the antiquated thinking of women's roles in the workplace (Smith et al., 2019).

Likewise, this reduces and ultimately eradicates the notion of the invisible imagery of African American women in senior leadership roles. This denies that African American women contribute to the workforce with unique experiences, innovation, and critical thinking skills. That can possibly address theories of intersectionality, fair representation, and cognitive diversity. Ultimately expounds on the importance of a diverse and heterogeneous workplace atmosphere for all involved to develop and flourish within the ranks (Smith et al., 2019).

Summary

Chapter 1 concludes by introducing the topic of the underrepresentation of African American women in senior leadership positions by offering insight and information on the essential need to continually address the issue of discrimination and challenges that African American women face when seeking senior leadership. Chapter 1 also discussed African American women's unique attributes and introduced three theories: intersectionality, fair representation, and cognitive diversity. Additionally, Chapter 1 discussed what the significance of underrepresentation holds concerning African American women's professional leadership. Additionally, discussed a study performed on 67 surgical and medical associations revealing their diversity and inclusion efficacy progress, if any, including statistics revealed by the BLS supporting data. This brought to the forefront the enormous gap of African American women compared to their European American counterparts concerning top executive positions. Moreover, the

chapter discussed diversification within the ranks of senior leadership and the benefit of including all members of society, and how excluding African American women is a continual challenge. Lastly, Chapter 1 discussed the topic of the mindset of leadership and how the fixed and flexible approach to thinking impacts the workplace and organizational cohesiveness.

CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

This literature review of African American women who desire to occupy senior-level leadership positions within examined the underrepresentation of African American women in senior executive leadership roles. It increased understanding of how race and gender factor into the career path, including the developmental preparedness American corporate businesses (Davis & Maldonado, 2015). According to Sanchez-Hules and Davis (2010), the workplace dynamics are shifting away from the traditional dominant patriarchal European American face. Furthermore, with African American women increasing in the workplace and competing for senior-level executive roles, diversity and inclusion policies are essential to ensure institutions and corporations function and adhere to mandates and legislative laws (Sanchez-Hules & Davis, 2010).

The Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC), since its enactment in 1964, has assisted marginalized groups such as women, people of color, individuals with disabilities, and the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, questioning/queer, intersex, and agender/asexual/ally (LGBTQIA+) (EEOC, 2022). The plus symbol represents individuals who do not identify specifically in one of the categories as mentioned above. And perhaps not included in the LGBTQIA+ queer community, along with the hiring, termination, promotion, benefits, and associated mandates relating to the workplace (EEOC, 2022).

With opportunities and advancement in the workforce steadily increasing, researchers are witnessing a trajectory change in the pendulum of opportunity, however small the strides may be (Meyerson & Fletcher, 2000). Bishu and Headly (2020) explained that despite significant strides accomplished within the last 100 years for

women of color, diversification among many organizations demands increased attention. According to the National Women's Law Center analysis report (NWLC, 2021), women gained in the job market totaling 87,000 jobs, while men lost 38,000. However, the gains (44%) for women in the workforce are minimal when analyzing the 22.3 million jobs lost between March and April due to the COVID-19 pandemic of 2020, which many have not returned, affecting African American women heavily with an unemployment rate of 8.5% (NWLC, 2021).

Examining the percentages of African American women in senior-level executive roles and chief operating officers (CEOs), a 2021 report shows African American women positional statistics in 2020 represented a mere 18% of introductory-level positions, with few promoted into senior-level positions. The same report displayed consisting of managers (12%), senior managers/ directors (9%), vice presidents (6%), senior vice presidents (5%), and CEOs (3%), revealing the critical need for an in-depth analysis of corporate America and diversity among top leadership (Catalyst, 2021).

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework discussed in this literature review examines African American women's underrepresentation and occupancy of senior-level positions, which involves investigating theories of intersectionality, fair representation, and cognitive diversity. According to Atewologun (2018), scholars and researchers have employed two of the mentioned theories, intersectionality, and fair representation, when examining the underrepresentation of African American women across multiple disciplines in senior-level executive positions. For instance, Atewologun (2018) discussed how intersectionality theory was applied (as cited by, Dhamoon, 2011) in understanding the

integration of societal identities, sociodemographic categories, social processes, and societal systems that affected women in Pakistan across the fields of education, medicine, and governing law (Atewologun, 2018).

Chen, Liu, Zhang, and Kwan (2019) explained cognitive diversity as a significant factor in the innovative performance and thinking capability of individuals in the workplace. Similarly, Smith and Angood (2020) contended that cognitive diversity allows organizations, big and small, to bridge the gaps of inclusivity. Cognitive diversity supports increasing workplace creativity modes (Chen et al., 2019).

The correlation between the mentioned theories and African American women relates to cultivating a fair and just workplace with equal advancement and pay that rests on leadership. Therefore, understanding that value creation and value salvation of an organization depends on organizations does not postulate the ideology of African American women's credibility, value, retainability, and capability as less important than her European American women counterparts (Smith & Angood, 2020).

Intersectionality Theory

African American women are typically well versed in flexibility with continual alignment to their environments, including passive aggression interactions and disregard directed towards them in the workplace (Ladge & Little, 2019). This is why African American women urgently work to find their spot in corporate America. At the same time, remaining genuine to self-identity results in a balancing act of faithful commitment to individuality. Also simultaneously, one has to decrease the perception of selfhood as a threat to optimizing advancement opportunities (Smith et al., 2019). Thus, engaging in overlapping and intersecting identities, such as in intersectionality theory, elucidates the

reasoning and essence for the shifting identities amongst African American women in the workplace, such as tone, vernacular, and, many times, physical appearance to be accepted (Crenshaw, 1989).

The provocation to alter one's identity for African American women in corporate America is boosted by societal constraints and biases (Ladge & Little, 2019). This lends to resistive behaviors, yielding African American women to conform, albeit as necessary, to promote and appear more credible and valuable to the governing bodies in positions of authority (Kantor, 1977). Furthermore, African American women operating within a tapered environment is not new (McCluney & Rabelo, 2018).

Possessing and utilizing a modulated style of presence assists with determining when African American women maximize or minimize their voices in the workforce. Rather than exercise and display expected attitudes, actions, and behaviors that perhaps are considered unprofessional by societal and corporate standards, African American women, strategically observe organizational leaders' emotions to determine when to code switch (Roberts & Blake-Beard, 2014).

McCluney et al. (2021) proclaimed that African American people engaging in code switching experienced various outcomes and received mixed emotions amongst African Americans (male and female) and European Americans about utilizing their white voice to improve career courses. While this strategy is inherently utilized as a coping mechanism for many African American women, the stigma of people of color, specifically black Americans, viewed as less than, remains (Grandey, Houston, & Avery, 2019).

Intersectionality of self-identity includes more than visual appearance and reduction of parlance. McCluney et al. (2021) discovered that African American women and people of color of the upper to middle class applied intersectional code switching to “whiten up their resumes by purposely redacting ethnic identifiers when applying for specific positions” (McCluney et al., 2021, p. 2).

Historically, African American women have been and continue to be the primary marginalized group that is ostracized and heavily scrutinized (Townsend, 2021). And substantially more than their European American women counterparts with minimal, if any, recognition of work accomplishment (Settles, Buchanan & Dotson, 2018). African American women are faced with the misconceptions of exhibiting sassy, overbearing, and unapproachable characteristics pertaining to senior leadership positions (Townsend, 2021). Thus, this is where intersectionality theory factors in and how African American women optimize in counteracting senior leadership advancement censorship. That is, mitigating perceived biases, assumptions, and discriminatory actions to influence fair representation despite the means of code switching.

Intersectionality allows African American women to have a voice. Moreover, the research integration of micro, meso, and macro stances gives the additional perspective to understand why African American women are underrepresented and underserved in various tenets of academia, paraprofessionals, legal, medical, and business. (Hayes, Joseph, Patton, Stewart & Allen, 2020). According to a McKinsey & Company & LeanIn, (2015), the need to evaluate the segments of African American women relates to the historical implications of discrimination and biases that contribute to imbalanced advancement and diversity at the top of leadership.

Including the invisible binds that society and corporate America have placed on African American women increase hurdles while decreasing leadership opportunities (Sealey-Ruiz, 2013). Moreover, with the utilization of intersectionality theory, African American women can contest the ahistoricism that occurs in predominant European American male and female arenas and complexities (Curtis, 2020) and the relevancy of acknowledgment. Furthermore, it is evident in current literature and history books that lack full transparency of African American history, especially within academia and higher learning environments underscore discrimination in senior leadership (Hayes et al., 2020). Additionally, intersectionality allows for merging various skill sets to create an environment bridging gaps in ideas, problem-solving skills, and perspectives supporting an organization's progress (Sealey-Ruiz, 2013).

Discrimination In Senior Leadership concerning African American women who continually face various discrimination, such as racism, gender, and ethnic biases, have forced them to cultivate better strategies to navigate the workplace environment barriers (West, 2019). The barriers in leadership that African American women endure are a global phenomenon contributing to the impediment that impedes their upward mobility (Davis, 2015). Additionally, Catalyst (2014) argued that isolation and reduced visibility for African American women furnishes feelings of 'being the other' and uncertainty within the organization. Therefore, African American women must ingrain themselves in projects to demonstrate competencies and skillsets and executive leadership skills (Thomas, 2006).

In doing so, African American women have learned how to integrate and intersect their identities to conform more seamlessly to the expectations of African American

women in corporate America by taking responsibility for their careers (Simmons, 2009). Law professor Kimberle Crenshaw, (1989) coined and defined *intersectionality* as the overlapping and intersecting of one's identities which might be exclusively used when discussing and analyzing the lived experiences of African American women. Additionally, it provides breadth and complexity with which organizational scholars and equality practitioners can engage (Atewologun, 2018).

According to Curtis (2017), "the road to leadership demands a crescendo of shared voices and visions" (p. 10). For genuine leadership to occur in corporate America and higher learning, leadership must share the burden of deconstructing practices and norms that reinforce discriminatory and sexist injustice (Sealey-Ruiz, 2013). Support for diversity through creating space for women's insight, ingenuity, values, and expression is critical and demands that the voices and personal experiences of women, specifically African American women, are heard (Curtis, 2017; Sealey-Ruiz, 2013). Dickens and Chavez (2018) contended that identity shifting is when an individual alters their dialect and behaviors to meet the societal approved expectations and norms. Shifting identities or conforming to combat discrimination in leadership is increasingly seen when African American women are considered for promotion and selection into senior-level positions (Dickens, Jones, & Hall, 2020; Dickens & Chavez, 2018).

Selection and Promotion of African American Women considered for promotion to senior leadership may consciously or unconsciously soften their voice inflection and body movements within an organization (Dickens, Womack, & Dimes, 2019). This is done to avoid appearing overly aggressive or easily angered. Amis, Mair, and Munir (2020) discovered discrimination in selection and promotion in their research

of organizational practices concerning discriminatory promotion and selection. This was ascribed to efficiency, meritocracy, and positive globalization. In the aforementioned, Amis et al. (2020) explained efficiency as a possible misconception that organizations are influenced by increased "concern for greater efficiency" (p. 196). Although the notion of efficiency is frequently questioned (Stiglitz, 2013). The second area is a meritocracy that researchers ascertained is centered on an individual's competence and performance instead of ethnicity, sex, social position, or company standing.

Amis et al. (2020) noted (Casto & Holvino, 2016; Friedman & Laurison, 2019), found however that this system does not necessarily fit into open and fair practices towards minorities in selecting and promoting candidates. Positive globalization presupposes an organization is innately positive and encompasses progressive development programs. Amis et al. (2020) argued that progressive development programs are only effective when all are included and perceived bias is addressed and reduced.

In contrast, Eden and Lenway (2001) posited that organizations do not consistently deliver prosperity or yield growth, which contradicts the assumption of organizational cohesiveness. According to Amis et al. (2020), organizations may engender policies or initiatives that widen inequalities instead of bolstering opportunities—for instance, addressing racial dissimilarities amongst selection protocols and practices. Moreover, Rivera (2015) ascertained that individual social capital factored into promotion when an individual's social capital status factored into promotion, disproportionately affecting minorities; categorically African American women at higher rates than European Americans. Furthermore, Rivera (2015) explained that stakeholders

within the corporation might lean toward candidates exhibiting similar interests of higher social status, which (Friedman & Laurison, 2019; Rivera, 2015) note as evident in various disciplines spanning "academics, life sciences, medicine, and law" (p. 201).

Many stereotypes that African American women face reflect the societal challenges black girls and girls of color, including African American women, endure due to limited cognizance of daily experiences and mischaracterization (Carter Andrews, Brown, Castro, ID-Deen, 2019). Assumptions of African American women concerning attitude, behavioral prejudices, and ability to lead also stem from misunderstanding and exclusion due to *their blackness* which factors into societal constraints (Carter Andrews et al., 2019).

Researchers and scholars have incorporated the intersectionality theory in various forms based on what intersectionality assumptions most closely represent their specific body of research (Rodriguez, Holvino, Fletcher, & Nkomo, 2016). With varying assumptions of the theory applied, the concern leaves room for interpretation and how best to summarize the theory (Atewologun, 2018). Examples of the various uses of intersectionality theory, as explained by Atewologun (2018), reveal how researchers have applied it.

Acker (2011) used the term as a metaphor (Dhamoon, 2011), as a research paradigm, and (Alexander-Floyd, 2012) as an ideograph, all of which display the flexibility of the theory while simultaneously revealing how conceptual intersectionality is characterized by relativity (Atewologun, 2018). As African American women aspiring promotion and selection into higher levels of leadership roles by increasing their presence within the workforce, it is suggested that organizations compete to hire and retain from a

diverse pool of applicants offering the best opportunity to capture the best talent (Davis & Maldonado, 2015). Intersectionality incorporated with investigating the promotion and selection of African American women opens a window into the awareness of expected societal norms (Dickens, Womack, & Dimes, 2019). African Americans' worldview experiences influence *their awareness*, which differs from those with some degree of privilege (Davis & Maldonado, 2015).

Perspective and intentional experience arise from a "chain of meaning," essentially the thoughts and feelings of an individual toward an event within (Moustakas, 1994, p55). Additionally, the world is indicative of the influences and experiences that captivate an individual's experiences which intersectionality *examines their accounts* of events (Moorosi et al., 2018). Moreover, intersectionality used in examining lived experiences of African American women has proved to be essential when examining the barriers and discriminatory actions and behaviors faced in the workplace (Moorosi et al., 2018).

Atewologun (2018) discussed intersectionality as a term that provides an in-depth theory analysis, including associated assumptions and examining structural systems within organizations hindering the selection and promotion of African American women. For instance, organizational "disparities related to control and power" fall into a methodical structure, comprising organizational assets and purpose, including intended targets and procedures (Roderiquez, Holvino, Fletcher, & Nkomo, 2010, p. 202). Choo and Ferrer (2010, p. 135) categorize Roderiquez et al. (2016) explanation of disparities within the realm of control and power as "systematic intersectionality," which investigates inequities that traverse into organizational positions impacting numerous

levels of leadership amongst multiple situational circumstances, leaving minorities underserved.

Atewologun's (2018) research additionally revealed a highly plausible connection between intersectionality and social constructionism; that highlights social interaction perspectives of real impacts and how an individual mentally processes encounters within society. Furthermore, Atewologun and Mahalingam (2018) posited intersectionality as a methodological instrument when investigating and attempting to pinpoint structural inequities. According to Young and Collin (2004), social constructionism is a theory where people formulate worldly knowledge within social environments based on a perception of reality and shared assumptions (culture).

An example of social constructionism would be the perceived knowledge and assumption that men are less emotional than women. Howard (2017) posited that increasing our comprehension of the world around us, differentiating between mere observations of a phenomenon and academic evidence and data around which new knowledge can be constructed, is vital. Additionally, understanding the standpoint of African American women and *their realities* concerning societal hurdles in the workplace offers increased insight into the daily experiences encountered (Atewologun & Mahalingam, 2018).

Black Feminist Optimization, what is Black feminism Optimization thinking? According to Clemmons (2019), Black feminist thinking centers around African American/Black women's experiences and voices that are minimized due to societal constraints. Thus, African American women silenced voices can now provide first-hand knowledge and perspective surrounding societal matters. Additionally, the Black

feminist standpoint in addressing African American/Black representation is responsible for creating [Black space] within forums typically reserved for the preferred European American presence (Clemmons, 2019). Black feminist thought (BFT), or thinking in practice, offers the exchange of conversation detailing encounters, actions, and emotional impact of attempting to create Black space in a span of disciplines that contribute to the oppression of African American women in leadership (Collins, 2016; Davis & Maldonado, 2015).

Why is Black feminist thinking vital to comprehend? According to Nayak (2021), society is composed of *borders* that form "who we are" (Nayak, 2021; Nayak, 2017; Oliver, 2001, p. 4). Within these borders, subsets of society are driving points of behaviors, actions, and attitudes (Nayak, 2021). The subsets consist of race, sex, societal hierarchy, sexual orientation, religion, and capital status. Examining intersectionality in contextual content shows that contextual intersectionality results from conceptualization belonging to a more extensive system (Nayak, 2021). In this case, the study of African American women's concern about discrimination based on ethnicity is at the forefront. Crenshaw (1989) investigated the paradigm of African American women's bias issues from legal and interpersonal contexts, revealing that African American women's *representational status* is enfolded after European American women and black men.

Moreover, the initial coining of intersectionality in 1989 provided an epithet to elucidate African American women's challenges encountered then and currently (Nayak & Robbins, 2018). Essentially, intersectionality and black feminist thinking and approaches toward discrimination support the need to distinguish between strategies

addressing oppression endured by African American women (Nayak, 2021).

Furthermore, understanding the black feminist standpoint creates conversation for and of African American women concerning their mental state and femininity as opposed to combining women's emotions as universal and femininity as a monolithic phrase where the assumption all women fall into (Sheehy & Nayak, 2020).

Mental Disparities of African American Women in Leadership as Kahn (2011) explained, how dismissing women as emotional and less dependable individuals and men, on the contrary, impacts women's stress levels of all ethnicities attempting to attain senior leadership roles. Kalinowski, Wurtz, Baird, and Willen (2022), during their research on the mental health of African American women during the Covid-19 pandemic, posit that African American women "experience considerable amounts of stress" (p. 1). The researchers highlight that African American women increased stress levels. Additionally, African American women continually encountered disparities in, but not limited to areas such as healthcare, pay, childrearing, employment, and promotions, including political and socioeconomic inequities (Chinn et al., 2021; Kalinowski et al., 2022; Nwakanwa, 2022; Wright et al., 2017).

Furthermore, Kalinowski et al. (2022) explained that the aforementioned inequities do not halt at internal organizations or home. The overall lived experiences challenging African American women's mental health are both work and home and do not affect their European American counterparts the same. Additionally, Kalinowski et al. (2022) expounded on the lived experiences by contending that African American women undoubtedly attract negative attitudes, behaviors, and microaggressions in the workplace (Crenshaw, 1990; Kalinowski, 2022; Mullings, 2000; Sue et al., 2008)

proclaimed are associated to ethnicity and gender. Miles (2019) posited that African American women historically display the image of the "*strong black woman*," which encompasses traits of selflessness, nurturing, resilience, and determination (p. 4).

However, Miles (2019) pointed out that continual stresses of societal and employment and upholding expected cultural traits can be both liberating and deleterious to "*African American women's health and self-concept*" (p. 4).

Rogers (2020) ascertained that African American women have increasingly high cases of "psychosocial stress" resulting from the Covid-19 pandemic (p. 1). Moreover, researchers offer a clearer understanding of the mental health and additional hurdles African American women endure before and during the pandemic. They use the black feminine theory to show a symbiotic relationship between African American women's mental status and other factors surrounding them, such as professional/social association, parenting, and work/school dilemmas (Kalinowski et al., 2022, p. 2). African American women in the workforce aspiring for senior leadership roles endure the Black Tax (Townsend, 2021). The Black tax is a reality that Townsend (2021) explained as the overburden of continually having to be a part of multiple committees, volunteering, and other internal functions that her European American colleagues may not. Why? Because African American women must prove their capabilities, worth, and competence, including high visibility, to combat promotion hurdles to ensure the best chance for a senior leadership position (Maylor, Roberts, Arday, & Linton, 2021).

African American women in diverse disciplines such as law, STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics), politics, and medicine are underrepresented (Dickens et al., 2019). However, researchers Warner, Settles, and Shields (2016) pointed

out that merging black feminist and standpoint theories is good but caution against overt generalizations concerning African American women's struggles compared to their European American counterparts.

Their research possibly offered an opportunity to essentialize the integration of feminist theory, implying that women are to be seen and not heard (Belensky, Clinchy, Goldberg & Tarule, 1986) and intersectionality, offering personal experiences of discrimination and oppressive actions from influential individuals. (Warner et al., 2016). Causing individual characteristics to merge without the opportunity to offer separation from the group studied. Likewise, the dynamics afforded by examining various backgrounds of African American women support the opportunity for them to become visible (individually) in a world that views them as less visible. The study allows for their voices at the table and in the room (Warner et al., 2016).

Some scholars, (Nash, 2008; Salem, 2016 ;) argued that intersectionality theory appears to function in a dual-headed manner. Essentially, it (a) provides a tool for disclosing structural oppression and (b) provides a comprehensive tool for understanding similarities, which scholars contend may not represent the most effective and efficient manner when examining lived experiences (Atewologun, 2018, p. 8). Furthermore, Atewologun (2018) proclaimed that assumptions underpin the expansive definitions concerning intersectionality theory and its applicability throughout the research process. The first of three assumptions pointed out (Else-Quest & Hyde, 2016), that individuals are characterized by their membership in multiple social categories (e.g., ethnicity and able-bodiedness).

An individual identifies in one category. In that case, the assumption is that the individual is linked to connecting categories of societal constructs (e.g., Indian women wearing the red dot [Bindi] on the forehead, representing a married Hindu woman religiously). In contrast, modern-day single women and children may wear the Bindi to represent their cultural communities and different religions.

Another assumption is that power directly correlates within each societal construct and places the focus on power in examining intersectionality. The last assumption mentioned by Atewologun (2018), as explained by Else-Quest and Hyde (2016), is that the integration of personal identities and societal categories renders the meaning and experiences "significantly powerful" (Atewologun, 2018, p. 4).

Assumptions such as stereotyping damage the opportunity for genuine discovery (McGee, 2018), such as African American women's assumptions of exhibiting the solid black woman attitude perpetuates the stereotype of having an overbearing and negative attitude, which is damaging when discussing advancement in the workplace.

According to Jerald, Ward, Moss, Thomas, and Fletcher (2017), African American women placed in a preverbal box exhibiting a strong and domineering presence are more susceptible to depression than their European American counterparts, due to the need to combat discriminatory and prejudicial biases. Therefore, historical stereotypes of the African American women's expected behaviors and attitudes, along with the cultural aspect, lend to the notion of more negative connotations (Ward et al., 2017). This instance requires the acknowledgment that structural barriers coupled with societal norms are in conflict and exploration of how to combat them are essential (Jared et al., 2017).

Howard (2017) explained that African American women are overlooked on the basics of sex while men are overlooked concerning the lack of education and tenure. Likewise, African American women's gender significantly affects search committees that promote candidates with preferred sex and credentials that match their individual goals.

Teague (2015) contended that research shows that women's roadblocks may result from the preferred gender [male] that many organizations today still harbor, albeit more cleverly or not so mentioned. Furthermore, Teague (2015) proclaimed that this cognition possibly plays a role in recruitment, hiring practices, advancement opportunities, and work assignments within an organization. For example, this may explain the underrepresentation of African American women principals at higher education institutions.

Hill and Wheat (2017) researched the mentorship of African American women as a valuable tool. Furthermore, possibly the mentalities, internal to organizations, mirror societal expectations (Hill & Wheat). Thus, actions and attitudes toward African American women are learned behaviors (something taught or learned due to experience, traits, and environment). Moreover, according to Nayak (2021), behavior can be adjusted if conditions change (e. g., workplace diversity) concerning the leadership potential of African American women. Biases that support the underrepresentation of African American women in senior executive leadership yield significantly negative results if allowed to be factored in (Hill & Wheat, 2017).

Social Inequalities of African American Women

Atewologun (2018) discussed how ideologies, institutions, and life experiences interact to sustain societal inequalities and power relations in the workplace.

Furthermore, Atewologun (2018) posited that systemic intersectionality is construed as examining the inequalities among African American women in senior-level leadership that affect and transform structures to include activities at all levels and in all situational contexts (p. 5). In any case, it might explain why corporate America and industries remain cautiously resistant to the capabilities of African American women in senior executive-level positions (Atewologun, 2018).

African American women lacking the expected cultural traits of being strong, adaptable, and dependable have been categorically ostracized, marginalized, and have increased their doubt of capability and value (Miles, 2019). Likewise, as categorized by Atewologun and colleagues (2016), is McCall's 2005 intercategory approach, where scholars analyzed various group differences. Their findings revealed shifting configurations of inequality along various dimensions, characterizing African American identities as a topic of discussion in the workplace. Perceived capabilities reflecting leadership at the senior level depend on her ability and desire to shift identities and determine how to use them most effectively and efficiently for advancement (Dickens & Chavez, 2017).

Optimizing intersectionality theory examines factors contributing to the lack of representation at the senior level (Nayak, 2021). Examining societal disadvantages accompanying African American women in organizational settings provides researchers with a database to explain companies' and institutions' impeding disadvantages with their communities (Smith, Watkins, Ladge, & Carlton, 2019).

According to Noack (2019), data analytics provide a process that makes decision-making more manageable and most appropriate for specific situations and timesaving. In

this case, of African American women promoted to senior-level positions, data analytics will offer an in-depth percentage of the organization's problem areas, including an additional tool for human resource management teams (Noack, 2019). Intersectionality in practice is often associated with qualitative research, which seeks to explain something and provide a space where all voices concerning a topic are heard. Atewologun (2018) discussed the benefits and applicability of intersectionality along with other referenced scholars and researchers.

However, Atewologun (2018) and Curtis (2017) expressed that with a wide range of appropriate use of examining the lived experiences of African American women in conjunction with race, gender, and cultural background, the authors fear that intersectionality perhaps has *yet to obtain its full potential*. Likewise, intersectionality offers a supportive means of a comprehensive phenomenological view of lived experiences (Nayak, 2018). Specifically, African American women at the perimeter are vital and will assist in identifying and addressing barriers to African American women's advancement into senior-level positions (Atewologun, 2018; Curtis, 2017).

Gender and Race explained by Maylor et al. (2021) proclaimed Gender and race as significant factors across multiple disciplines concerning a women's career progression, including the degree of visibility and experiences encountered. Furthermore, African American women's employment experiences are shaped by race and gender interactions, according to Kimberle Crenshaw (1989). Therefore, race, gender, and societal constructs perpetuate the prevalence of oppression that led to the development of intersectionality that investigates minimized experiences of African American women in a multifaceted aspect. When optimized in creating barriers, the

uncertainty of ability and capability undervalues them as leaders (Davis & Maldonado, 2015; Stanley, 2006). Thus, attempting to separate race from gender is a cultural dynamic that is inherently impossible when referencing African American women (Davis & Maldonado, 2015)

McGee (2018) explained that the previous research into race, gender, and societal expectations focuses on 'women's responsibility' to adjust. The research has been geared toward European American counterparts and has not fully and authentically addressed African American women's limited women's experiences of promotional journeys (McGee, 2018). Socioeconomic, cultural, and status starkly contrast European American women (Maylor et al., 2021). The author's research strategy combined intersectionality theory with the theory of individual differences in analyzing women of color's attainment at the senior executive level within the information technology arena; and the attributes that factor into self-efficacy in senior leadership positions that allow internal examination (McGee, 2018).

Advancing in Informational Technology

McGee (2018) provided a historical overview of influential women and women of color that has significantly contributed to the information technology and computer sciences profession for decades. For instance, Dorothy Vaughn and Katherine G. Johnson, who worked for NASA as mathematicians, inspired the movie *Hidden Figures* contributing to the creation of [black space] for African American women (Carpenter, 2017). Likewise, there was Marsha R. Williams, the first African American woman to attain a doctorate in computer sciences, in 1982. Additionally, the latest contribution to technology is Dr. Temnit Gebru, who previously worked at Google as an

ethicist artificial intelligence developer until her departure in 2020. Dr. Gebru cited a lack of inclusivity, including racism, sexual harassment, and a hostile workplace surrounding bias and discrimination (Ebell et al., 2021).

Moreover, Carpenter (2017) displayed clear instances of African American women's interest and leadership in the field. Ebell et al. (2021) posited that it is critical to understand the negative impacts of organizational discord on insufficient *promotional opportunities, funding disparities, sponsorship, firing practices, and inequitable hiring practices* (p. 2). Furthermore, Ebell et al. (2021) contended that big tech organizations, such as Google, Microsoft, Amazon, and Apple, despite possessing 'diversity' programs, there remain issues with diversity and inclusivity amongst leadership ranks and potential leadership positions (Ebell et al., 2021). Why is this? According to Beal (1970), African American woman's experiences are described as "double barriers" encompassing race and gender in one and structural roadblocks and discrimination in another. As such, this inflames the degree of isolation and oneness (p. 4). Examining African American women's worldly individual encounters is essential to investigate in an intersectional construct to better comprehend their unique and individual contributions to decreasing the *double barrier syndrome* (Ebell et al., 2021).

McGee (2018) pointed out the necessity to go beyond acknowledging individual contributions. In not doing so, African American women possibly are confined to a particular societal configuration of how they are viewed and engaged (McGee, 2018). Furthermore, the historical overview provided an explication for a more in-depth examination of the influence of gender and race, factoring into visibility and perceived credibility (McGee, 2018; 2020). Moreover, the deeper analysis revealed that internal

organizational inequalities affected their advancement and ultimately disqualified them from reaching senior technical leadership roles.

McGee (2018) offered several categories to explain the stereotypes of geeks in the information technology community and assumptions about how organization members relate to one another. Likewise, McGee (2018) explained (as cited by Bell and Nkomo, 2003) that the degree of engagement amongst co-workers depends on the amount of time established members dedicate to socializing with newcomers.

Essentially, when examining women of color as newcomers accompanied by a rich background of experience, socialization remains vital, especially when considering a future promotion (McGee, 2018). McGee's (2018) research found that some scholars associated outsider status with a term coined tokenism, which, when referencing Kanter (1977), implies results from proportional representation (McGee, 2018, p. 9). Furthermore, Kanter's (1977) tokenism theory explained, for example, "if 85% of people in an organization are homogenous regarding sex, race, or ethnicity, the remaining 15% represents tokens" (p. 9). The tokenism theory encompasses multiple adverse consequences, encompassing performance anxiety brought on by increasing visibility, social isolation, and positional stagnation stemming from assumptions concerning the tokens that significantly hinder promotion targeting women of color.

Yoder (1991) argued that tokenism fails to address many reactions, including the effects on women of color relating to sexual harassment and resistive attitudes toward their position of authority and influence. Intersectionality integration with individual differences theory opposes the essentialist theory and social construction perspective (McGee, 2018). Furthermore, relating both theories to gender and race explores the

underrepresentation of women of color in senior-level leadership positions. Thereby permitting researchers to study how gender, race, and societal class contribute to molding the lived experiences of African American women and women of color and the consequential systematic biases endured (McGee, 2018). However, Jared et al. (2017) contended that more is demanded in exploring the lives of African American women; there needs to be more analysis of European American males and their perspectives on African American women's senior executive leadership and potential.

McGee (2018) explained that even women in the same categories are demographically diverse concerning cultural backgrounds, lived experiences, and exposure to various forms of workplace discrimination, which warrant a degree of individuality investigation within research. For instance, women in the United States do not suffer the same because they are women. However, women and women of color, LGBTQ+ women, and women with disabilities all encompass various backgrounds and perhaps encountered forms of discrimination and some to the contrary (Tammers & Gast, 2017). Intersectionality theory offers an in-depth and comprehensive analysis when used to examine the lived experiences of African American women as it concerns senior executive positions (Tammers & Gast, 2017).

Intersectionality theory provides the voice and investigates African American women missing or limited within the workforce. Intersectionality displays African American women's perspectives on the desire to obtain senior executive positions. Additionally, addressing the challenges African American women face structurally from an organization and preconceived societal norms of expected behaviors and attitudes is a continual hurdle (Tammers & Gast, 2017). Moreover, fair representation of African

American women is a continual challenge despite great strides made with research into African American women's lived experiences. Examining hurdles must ensure that fair representation is more accessible across multiple disciplines (Howard, 2017).

Fair Representation Theory

Building professional relationships and fostering growth are inevitable for sustainable competition in today's economy (Rust, Moorman & Bhalla, 2013). African American women have long contributed to corporate America in various positions. However, in higher positions of executive and senior roles, they fall off significantly in essential leadership positions (Townsend, 2021). Despite surpassing their male counterparts in educational degree attainment, African American women are consistently underrepresented (Townsend, 2021). Fair representation involves a collaborative conversation on both sides of the spectrum, employer, and employee, to come together and confer with open minds (Rust et al., 2013).

The organization offers a pathway to bridge gaps in race relations by having complex discussions on race, gender, imagery, and racism to ameliorate interactions for people of color, specifically African American women (Townsend, 2021).

Organizational executives looking for talent to possibly promote must explore where others are not looking (Greenberg & Greenlee, 2022). This essentially includes a comprehensive understanding of conscious incompetence; that is, acknowledging what one does not know, which is the beginning and arduous stage of learning; specifically with addressing the topic of fair representation for African American women (Greenberg & Greenlee, 2022).

The next two stages that follow are conscious competence (understanding what is demanded and applying knowledge) and unconscious competence (behaviors and actions are second nature), which authors proclaimed, are essential when executives search for talent. The question asked, "Does the prospective pool of applicants for advancement to higher senior and executive leadership represent identities of the United States?" (Greenberg & Greenlee, 2022, p. 201). Asking that critical question encourages executive board members to confer about fair, better positions in organizations in obtaining a more diverse workforce, and supporting diversification within the ranks.

Imagery and self-representation for African American women in positions of higher echelon levels of leadership are essential (Chowdhury, 2021). Chowdhury (2021) ascertained the significance of self-representation, as defined by Du Bois (1903), as "possessing a consciousness and comprehension of one's soul and collective context which self-resides" (Chowdhury, 2021, p. 1). That is awareness of attitudes, behaviors, manner of thinking (positive and negative), and how one's 'self-representation' factors into outside perceptions.

Du Bois's (1940) discussion on the "talented tenth," a concept that addressed the necessity of leadership for the African American community, where personal interests are set aside for the betterment of promoting and advancing the magnitude of leadership and a sense of democratic ideology (Chowdhury, 2021, p. 17). Furthermore, Chowdhury (2021) offered an exegesis of the importance of leadership commitment to employee development, training, and a sense of appreciation for employees. At the same time, leadership is constructing strategies for addressing race relations and diversity measures.

Leadership understanding of the very essence of the African American women's lack of representation in critical roles and the monolithic ideology in which [they] are placed, lies in the keenness and inclusivity of higher-ups in accepting knowledge and a difference of thinking (Townsend, 2021). Organizations must encompass flexibility and openness concerning race and gender relations. This Includes being seen as valuable along with the lived experiences of African American women ascending to senior roles plays a significant factor in career choices, required education, and expected goal accomplishment (Roberts & Blake-Beard, 2014).

Focusing on race relations occurs when openness on varying perspectives and strategy development are fostered in a safe workplace. Moreover, possessing the embracement attitude of African American women as an inevitable fixture lends to social cognitive career theory. This theory investigates the areas mentioned earlier in professional career advancement and the trajectory an individual aspires to chart in the workplace (Roberts & Blake-Beard, 2014).

Fair Representation according to the Fair Representation Act (HR 4000), a legal duty is to create more fair opportunities for women, people of color, urban Republicans, rural Democrats, and independents and ensure representation in voting, employment, and opportunity (Fair Representation Act, 2020). Fair representation originated from racial discrimination court cases stemming from racism concerning railway workers during the 1940s. It supports the fair treatment of all employees within an organization whether or not employees possess basic membership in the union (Fair Representation Act, 2020). Due to systematically constructed barriers, Sawyer (2017) contended that African American women are increasingly overlooked as eligible candidates for senior-level

leadership roles. The disparagement can be attributed to the perceived discriminatory action, behaviors, and attitudes based on race and gender (Kalinowski et al., 2022). To include access to resources and training opportunities that lead to African American women obtaining senior executive positions (Sawyer, 2017).

Examining and having cognizant comprehension concerning how African American women shift their characters from the initial phase of performing within their vocations. This can add to the writing on the effect of moving in the profession direction to upper-level situations among African American women. Albeit the quantity of women of color leadership in the work environment has expanded, the underrepresentation of African American women possessing senior-level leadership remains stubbornly low in widespread professions and disciplines (Sanchez-Hucles & Davis, 2010). Therefore, Bell and Nkomo (2001) contend that African American women and women of color experience the sticky floor theory (p.4), essentially a hindrance presented by prejudice and sexism. This supports the notions of difficulties and challenges of African American women and women of color with attempting to attain and maintain senior-level leadership administrative roles (Dickens & Chavez, 2018).

Critical planning and cultivating of manners and behaviors concerning African American women, strategically maneuvering their identities for validity within the organization initially, in one's profession, perhaps develop a range of abilities to traverse the tenacious organizational floors to attain senior-level administrative roles (Dickens & Chavez, 2018). Zeroing in on the number of inhabitants in early vocations concerning African American women and women of color who are late school graduates can add to

the journey of African American women with accomplishing senior-level administrative roles (McGee, 2020).

Researchers O'Brien, McAbee, Hebel, and Rodgers (2016) contended that scarce data are aggregated and focused on the specific outcomes of the significant impact of shifting identities amongst African American women and women of color. To include any ramifications of any act of shifting identities yielded once African American women attain and maintain senior-level positions earlier in their careers (O'Brien et al., 2016). However, Dickens and Chavez (2018) proclaimed that current literature reveals that exploring post-graduate African American women engaged in shifting identity remains relatively new. Limited research has explored the perceptions of involvement and influence of context on identity shifting among early-career black women and its potential ramifications (Dickens & Chavez, 2018). McDowell (2008) investigated personality exchange among African American women athletic directors (AD), revealing the necessity of identity modification that directly affects the trajectory of current positions. This included recognizing the correlation between identity and positional competence, value, and efficiency.

These moving methodologies are frequently utilized when African American women and women of color face hostile generalizations, biases, and connotations predetermined by building structural racism and sexism. Discoveries by researchers Wells and Kerwin (2017) revealed how senior-level African American women intentionally and strategically bargain and manipulate their identities in the work environment for viewed credibility amongst a predominantly European American majority of leadership (Wells & Kerwin, 2017). Thus, if senior-level executive African

American women continually arrange their behaviors and vernacular, despite having moderately stable personalities and vocations, Dickens and Chavez (2018) expressed that it is essential to investigate in-depth the significant effect of identity shifting. In this case, early-profession African American women may start their disciplines while probing self-identity and how their individual and ethnicity fit within the organization or the contrary (Dickens & Chavez, 2018). Fair representation is a continual struggle in American corporate environments (Wells & Kerwin, 2017).

The resistive behaviors toward women in leadership have historically been a contentious topic and explicitly concerning the ability of African American women to possess the intellectual, skillset, and behavioral characteristics deemed as the appropriate and acceptable appearance and language required to secure senior-level leadership roles within organizations (Wells & Kerwin, 2017). Representation of prominent African American leadership that spans disciplines and industries is grossly underrepresented. As literature revealed, the representation of prominent African American leadership that spans disciplines and industries is grossly underrepresented (Dickens & Chavez, 2018). So, how do African American women effectively address the need for engagement with the shifting of ideologies relating to African American women? Further, how about a discussion on abilities and capabilities to produce an innovative strategy and robust programs? When afforded the opportunity that benefits the community, organizations of both business and academia serve the organization itself without jeopardizing one's current positional standing internally in the organizational hierarchy (McGee, 2018).

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The challenge of deploying an identity altered to 'conform' to a specific situation or organization is the hurdle of handling what researcher McGee (2018) considers impacting African American women's wellness and overall performance. Corporate America's provocation ensures that diversity and inclusiveness are focused on formulating an inviting and welcoming workspace where shifting identities for African American women may decrease (Bell & Nkomo, 2001). Likewise, African American women utilizing identity shifting must be aware of individual intentions of furthering their advancement and the expectations accompanying the position (Wells & Kerwin, 2018).

In their study, Wells and Kerwin (2018) explored African American women's professional development and representation by employing social cognitive career theory

(SCCT) developed by scholars Robert, W. Lent, Steven, D. Brown, and Gail Hackett in 1994. The researchers sought to explain three prominent areas: how individuals inaugurate career and academic intentions; how their educational and career decisions are formed; and how individuals attain career and academic achievement. Incorporating the framework of SCCT into their research, Lent et al., 1994, analyzed the fair representation of African American women in senior-level leadership roles. That provided researchers with additional tools to assess pertinent factors that contribute to or are lacking in the progression of African American women in a higher level of senior leadership (Wells & Kerwin, 2018).

Lent and Brown (2017) added to the initial study by Robert et al. (1994), examining race, gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, culture, and socioeconomic standings. Expanding SSCT to concentrate on variables that affect decision-making and intentions with advancing within an organization based on the areas mentioned earlier, including workplace culture and attitudes towards diversification, allows a more profound analysis of various cultural backgrounds and demographics (Lent & Brown, 2017).

Lent and Brown (2017) posited that self-efficacy surprisingly affects whether an individual performs well within their current positions. To include an individual possessing confidence in one's ability and capabilities to effectively execute the responsibilities demanded of the job position and striving for attainment (Lent & Brown, 2017). With the lack of fair representation of African American women across disciplines criticized, the career self-efficacy concept correlates to understanding the limitation of women's career advancement (McCluney et al., 2021). Subsequently,

precursors of societal and organizational attitudes prevent African American women from obtaining the required skillset and training demanded of a senior-level executive leader. Lent and Brown (2017) stated that the study emphasized the importance of relating to a diverse group and analyzed how SCCT's impetus and applicability intersect with African American women. To include other marginalized groups concerning career advancement and attainment due to structural oppression, no matter how subtle. According to Nkomo and Hoobler (2014), even with legislative laws, regulations, and mandates, integration in the workforce remains a vital contending topic that hinders advancement.

Wells and Kerwin (2018) proclaimed that using SCCT contributes excellent knowledge in understanding how individuals decide about career and educational opportunities. Additionally, the researchers point out that, in general, SCCT employs multiple factors; however, it leaves it open to interpretation of the individual self-inflicted career damage. Due to a lack of desire to conform based on solid personal beliefs of cultural salvation and identity security, they may restrict themselves into not obtaining a senior-level leadership position (Lent & Brown, 2017).

As Jones (2006, p. 10) proclaimed, European American women may experience oppression within organizations. However, they enjoy modes of "status and privilege" denied to African American women from their membership in the hegemonic white majority group (Jones, 2006). Therefore, maneuvering within an organization for women, particularly African American women, is the consistent variable hamstringing progression (Wells & Kerwin, 2018). In contrast, studies show that SCCT is essential in providing a comprehensive review of intentions and career development (Lent & Brown, 2017). The authors expressed that researchers should rely on something other than the

expansion of SCCT to assist in explaining the complexities of career trajectory and decisions of African American women in the workplace setting (Wells & Kerwin, 2018).

As Dickens and Chavez (2018, p. 2) explain, African American women often report that their European American women counterparts "question their credibility and authority" on the job. They consistently encounter the workplace's race, gender, and class-based stereotypes. Code-switching and identity-altering factors relieve the assumptions and societal notions perpetuating African American women's negative connotations (Dickens & Chavez, 2018). Thus, African American women feel pressured in their behavior and speech to represent all Black people as a race, known as tokenism which McGee (2018) proclaimed contains multiple adverse consequences that affect work performance and individual mental well-being.

Furthermore, the need for African American women to continually shift within the workplace to meet the expectations of a predetermined organization bathed in assumptions and negative connotations, with racism, sexism, and discrimination, is essential (McGee, 2018). Current research supports the necessity to continue the exploration of African American identities and presumed threats just by their presence (McGee, 2018). To fully grasp the underlining issue concerning the limited representation of African American women in senior-level positions, such a concern demands that attention to characteristics specific to African American women are studied (Dickens & Chavez, 2017). For example, a 2021 PEW Research Center report concerning the diversity and progress of minorities and women of color in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) Programs were written and acknowledged.

The report revealed that African Americans represent 9% of STEM senior leadership, with African American women holding just 2%, which has remained the same since 2016. The underrepresentation of African American women results from a conglomerate of disparities in their advancement stemming from the limited opportunity, to include financial access to resources in both internal and external organizations (Moorosi, Fuller, & Reilly, 2018). Researchers (Meschitti & Smith, 2017; Wells, 2017) contended that mentorship and sponsorship are significant routes in an organization to create a pathway for African American women with career preparedness. Thus, continuing educational opportunities and additional postsecondary degrees are essential for African American women in securing senior-level positions, stressing the critical need for access to resources to ensure fair representation amongst senior-level leadership positions (Nkomo & Hoobler, 2014).

Fair representation equality and the understanding of African American women can be associated with critical race theory (CRT), derived from the literature of E.E. Gantt, G.W.F. Hegel, and Karl Marx (Sawyer, 2017). The CRT objective is to create a means of aggregating and investigating data to explain the stagnation of equality amongst African Americans and minorities despite enacted laws that address discriminatory actions. Likewise, CRT merging with intersectionality, which law professor Kimberle Crenshaw contributed to examining African American women from a micro (personal) and macro (cultural) perspective, proved significant. Therefore, mentorship and sponsorship would benefit African American women desiring to reach and obtain senior-level executive positions.

Representation concerning race and gender is critical and must be acknowledged for full diversity and inclusion (Moorosi et al., 2018). Race and gender obstacles hinder African American women across disciplines and industries. The topic of critical race theory (CRT) has given way to a political storm that has produced heated debates among politicians and faith leaders. In a recent Wall Street Journal (WSJ) article, Lovett (2021) reported that religious leaders, particularly pastors of the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC), expressed their resistance to the concept of CRT and the underpinning of the theory relating to the representation of gender and race from a religious hierarchy standpoint (Lovett, 2021). In contrast, the author further explained that the younger conservative SBC is more diverse and accepting of an increasingly progressive society. Some pastors expressed their firm beliefs regarding mixing God's teachings towards women in positions of power (e.g., head of a religious order) and strict belief of homophobia as a sin and not to be taught inclusively. Fair representation for minorities and women, specifically African American women, has historically been an uphill battle despite gains in the workforce (Moorosi et al., 2018).

African American women within religious positions that aspire to head a church or religious institutions must contend with the enormous generational gap accompanied by the resistive attitude of non-acceptance of diversity in thinking (Sawyer, 2017). Furthermore, the ability to provide outreach to an ever-changing culture concerning inclusion in the workplace, home, and political institutions; according to Curtis (2020), African American women's place in culture is contentious partly due to the many resistive attitudes, racism, sexism, and exclusion that span disciplines and fields.

Curtis (2020) explained that the self-esteem of African American women includes the challenge of addressing what sociologists term the steep authority gradient (SAP) that explains the hierarchy of dominance within a field. The term SAP was the first to use applied to aviation, where pilots and co-pilots did not communicate well during stressful situations (Syed, 2019). Moreover, there was a significant deterioration in communication due to the perceived importance placed on expertise and experience. African American women face similar peril concerning the steep authority gradient when attempting or possessing senior executive leadership roles (Syed, 2019). Despite held experience and expertise in a specific field, communication may need to be improved due to the hierarchy within the organization, and African American women's authority and validity coming into question (Lewis, 2017). Furthermore, biases and prejudices that permeate society that cross over to corporate America contribute to the lack of confidence in African American leadership. The continual battle of African American imagery concerning what corporate America contends is what assertive, effective, and confident leaders look like when senior executive leadership is discussed (Kabir, 2020).

African American women must be allowed to provide various problem-solving skillsets, strategy formation, and redress workplace situations as required to improve or overhaul organizational climate. According to Narayan, Sidhu, and Volberda (2021), cognitive ideology of diversity in the workplace, precisely as it relates to senior leadership, is critical. When organizations allow for varying perspectives and leadership qualities to occur, organizations and institutions flourish. Likewise, cognitive diversity theory, first coined by Kimberle Crenshaw, provides insight into the benefits of inclusion and diversification when all perspectives and ideas of leadership styles are incorporated

to improve organizational culture. Moreover, African American women bring unique cultural aspects and viewpoints that societal and structural racism, sexism, and biases have cultivated to the formation of thinking outside of the box. African American women have become accustomed to engaging in this kind of thinking to navigate systemic obstacles (Washington & Morgan, 2019).

When upper echelons of leadership exclude cognitive diversity to fulfill a like-minded gratification of vantage points, it stifles the growth of broader thinking (Kabir, 2022). When African American women with complex identities are considered, there is an inherent advantage in how they see representation and to what degree their identities, including racial strongholds, are acknowledged (Chowdhury, 2021). Race and gender intersect with CRT and are some tentacles that examine and explain the background issue African American women contend with (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Likewise, as law professor Kimberle Crenshaw expressed in a recent Fox News article, CRT is more of a dynamically produced academic unit. Due to a sequence of contestations and convergences on how racial power expressed in the post-civil rights age, it is filled with material like theories, motifs, and practices (Dorman, 2021).

Essentially, CRT acts as a bridge and brings about understanding regarding the daily lived experiences of marginalized groups. Understanding the complexities of racial constraints that have continually positioned minorities and women, specifically African American women, at a disadvantage and metaphorically a chokehold is essential (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). African American women's positional standing regarding diversity is significant when attempting to occupy senior executive level positions is vital because racism and sexism for African American women is a double-

sided coin of reality. Wells and Kerwin (2017) explained that networking and developing social connections influence relationships that can propel an African American women's career trajectory.

In an interview, newly appointed chief executive officer (CEO) Rosalind Brewer of Walgreens Boots Alliance discussed that mentorship, adequate access to resources, and forging professional relationships assisted in affording her opportunities with advancements in senior-level positions throughout her career. Moreover, systemic racism and the hindering of African Americans with specific emphasis on African American women's continued impairment with senior-level attainment reveals that civil unrest and inequalities remain in the 21st century despite newly enacted laws (Howard, 2017).

Sawyer (2017) ascertained that "people of color are perpetually damaged not only by racism itself but also the misconception that racism has significantly decreased or disappeared," which studies and research show are contrary (Sawyer, 2017, p. 44). Likewise, a 2017 Deloitte survey to provide a window on board diversity revealed that a significant amount of work remains demanded in addressing the disparages of diversity and inclusion. Furthermore, many corporations in the survey explained that increasing diversity in the senior leadership levels holds multiple advantages, such as ingenuity and revolutionary thinking (Deloitte, 2021). Davis (2013) explained that current senior-level board members would select prospective candidates. Proving the critical need to expose, recruit, and prepare minorities and African American women with access to resources. To improve career positioning with higher levels of leadership, Son (2016) contends that mentoring and sponsorship contribute to career advancement. Sawyer (2017) proclaims

that "although African American women fought against the various forms of oppression, for them being Black and female was reality" (Sawyer, 2017, p. 48).

Gender bias and structural racism, however subtle, affect women's performance and makes for an unwelcoming workplace (Wells & Kerwin, 2017). Wells and Kerwin (2017) revealed in a study performed amongst African American women athletic administrators with desires to obtain Division I athletic director positions, expressed that there is no representation at that level. When interviewed, the participant [Kris] explained: A female African American in compliance introduced her to athletic administration, and now she "sees it all the time." When a woman, especially a black woman, says they are interested in athletic administration, others will be like, 'Oh, you need to go talk to Kris.' In my mind, I'm thinking, did you even ask this person what they wanted to do, or do all women want to be in compliance? (Wells & Kerwin, 2017, p. 12).

Wells and Kerwin's (2017) research highlights the underrepresentation of African American women as Division I athletic directors (AD) in athletic administrative roles. That displays the need for more representation at senior-level positions, which the authors contended decreases motivation and interest in pursuing senior-level positions in Division I leadership. Thus, supporting the perception of organizational preference of an European American male as the best fit for an athletic director to represent a Division I AD position (Wells & Kerwin, 2017).

Globalization of the world markets requires well-vetted and qualified senior executives to oversee and lead organizations to meet the inevitable demands (Howard, 2017). For African American women to attain senior-level positions, they demand exposure, networking, mentorship, and experience to be considered significant

candidates. However, when African American women are limited in exposure to global training, skill-building, and leadership development, the hurdles of senior-level attainment are increasingly difficult to overcome (Howard, 2017). Creating workplace space for African American women is essential. According to Silverman (2018), organizations yield success when they allow women to contribute to an ever-growing global economy.

The various perspectives of women, specifically African American women, allow organizations to increase recruitment, retainment, and advancement when fairly represented in senior-level positions (Silverman, 2018). Fair representation imagery is vital and essential to building support and interest in a discipline (Jared et al., 2017). Scarborough (2019) ascertained that although today, there is an array of legislative laws surrounding the hiring and promotion of women and women of color due to affirmative action regulations, Scarborough (2019) explained that fair representation lags significantly across disciplines and industries. Teague (2015) proclaimed that the underrepresentation of African American women in senior-level higher education positions is another area where imagery is essential. Senior educational leadership depicting the student body in higher learning institutions is critical. Despite possessing the most significant percentage of degree attainment, African American women are underrepresented in academic positions (Teague, 2015).

According to the American Council on Education (ACE, 2021), African American representation in senior-level positions, specifically as college presidents in higher academic institutions, identified their race and gender as an estimated 5%. Furthermore, Patterson-Stephens, Lane, and Vital (2017) explained that African

American women often must employ various coping mechanisms and strategies to overcome racial and gendered oppression. For instance, African American women navigate networking limitations, limited exposure to training opportunities, and visibility into the lack of fair representation of higher education. With that mindset, organizations must employ strategies that target African American women and the objective to recruit and retain them (Patterson-Stephens et al., 2017).

The Patterson-Stephens et al. (2017) study revealed that participants voiced the possible benefit of having a mentor earlier in their career that could have provided substantial support in guiding and assisting in the trajectory of obtaining their goals of reaching higher education leadership positions. In contrast, through their research, Patterson-Stephens et al. (2017) discovered mixed emotions and experiences voiced by African American women concerning having a mentor instead of a sponsor.

One experience expressed by a participant is the lack of access to a mentor. When a mentor was finally obtained, the participant explained that the mentor did little to offer substantial support and advice to accelerate her career. In contrast, another participant explained that her mentor played an enormous role in reaching senior-level roles and ensuring that the right mentor/mentee relationship forged will set an individual on a pathway for success (Patterson-Stephens et al., 2017).

The interviewed women offered their take on sponsorship, revealing that sponsorship offers specific benefits that mentorship does not, such as the sponsor having an invested commitment to the protégé to include activities involving the protégé in experiences that will enable advancement (Patterson-Stephens et al., 2017). Moreover, Teague (2015) contended that mentorship and sponsorship have advantages and

disadvantages; however, having a support system, mainly for African American women striving to attain senior-level roles, plays a critical component in reaching leadership positions.

Patterson-Stephens et al. (2017) also investigated the role of mentorship and sponsorship concerning politics and the underrepresentation of African American women in positions of power. The authors explained that sponsorship to include mentorship is essential in a society with built-in structural bias and large diversity and inclusion gaps (e.g., when political candidates are campaigning). Generally, African American women who obtain sponsorship have mentors who have created a pathway to pursue a desired career path. The significance for African American women to obtain mentorship and sponsorship is even more vital (Patterson-Stephens et al., 2017).

Patterson-Stephens et al. (2017), when investigating the experiences of African American women politicians, revealed that representation is one of many driving points for many women of color to pursue high-profile and senior-level executive positions. However, Jared et al. (2017) explained that mentorship and sponsorship, despite advantages, if not used effectively, can create long-lasting damaging consequences for African American women pursuing senior-level leadership. For example, the 2020 vice-presidential campaign of Vice President (VP) Kamala Harris utilized sponsorship to support her campaign agenda.

Scarborough (2019) argued that workplace diversity initiatives integrated with increased awareness of the necessity of inclusive programs would provide companies and institutions with increasing representation for African American women (Scarborough, 2019). Albeit African American women do not fit the prototypical base preference of

what senior-executive are accustomed to seeing. However, providing a pathway for the preparedness of African American women will produce space and opportunity for both the organization and African American women to succeed (Scarborough, 2019). Hill and Wheat (2017) ascertained that when African American women are afforded opportunities to tap into networking resources and training programs that excel in their careers, organizations benefit from increased African American women's retention. Furthermore, Hill and Wheat (2017) explained that access to resources is a significant component of senior-level roles' progression and must be addressed when African American women seek advancement. In contrast, Son (2016) proclaimed that focusing on mentoring and guiding the mentee is critical in exploring where the interest lies before discussing resource opportunities.

Like any other employee, African American women desire job satisfaction and fulfillment promoted in an inclusive workplace, including using higher degree attainment in breaking gender and race discrimination (Gonzalez, 2018). A study by Curtis (2020) explored the weaving of identity shifting and lived experiences of several African American women. This research explained the need for identity shifting for self-improvement and ensuring employees' financial security. In the study, Curtis interviewed several African American women in leadership positions striving to qualify and attain senior-level executive roles.

Tammers and Cast (2017) posited that African American women in the U.S. understand that predetermined biases towards women are intersected in corporate America and globally. Thus, due to predetermined biases, interactions are conditional because of societal notions of "how African American women are perceived." (Tammers

& Cast, 2017, p. 5). While African American women's barriers and challenges concerning their identities function in a multi-dimensional form, which Akinyemi, Harris, and Kawonga (2020) explained as the balancing act of societal norms, cultural background, and organizational expectations affect potential resources and career-building opportunities. African American women do not have the luxury of addressing sexism independently (Akinyemi et al., 2020); they must determine which area(s) of discrimination demands attention (Tammers & Cast, 2017).

European American women faced with discrimination in the workplace have the luxury of challenging sexism in one-dimensional form by focusing on gender discrimination; perhaps overlooking additional sexism attributes affecting [her] advancement amongst the organization's ranks, such as race and ethnicity. Moreover, Akinyemi et al. (2020) acknowledged that European American women of gay and lesbian communities and those contending with disabilities have particular challenges; however, the plane of equality of fairness in treatment and representation has stark contrasts (Akinyemi et al., 2020).

African American women's identities and assumptions concerning their intellect and value lend to the belief that African American women are less apt to handle senior-level positions (Asi & Williams, 2020). Because the assumptions intersected with organizational biases, African American women experienced hamstrings relative to potential training opportunities, thus, widening the gap of disparities amongst African American women in senior-level attainment and fair representation across multiple disciplines and fields (Asi & Williams, 2020).

Women in leadership roles requiring degrees and tenure face additional challenges, one securing the degree and two is the degree supporting advancement within the institution. Women of all diverse cultural backgrounds are steadily forging ahead despite hurdles (Leonard, Walker, Bloom, & Joseph, 2020). However, (as cited by Finkelstein, Conley, and Schuster, 2016) not all women had made equal gains in the U.S. academic profession. This notion is evident in the literature on African American women's studies concerning senior-level leadership positions (Leonard et al., 2020). Gaps remain between men and women if one disaggregates data by rank, institution type, representation, and appointment type (Leonard et al., 2020). African American women's identity might be characterized as a wife, single parent, specific religious identity, and sexual preference, which causes African American women to be labeled in the workplace with identifiable characteristics and viewed as possibly harmful (Asi & Williams, 2020). These characterizations may include behavioral stereotyping contributing to an organization's prejudicial actions (Leonard et al., 2020).

Fair representation of African American women requires that corporate America deconstruct the constraints embedded from days of slavery concerning African Americans, specifically African American women (Catalyst, 2021). Historically depicted perceptions of African American women are overtly viewed as the ghetto, neck rolling, sassy, and the angry black women syndrome. The media, news, and radio have indulged in these depictions over the decades. However, Meschitti and Smith (2017) posited that there are benefits in peer-to-peer and higher-echelon mentoring when attempting to progress professionally and personally. Therefore, when barriers concerning gender and race, particularly with African American women, supportive measures (e.g., life coaches

and mentors) addressing adverse and discrimination are essential in advancing to senior executive leadership positions (Meschitti & Smith, 2017).

Embracing the wide range of diversity cognitively amongst African American women includes various background experiences, outlook on problem-solving, innovative thinking, and ingenuity. It helps to understand the politics of identity for African American women because it is these areas that corporate America must address and contend with as globalization expands corporations' outreach and possible community connections, which cognitive diversity possibly assists with (Meschitti & Smith, 2017).

Social cognitive career theory (SCCT), in conjunction with social cognitive theory (SCT), provides a foundation for researchers, scholars, and lay persons to explain and predict human development and changes in behaviors (Eun, 2019). Eun also contended that SCT led to effective planning in their research of professional development amongst pedagogies by creating career models addressing professional development, which increased aggrandized preparatory training. Thus, examining the realm of cognitive diverse thinking, backgrounds, and perspectives of African American women, including redacting hurdles that oppress succession to senior leadership roles. Doing so yields a broader impact within any organization (Eun, 2019).

Cognitive Diversity Theory

According to Cognitive Diversity Theory (CDT), investing time and understanding in the cognitive diverse reasoning of African American women fosters modes of creativity attained over the years (Chen et al., 2019). Within this creativity, African American women can span the arts, sciences, and technologies in a creative class

(Florida, 2019). Investigating how to best apply (CDT) and developing a strategy for teams to function effectively as a unified front necessitates considering diverse thinking (Chen et al., 2019).

Cognitive Diversity surrounds a variance in individuals' thoughts, offering various perspectives, intuition, problem-solving skills, and lived experiences stemming from unique cultural backgrounds (Syed, 2019). Syed (2019) proclaimed that using and acknowledging cognitive diversity as an inherently valuable tool was not considered necessary a few hundred years ago as it has become. The problems that many faced at a time when "leadership and strategic thinking leaned more towards a linear, separable, simple, and times are encompassing all three" (Syed, 2019, p. 12). Thus, addressing the critical need to reverse the monolithic notion of thinking that may delay essential work requirements from completion. Syed (2019) noted that with today's organizations operating and functioning within global markets and integrating diverse backgrounds of individuals, specifically African American women, the various perspectives, and experiences benefit organizations.

Hence, organizations facing complex human resource challenges must employ all avenues of thinking and problem problem-solving, which cognitive diversity allows (Kritz, 2022). Chen et al. (2019) contended that cognitive diversity has a symbolic relationship between creativity and innovative work behavior (IWB). While also acknowledging the pros and cons of using cognitive diversity in leadership and management. Chen et al. (2019) explored the theory of cognitive diversity. The authors applied an analytical approach in examining a binary conduit of 10 Chinese companies. Amongst 100+ teams, task reflexivity (positive pathway) refers to the structure in which

groups communicate, exchange ideas, discuss objectives, strategy development, apply to current or anticipated situations, and relationship conflict (adverse pathway). Chen et al. ascertained that with ever-increasing globalization and fierce business competition, business executives and higher echelon of leadership wrestle with the best possible avenues to confer the topic of diversity and representation to face those discomforts. Without engaging in discussions on organizational makeup, the reality that African American women's place in corporate America's senior leadership pool has and continually is met with contention (Chen et al., 2019).

DiAngelo (2018) hypothesized addressing the difficulty of white privilege and white fragility when forced to acknowledge [their leverage] within societal constructs, which has remained the "historical constant that is hidden in visible invisibility" (DiAngelo, 2018, p. 10). Thus, engaging in a term the late author Toni Morrison explained as race talk. That assists in confronting boundaries and the indifference relating to African American women [black space] interjecting oneself with them vice us, which upsets societal comfortability and disrupts identity security enjoyed by the majority (DiAngelo, 2018).

Jonkelovia, Jankelova, Blstakova, and Nemethov (2021) conducted a case study on the effects of cognitive diversity as a quality of leadership in a crisis, specifically the COVID-19 pandemic. Jonkelovia et al. (2021) applied CDT to investigate its applicability and efficiency and identify possible areas where CDT would not yield a positive outcome. Within their study, Jonkelovia et al. (2021) offered an in-depth analysis of the human factor and how the very element of human behavior factored into

building successful leadership teams, including examining how human actions perhaps fostered an unbalanced workplace.

When investigating the relevance and potential position of CDT, the question of what cognitive diversity means for senior executive leadership arises. The absence and underrepresentation of African American women in top leadership roles, proclaimed by Levitt (2013), rests at the top of executive management. When upper-echelon leadership explores the diversity gap among senior ranks, specifically African American women, increasing the thinking pool offers a two-term phrase-potential opportunity (Kritz, 2022). To yield a diverse panel of leadership depends on those in decision-making positions who do not engage in myopic views for the success of current and future business operations (Fournier & Lee, 2013).

Thus, encouraging communication between senior leaders and African American women of entry-level positions and those in line for potential senior executive roles is inevitable to achieve full transparency (Lewis, Akhu & Hunter, 2021). Although both sides may view increased interaction as a challenge, possibly due to historical precedence, biases, assumptions, and emotions encompassed both sides. Therefore, improving an open dialogue pathway ensures that African American women's concerns, thoughts, and perspectives, hold a degree of importance within the organization in addressing parity regarding their voices being heard equally within the organization (Lewis et al., 2021). On the other hand, when all voices are not aligned to meet strategic planning, address issues, and meet objectives, structural cohesiveness and fluidity within all ranks are heavily impacted (Asi & Williams, 2020).

Fournier and Lee (2013) ascertained that organizations seeking to construct a robust and sound business venture must build the internal community, i.e., employees, which entails encompassing individuals that are diverse and innovative thinkers, which CDT assists with achieving. Essentially, organizations, regardless of size, embracing diversity measures to improve inclusivity recognize, too, that CDT is an invaluable tool if used effectively and efficiently. Ultimately, achieving organizational success is a part of yielding fundamental requirements, such as developing gold standard practices in an ethical and equitable structure (Fournier & Lee, 2013).

Incorporating and applying diversity measures do not equate to equality, which is why continual re-evaluation of policies, programs, and demands is essential, including the degree of productivity and examining if implemented strategies positively affect both organizations and employees impacted by such initiatives. Townsend (2021), who conducted a qualitative study on the ascent of five African American women in a higher level of academia, explained how critical race theory (CRT) factored into the investigation of the lack or complete absence of African American women trajectory in leadership seats and disparities encountered.

According to Derrick Bell, in 1979, CRT propounds that societal views towards racism are quotidian, customary, and a perpetual component of American life, while not solely found within American contexts alone (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). Townsend (2021), referencing scholars (DeCuir & Dixon, 2004; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995) revealed that researchers discussed specificities into the components of CRT and those measuring tenets incorporated investigating race, racism, and power. The components of CRT consisted of five paramount principles, which are: (a) counter-stories, (b) the

permanence of racism, (c) whiteness of property, (d) interest convergence, and (e) the critique of liberalism (Townsend, 2021).

Wang, Kim, and Lee (2016) ascertained that cognitive diversity comprehension accelerates business creativity and innovation when varying perspectives are allowed to interact with one another, which also assists in discussions and addressing hot topics surrounding power, privilege, and race within the corporation (Wang et al., 2016). In their research, Chen et al. (2019) argued that cognitive diversity has a double sword edge, meaning that with many potential positives that CDT offers, it is worth noting the potential negatives.

There is scarce research into the possible adverse effects of merging perspectives, such as divisiveness, in structuring leadership teams, specifically those encompassing African American women (Chen et al., 2019; Kritz, 2022). Furthermore, exploring CDT within leadership refinement and change is inevitable due to the ever-changing organizational landscape amongst employees and the increasing degrees of knowledge, experience, and skillset women have obtained, with African American women significantly advancing.

Job promotions lack a substantial statistical correlation between African American women and CDT within organizations (Kritz, 2022). Kritz (2022) posit that embracing various mindsets, perspectives, and outlooks to re-examine standard business practices is necessary. The COVID-19 pandemic is a prime example of restructuring and approaching the workforce with different tactics to ensure business sustainability (Kritz, 2022). Thus, looking in the direction of what is out of the customary parameters of selecting and positioning individuals such as qualified African American women in

spaces, offers a different lens into business tactics and possible beneficial strategies (Kritz, 2022; Wang et al., 2016).

Summary

The literature on African American women's underrepresentation offers insight into the challenges, societal assumptions, and constraints as limited attention for African American women to succeed in senior leadership roles (Lewis, Akhu & Hunter, 2021). Most of the literature provides a segue into a deeper analysis of the ideologies and cultural aspects incorporated into how African American women are treated and viewed as an underrepresented class.

Sawyer (2017) explained that implanted cultural thoughts and behaviors toward African American women are significant roadblocks to why African American women must navigate differently from European American women. For instance, this includes expected behaviors and actions such as appearance (imagery), altering how they speak (code switching), and their overall cultural makeup (identity shifting) (Chen et al., 2019). The literature highlights gaps in resource access, limited professional social / networking building—educational and training opportunities, and senior-level preparatory training, which demands highly skilled trained individuals in an ever-changing global market (Chen et al., 2019; DiAngelo, 2019). The literature also points out a degree of resistive attitudes towards women of color, specifically African American women in positions of power and higher echelon of leadership in academia, e.g., college president.

Moreover, the literature expressed the need for increased research concerning African American women in senior leadership positions and discussed the impetus

concerning African American women's senior leadership increase. In Chapter 2, in relation to corporation gaps:

- there remain gaps that corporate American is perhaps incredulous in decreasing due to comfortability and perceived loss of power;
- assumptions and preconceived attributes of the African American women are continually being researched due to the complexity of the topic;
- theoretical frameworks that have been used and intersected with others (e. g., feminist theory, and social constructionist; intersectionality, fair representation, cognitive diversity, and CRT);
- theories that researchers and scholars have referenced and examined more frequently concerning the path for African American women to attain senior leadership positions;
- data that revealed the percentages which African American women represented in senior leadership positions;
- the importance to access capital within and external of an organization to further continuing educational requirements;
- the contrasting research concerning women of color, primarily African American women;
- the impacts on mental health and self-efficacy that affect African American women's drive to attain senior leadership positions;
- sustainability impacting organizations where African American women and women of color expressed as feeling invisible in the workplace; and

- the significant portion of research that is how critical to the voices and lived experiences of African American women in the workplace who are with attempting to obtain levels of esteemed leadership positions while facing adversity even after senior leadership is accomplished.

In many of the studies explored in this investigation, researchers selected African American women who provided various insights and cultural backgrounds that assisted in exploring the impacts of racism, sexism, and discriminatory behaviors and actions. The studies offered a platform where African American women's views offered an avenue into the effects of what authors Tammer & Gast (2017) explained as not just a glass ceiling but a concrete ceiling. Where women, primarily African American women, are slowly moving the needle.

As scholars and researchers have found, the theories of intersectionality, fair representation, and cognitive diversity are essential for understanding issues facing African American women. However, their use and applicability are even more critical in understanding African American women because of their multifaceted backgrounds and cultural uniqueness to corporate America (Tammer & Gast, 2017).

Intersectionality, fair representation, and cognitive diversity theories assisted in explaining how race and gender factor into African American women's career paths. The developmental preparedness of African American women desiring to occupy senior-level executive positions within American corporate businesses is critical. Research shows that underrepresented African American women remain a relevant and continued area of investigation. Furthermore, most important is the lack of allocated resources, limited exposure, and continuing education opportunities, including mentorship/sponsorship that

offers added advantages in obtaining senior leadership positions. As the literature reveals, African American women continually face barriers to social, economic, and professional prosperity hamstrung by built-in structural racism. African American women must contend with racism, sexism, and predetermined biases concerning behaviors and attitudes that must be addressed to include networking resources that prepare African American women to attain senior-level positions.

In conclusion, continued research on African American women's identity shifting, intersectional attributes, and educational and training opportunities is vital for corporate America and society in narrowing the disparities. When one voice is left out, [African American women], an organization or society does not yield full benefits.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this section is to describe the research design to answer research questions concerning the underrepresentation of African American women in senior leadership positions. The study increased awareness and understanding of the limited representation of African American women possessing senior-level roles. For African American and European American women, gender, as explained by Curtis (2017), is the one area where common ground is shared when referencing discrimination and inequalities with leadership.

The lived experiences while navigating the workforce, vary significantly in approach and attitude (Curtis, 2017). This chapter presents the research method, explanation of phenomenology, relation to investigating the phenomenon, research questions, research design, instrumentation, trustworthiness, triangulation, data collection, and analysis plan.

Purpose Statement

This study aimed to conduct a phenomenological qualitative study to identify the under representation of African American women and their presence in senior leadership roles, including discussions of organizations that employed diverse environments or were in the process of diversification. The study addressing the underrepresented African American women including current literature, offered an analytical and comprehensive view on the lack of African American women's presence in senior leadership roles. The study explored the obstacles that impeded the advancement of African American women, which speaks to the underrepresentation. This qualitative phenomenological exploration study of the underrepresentation of African American women in senior leadership

reflected progress hindrance and dearth of advancement of senior leadership roles was examined by providing in-depth analysis and would possibly add to the existing body of knowledge. Furthermore, the data aggregated within the research might offer additional perspectives on the African American women's limits or utter absence, and how the lack of representation might have a lasting impact on current and aspiring leaders among African American women in the workplace.

The critical attention given to African American women's representation sheds light on the unique barriers to career progression and success (Finkel, 2019). For both African American and European American women, gender, as explained by Curtis (2017), is the one area where common ground is shared when referencing discrimination and inequalities with leadership. The contrast, in this case, is the lived experiences navigating the workforce, which notably vary significantly in approach and attitude (Curtis, 2017).

Curtis (2017) promulgated when discussing and examining the lived experiences, including, and not limited to, family dynamics, varying backgrounds, cultural and religious aspects, and educational successes acquired not as a monolithic entity. Each separate experience is a part of heritage, struggle, and traditional attributes, which support the range of perspectives amongst heterogeneous groups of African American women. Curtis (2020) explained that the lived experience of African American women serves as somewhat of a guided structure, relating to expected behaviors and attitudes, internal and external, of their specific groups, and that corporate leadership may view the behaviors as unprofessional and typical. Which, in some instances, feasibly negatively influence and direct the pendulum of promotion to senior leadership roles (Curtis, 2020).

However, Smith, Watkins, and Carlton (2019) deduced that African American women who displayed atypical behaviors reduced the perceived biases of higher echelon leadership, while increasing opportunities for selection into senior roles (Smith et al., 2019). Likewise, performing research into a marginalized group such as African American women of their experiences offers not only an in-depth analysis of why underrepresentation occurs in an intersectionality form, but possibly prompts discussion amongst scholars on gendered ideologies, the structure of labor, position of power, and cathexis (Wells & Kerwin, 2017).

Adib and Guerrier (2003) performed a narrative study with several African American women that disclosed the salience of shifting identities. The women explained in their experience, whether multiple identities were emphasized or not, minimizing their cultural and ethnic behaviors is one way that African American women attempt to conform to corporate expectations. Moreover, the women noted that corporate America expects senior leadership to exhibit specific predetermined attributes that may not include minorities and women of color to advance toward senior-level positions (Adib & Guerrier, 2003). The researchers discussed women and racial minorities within the senior athletic administrative areas aspiring to obtain an athletic director position at the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) Division 1 level. Their study offered support for underrepresented of people of color, particularly among African American males (AAM). African American women were not viewed as potential senior level administrators.

The Institute for Diversity and Ethics (TIDES) revealed in a 2020-2021 study that educational institutions with Division 1 level departments that received higher grades on

the Racial and Gender Report Card (RGRC) than lower college levels concerning gender and race hiring practices obtained an RGRC score of B-, a significant increase, from 10% to 12% for race. Additionally, educational institutions in the same grading category received an F- for gender, with European Americans holding 10%, Hispanics at 0.9%, and Black women at 1.5%. Still, it only reached slightly higher marks than the college level of C-minus to C-plus, with AAM making up 22.3% of athletic administrative positions and African American women in the Division 1 level holding two spots for every 30 director positions (TIDES, 2021).

African American women (AAW) in the workplace, as mentioned, face specific challenges and barriers that are unique. Thus, it is essential that African American women seek appropriate mentorship and training programs to support obtaining the credentials and experience required to assume senior leadership and boardroom positions (Dickens & Chavez, 2018). Access to resources that support increased educational and job opportunities is essential (Dickens & Chavez, 2018). Furthermore, corporations' acknowledgment of diversity issues impacting African American women, including code-shifting their identity and language is vital to cultural embracement (Smith et al., 2019). Moreover, for corporations to exhibit transparency and receptive attitudes toward diversity, research might be conducted to address the concerns of African American women and marginalized groups; openness is required to yield success in the workforce (Dickens & Chavez, 2018).

Research Questions

The lack of representation of African American women (AAW) senior-level leadership within organizations across multiple industries—specifically in male-

dominated fields and disciplines drew the researcher to investigate the possible cause(s). The impetus for the research was to investigate the phenomenon among participants that exhibit similar characteristics and lived experiences and how those lived experiences affect possible leadership attainment.

According to Creswell and Creswell-Baez (2021), qualitative research assists the researcher in narrowing the purpose statement to specific questions that aggregated data will provide answers for the study verse presenting hypotheses as in quantitative research. The following questions relate to the research:

1. What structural societal barriers factor into the underrepresentation of African American women in senior leadership positions?
2. Are less African American women's engagement in executive and career-enhancing preparatory programs affected by resource attainment?
3. How does genetic endowment factor into individual thinking toward senior leadership attainment?

Significance of Study

The research aimed to explore and expound on previously conducted research and literature in gaining data to assist in furthering the understanding and perspectives of African American women in leadership roles (Smith et al.,2019). Furthermore, the journey in obtainment amidst racism and sexism hurdles, which will contribute to the body of knowledge. In addition, possibly discover during additional research attributes uniquely related to African American women that may not have been fully explored in a phenomenological manner. This investigation may be an underlining factor not

considered concerning African American women's attainment and underrepresentation in senior leadership positions (Smith et al., 2019).

Expanding research to understand the underrepresentation of African American women better leads to examining not only the obvious but imagery; also represents decreased or complete absence of African American women in senior leadership (Sanchez-Hules & Davis, 2010). The study incorporated further research and discussions with concerns about educational opportunities, behaviors, resource allocation, credibility issues, personal appearance, and vernacular directly associated with African American women in the workplace (Sanchez-Hules & Davis, 2010). Furthermore, organizations, corporations, researchers, and scholars investigating the African American woman phenomenon in the workforce to include the challenges and hurdles must examine the organizational objectives. Including hiring, and promoting practices (Wells & Kerwin, 2018), deepening the exposure of the resistive attitudes that permeate corporate America towards African American women.

Significance of the Study to Leadership intends to probe the underrepresentation of African American women in senior leadership roles. Leaders in positions to make change are charged with executing their due diligence to ensure that the workplace atmosphere is that of equality, inclusion, diversity, and safety for freedom of expression (within reason), including addressing concerns of discrimination, sexism, and self-representation (Dickens & Chavez, 2017). It is incumbent on leadership to promote consistency with organizational transparency in conveying a welcoming environment, including training programs (Dickens & Chavez, 2017). Examining the place of African

American women in leadership demands organizations investigate where the possible cracks are that tend to impact African American women (Jones, 2006) heavily.

Keleman, Matthews, Zhang, Bradley and Liu (2020) studied the effect that gender had on diversity when women participated in team performance; they discovered that when women, explicitly minorities, participated, they reportedly described concerns of personal well-being (Miner-Rubio, Settles, and Steward, 2009). Additionally access to leadership opportunities filtered less towards women of color, constraining full engagement in all aspects of leadership roles (Oztot & Finkel, 2015). In today's growing economy and an unavoidable influx of women with increasingly diverse measures, leaders must be cognizant of the inherent biases of African American women. Conscious competence allows for appropriate attention to address the resistive attitudes targeting women of color within the decision-making paradigm (O'Meara, Culpepper, Templeton, 2020). Likewise, Washington and Morgan (2019) posited that microaggressions that African American women encounter, along with double standards and unconscious and conscious biases, are inherited variables that underpin African American women obtaining less support at work (Washington & Morgan, 2019).

Furthermore, despite the decreased support provided, African Americans and women of color continually chip away at the diminishment in training opportunities to support prerequisites demanded for a competitive edge in the attaining of senior positions (Washington & Morgan, 2019). According to the bureau of labor statistics report (BLS, 2022), women employed were estimated at over 64 thousand, with African American women and individuals identifying as Black calculated at 9.8%, while European American women were approximately 78.3% within the management, business,

professional, and financial jobs. In addition, African American women occupied 37.2% as opposed to 46.1 % of European American women in professional fields (BLS, 2022).

Why is this information vital for leadership? Because viewing statistical data that offers a current state of employment and promotion perhaps assists higher echelon leaders with addressing gaps and possible concerns internally of the organization relating to hiring, training, retaining, and promotion of African American women (Washington & Morgan, 2019). Data reveals the grim truth of diversity, race relations, gender, and discrimination issues in those areas, to name a few. It is ultimately up to those in positions of authority to make significant changes in behaviors, attitudes, and policy for the betterment of all they serve internally and externally of the organization with transparency (Oztog & Finkel, 2015). Moreover, acknowledging when good work is performed is essential, including expressing concern when appropriate praise is neglected (Washington & Morgan, 2019).

Nature of the Study in this qualitative composition layout was utilized in this study to cumulate data in a non-numerical form. This style of data collection is a prime manner of investigation of the human sciences and the lived experiences of individuals. Qualitative research allows the voices of participants to be heard (Creswell & Creswell-Baez, 2021). Incorporating a phenomenological approach offers guidance in interviewing participants to include rousing passion in the inquiry of the phenomenon and individuals directly impacted by it (Moustakas, 1994). As it relates to a deeper understanding of areas such as human perceptions and consciousness, phenomenology offers greater delineations between the investigation of human sciences and orthodox firsthand sciences (Moustakas, 1994). Thus, Moustakas (1994) noted that a logical,

methodical, and rational strategy for reflection is indispensable; for researchers to materialize aggregated data to descriptively document experiences connected to the phenomenon.

Understanding the realities of societal discriminatory, essentially prejudicial, and gender-biases attitudes, acts as a positive conduit. Jackson (2020), referencing Merriam and Greiner (2019), ascertained that organizations might contribute to the realignment and upward transition of African American women in senior positions through means of linking them up with mentorship and increasing exposure to training programs (Jackson, 2020). In phenomenological research, this method offers the researcher and participants a focal point to dive deeper into areas that heavily impact a specific group of people. Creswell and Creswell-Baez (2021) explained that qualitative research's criticism directed at phenomenological studies' overwhelmingly is *subjectivity and interpretative aspects* (p. 9).

Creswell and Creswell-Baez (2021) also noted that much discussion of subjectivity and interpretative characteristics refers to the open-ended questioning required for qualitative research. Furthermore, for accuracy of qualitative research to obtain specific codes and themes relating to the phenomenon studied is derived from the participants (Creswell & Creswell-Baez, 2021, p. 9). This qualitative research into the phenomenon of the underrepresentation of African American women in senior leadership positions allowed participants to freely express their feelings and perspectives on the lack of representation. By the researcher executing the method of conducting interviews, including open-ended questioning, the study obtained considerable degrees of enlightenment, contributing to the current body of knowledge.

Because qualitative research depends on the perspectives of the participants' lived experiences, the researcher ensuring that participants are not put in a situation where minimal harm is increased is critical and mandated by the governing bodies of The Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP, 2017). Therefore, before research commences, the researcher must ensure that the participant's role in the study is explained in full detail. Additionally, the reasoning for the proposed investigation, their rights to decline at any point in the study without recourse, and their right to reasonable confidentiality, as this is not a guarantee in certain instances, such as online and group studies, to name a few.

Participants' interviews were reproduced using transcription computer software tools that assisted the researcher in capturing the participants' responses and creating codes and themes, as previously mentioned. Participants for the study were African American women from the Southern California Region ranging in ages between 35-55, currently working or desire leadership roles with aspirations of promotion into senior executive positions in their respective professions.

Research Design

The purpose of this section is to describe the research design to answer research questions concerning the underrepresentation of African American women in senior leadership positions. The study increased awareness and understanding of the limited representation of African American women possessing senior-level roles. For African American and European American women, gender, as explained by Curtis (2017), is the one area where common ground is shared when referencing discrimination and

inequalities with leadership. Their lived experiences while navigating the workforce vary significantly in approach and attitude (Curtis, 2017).

This chapter presents the research method, explanation of phenomenology, relation to investigating the phenomenon, research questions, research design, instrumentation, trustworthiness, triangulation, data collection, and analysis plan. This research design aimed to investigate the lived experiences and lack of representation of African American Women in senior executive leadership roles. This phenomenological research study examines the lived experiences of African American women striving to attain senior leadership roles within non-government organizations (NGOs), including organizations of higher academia.

For this study, the researcher employed interviews of African American women ranged 35-59 in the Southern California region currently in leadership management roles. The research into the phenomenon provided a narrative of participants lived experiences in their current positions with a goal of attaining senior-level leadership roles within their perspective organization in a social science outlook (Nicholls, 2019). In addition, they included their perceived challenges and hurdles uniquely related to African American women and their representation within organizations. Performing a phenomenological investigation affords “firsthand accounts of individual experiences through interviews in a non-judgmental manner acknowledging thoughts, emotions, and feelings with the assurance of no response is good, bad, or right or wrong” (Nicholls, 2019, p. 6).

The researcher intended to investigate and explore how African American women's lived experiences factor into attaining senior-level positions and the associated challenges and barriers affiliated with African American women. At the same time,

noting not all obstacles and difficulties may be investigated or revealed. Therefore, the researcher obtained a more in-depth comprehension of the possible constraints that might hamstring opportunities for African American women when attempting to take a place at the table of senior leadership.

The researcher selected a qualitative phenomenological research design related to investigating African American women's lived experiences to attain senior-level positions. This research design was appropriate because it allowed African American women to offer various perspectives concerning their lived experiences (Mansel & Einon, 2019). In doing so, the researcher aggregated valuable data that contributed to in-depth comprehension of the phenomenon by deciphering and deconstructing terms and phrases utilized (Mansel & Einon, 2019).

Phenomenology relating to the investigation of human scientific research is defined by Neubauer et al. (2019) as a way to approach research that seeks to depict the essence of a phenomenon by investigating the effect of the phenomena from the vantage point of those who have encountered the phenomena. Phenomenology's objective is to depict an experience's significance through a descriptive structure regarding what was experienced and how it was felt. Neubauer et al. (2019) further proclaimed that the various types of phenomenology chosen related to a research methodology rest on the area of research and intended objective. Moreover, Kruger-Ross (2019) ascertained that "phenomenological thinking and methodologies" challenge human beings to account for the experience of phenomena" (p. 4). Kruger-Ross (2019) further explained, referencing Heidegger's claim that truth will be the truth as it relates to individuals within various

settings is their truth of the occurrence and vantage points. Essentially, how one views an experience is directly related to a person's relativity and personal views.

Therefore, continual investigations on the impact of phenomena among individuals remain. Moreover, Kruger-Ross (2019) explained that the significance of researching a specific phenomenon is not to analyze if there is truth in the impact of a phenomenon on human beings. However, the essential portion to comprehend is to what extent an individual can experience the occurrence and if those occurrences can "empirically, ontologically, or logically be (pre)determined" within the study (p. 4).

Smith et al. (2009) proclaimed that interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) within qualitative research design interacts with double hermeneutics, which Moustakas (1994), referencing (Dilthey, 1976), discussed as the skill to read and interpret a text as art that contributes to comprehension and decreases confusion. Thus, permitting transparency of purpose and meaningfully displayed with complete discernment (Moustakas, 1994). The researcher's rationale for employing a qualitative phenomenological research design was that the study provided a figurative safeguarded stage where the co-researchers (participants) voices were heard (Mansel & Einon, 2019).

Furthermore, they shared lived experiences, challenges, and navigational strategies to mitigate advancement hurdles toward attaining senior-level positions. Authors Zeghami & Ahmadi (2021), who conducted a qualitative research study into the lived experiences of spouses of mental disorders, explained that participants revealed their high level of frustration, thoughts, and daily engagement of spouses suffering from various mental disorders. Including a lack of knowledge of appropriate coping mechanisms (Zeghami & Ahmadi, 2021). Thus, by conducting the study, their voices

were free to flow in the various trajectory of concern or expressions. Furthermore, this research methodology might permit the disclosure of themes that tackle structural and societal expectations concerning the investigated phenomenon of underrepresentation of African American women in senior-level leadership positions (Sawyer, 2017).

Methodology employed is dependent on specific research and phenomena investigated (Morgan & Smircich, 1980; Noor, 2008). This research used a qualitative method to ascertain where possible gaps relate to African American women and their voices and presence in senior leadership roles, including corporations that employ diverse environments or are diversifying. The study to address the underrepresented African American women by utilizing current and some seminal literature investigated various scenarios concerning the lack of African American women's presence in senior leadership roles and understanding of the topic investigated (Noor, 2008). It explored challenges that hinder advancement, provided in-depth analysis and possibly added to existing body of knowledge.

Furthermore, the data were aggregated within the research. Special attention was given to how knowledge is assembled (Nicholls, 2019) which offered additional perspectives on the African American women's limited or utterly absent voice at the table and how the lack of representation might have a lasting impact on current and aspiring leaders among African American women in the workplace. The critical attention given to African American women's representation shed light on the unique barriers to their career progression and success (Greenberg & Greenlee, 2022).

Phenomenological research presents an opportunity to *listen and learn from participants* and report their accounts through interviews (Creswell & Creswell-Baez,

2021). Thus, phenomenological research incorporates the scientist finding the members' portrayal of a particular peculiarity through their encounters (Moustakas, 1994).

Interviewing participants' experiences captures the essence of individuals experiencing a phenomenon (Cuthbertson, Robb, & Blair, 2020). The researcher engages with interviewing to understand one's standpoint within the social world (Cuthbertson et al., 2020). Moustakas (1994) constructed a standard operational format detailing seven steps for the researcher to employ when embarking on a phenomenological methodology. Displayed below are Moustakas' (1994) arrangement:

1. Formulate research question(s) and conduct literature review
2. Preparing data collection with gaining consent and honest level of confidentiality
3. Agree to location and time constraints and permission to record session
4. Collect data
5. Conduct formal interview
6. Organize and analyze data
7. Summarize data implications and outcomes of the study (pp. 181-182).

The researcher utilized additional procedures in the gathering and compiling of data. This included developing participant participation criteria, constructing appropriate questioning in-line with the topic investigated, transliteration of interviews, coding data via computer instrumentation to obtain themes, and optimizing themes in cultivating conclusions of the research topic.

Phenomenology allows researchers to explore areas of lived experiences and consciousness relevant to their lives and how those occurrences of the phenomenon

dictated actions or the contrary, which led to the investigation of the lack of African American women in senior leadership roles (DiAngelo, 2018). The phenomenon of underrepresentation of African American women, as well as the navigational challenges and hurdles encountered when confronted with the perceived truth of biases, prejudices, and stereotypes, and when interlocked, restrict access of individuals (Kruger-Ross, 2019). Therefore, factoring societal constraints into what African American women view as hamstrings when attempting to occupy space regardless of field specialty and discipline continues to exist in every institution across social constructs (DiAngelo, 2018).

Population

Participants in this examination were comprised African American women who were now or recently employed in non-government (NGOs), government, and higher learning institutions. Members showed no constraints with participating in research; upon endorsement by the California Baptist University institutional review board (IRB), that "protects human subjects involving sensitive information" (Creswell & Creswell-Baez, 2021, p. 51). The researcher selected African American women currently in mid-level administrative positions with an aspiration of senior leadership positions within U.S. organizations. Creswell and Creswell-Baez (2021) posited that selecting participants appropriate for a study is critical to shedding light on a phenomenon. The African American women were specifically selected for their experience and information concerning the underrepresentation or complete absence of African American women occupying senior leadership positions in corporate America.

Sample

The researcher employed a secondary plan, the snowball sampling process, commonly employed in qualitative studies, as explained by Ritchie, Lewis & Elam (2013). Balikci, Cansoy, and Parlar (2019) utilized convenient sampling and snowball methods when searching for participants in their research to investigate how teachers transition from academia. In their study, Balikci et al. (2018) analyzed pedagogies that encountered challenges during transitioning from teaching to academia.

Balikci et al. (2018) approached research holistically to obtain the teacher's perspectives on their lived experiences with the phenomenon. Thus, Balikci et al. (2018) created their qualitative phenomenological design. Another study performed by Balikci (2019) on school administrators' perspectives assessed potential pedagogue candidates; employed the qualitative phenomenological method to determine the degree of potentiality each candidate possesses.

Administrators provided positive and negative experiences when selecting potential candidates, supporting the discovered top three themes (Balikci, 2019). Moreover, in snowball sampling, participants provide the researcher with additional participants' names, possibly adding value and substance to the study.

Cobern & Adams (2020) proclaimed that researchers must know the appropriate sample size for the proposed research study. Cobern and Adams (2020) argued that previous research on sample size continually questioned what size is valid with interviewing, surveys, and possibly focus groups. The authors discuss avoiding optimizing generalizations concerning interviews and state that "for qualitative researchers, that size is not everything, not even in quantitative research" (p. 74).

Moreover, selecting an appropriate sample size to perform a credible investigation is imperative as the study requires that the researcher provide factual reporting of the sample size concerning the participants and use of judgment in all research (Cobern & Adams, 2020). According to Patton (2014), there is no rule for sample size in qualitative research. Furthermore, the sampling size in qualitative research recommended by scholars who perform this type research suggests that the pool of participants is small to obtain an in-depth investigation (Vasileiou, Barnett, Thorpe, & Young, 2018).

Researchers Leighton, Karadon-Edgen, Sschreidereith, & Foisy-Doll (2021) explained that using the snowball strategy with qualitative research relies on the outreach of participant referrals. Where the researcher does not directly recruit additional participants but contacts others who connect them to research participants who should participate is low (Leighton et al., 2021). According to Creswell and Creswell Baez (2021), the sample size in a phenomenological qualitative research study deduced by multiple components, which include the serpentine surrounding the phenomena investigated, the chosen qualitative form, the abundance and substantial use of aggregated data, and the degree of resources available and employed (Creswell & Creswell Baez, 2021). Purposeful selection of participants associated with the topic investigated possess the required attributes that provide substance and experience is critical (Leighton et al., 2021). Further, Sharma (2017) contended that snowball, while a commonly used strategy in qualitative research, is effective, notes that the strategy holds benefits and drawbacks.

As previously mentioned, one benefit is the researcher's ability to obtain additional and potential participants utilizing referrals from current study participants.

Sharma (2017) also proclaimed that a drawback of snowball sampling is the ineptitude in determining sampling target size errors, citing Marcus, Weigelt, Hergert, Gurt, & Gelleri (2017). That explained in their research that they utilized snowball sampling in the study on multi-source organizations that addressed strategic development and use concerns. Marcus et al. (2017) noted that their investigation focused primarily on snowball samplings concerning potential consequences not addressed in multi-source organizations concerning aggregated data's quality and validity. At the same time, snowball sampling is noted by methodologists as highly used in sociology and associated social sciences with the investigation of specific demographics. Their unique perspectives contribute to the current and unexplored body of knowledge, including epistemology on human behaviors and attributes of participants that support the significance of research (Marcus et al., 2017).

Once the researcher applies the purposeful sampling method, an explanation of the research requires the potential study participants. In the current study, the researcher optimized purposeful sampling to pinpoint suitable African American women with the required knowledge, vantage points, and lived experiences to describe the phenomenon. Concerning underrepresented African American women effectively and efficiently in senior leadership roles in the Southern California region, sampling size played a significant role.

Patton (2014) contended that the logic, magnitude, and perceptiveness of qualitative studies are related to the copious amount of information engendered and the competencies of the researcher (Patton, 2014). Ensuring that targeted participants fully understand the study and objectives and goals are significant and must be approached

with a neutral tone and reflect the genuine and authentic perspectives of the participants (Marcus et al., 2017). Phenomenological qualitative investigations, according to Moustakas (1994), contend that "evidence obtained from phenomenological research derives from first-person reports of life experiences" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 84). Thus, in researching African American women's perspectives, data aggregated must have been first-person driven.

Moustakas (1994), citing (Husserl, 1970), proclaimed that in research participant investigation, the investigation is to observe and describe in completeness what was observed, just as it appears, in such a manner that is genuine of an individual's perspective (p. 93). In a qualitative research methodology, the researcher can access a large scale of available methodologies to investigate a phenomenon (Neubauer, Witkop, & Varpio, 2019). Neubauer et al. (2019) explained that the researcher must fully comprehend the type of phenomenology selected before selecting an appropriate research method. There should be no disinclination towards the philosophies underpinning such methodology (Neubauer et al., 2019). Furthermore, Moustakas (1994) ascertained that phenomenology essences derive from the researcher's ability to investigate individuals by way of "naively and fresh again" through genuine awareness (Moustakas, 1994, p. 101). Thus, investigating participants in the content of what and how the individuals experienced or experienced the phenomena investigated (Neubauer et al., 2019).

Crowell (2020) contended that in qualitative phenomenology research, when examining the extent of structure and consciousness on the researcher's awareness relating to participants, the investigation should be executed in such a manner of ontology (the study of what is; and being) for the participant. Furthermore, Edmund Husserl, one

of the four most recognized names (Heidegger, Sartre, and Merleau-Ponty) of phenomenology, provided a highly structured study of human beings with phenomenology that expanded from philosophy vernacular to ontology. Husserl studied and approached phenomenology in the context of quintessence awareness relating to individuals' lived experiences.

Criteria for Participation

The African American women participating in this study ranged between 35-59 years old with a minimum of five years of experience operating within mid-level leadership positions with the aspiration of attaining senior-level leadership positions.

The chosen participants operate in NGOs' leadership positions within non-profit and for-profit organizations across various specialties, departments, and industries, such as higher learning institutions and industries. The participants requested by the researcher utilized consent to ensure that participants met specific requirements to engage in the study. The researcher provided a consent form and obtained a data demographics questionnaire that allowed the researcher to determine eligibility before conducting face-to-face and over-the-phone interviews. The questionnaire structure was formulated based on the pertinent reviewed literature in semi-structured and structured interviewing as appropriate and available for the participants. The researcher ensured that all consent forms were received, screened, and documented with participants' approval to be interviewed following proper ethical standards with the governing bodies for the research of individuals to support a rich and diversified pool of participants.

Guidelines ensure participants are not incentivized to participate in the research to obtain intended data from participants. The researcher optimized E-mailing of

participants to obtain a prospective sample size. Cobern and Adams (2020) posited that participant interaction within any study must follow specific ethical guidelines to protect individuals against potentially exposed harmful information as a result of the study by the researcher. When a researcher is going to conduct a phenomenological qualitative study that entails interviewing participants Cobern & Adams (2020) contend that following specific guidelines assists researchers in maintaining the integrity of research for participants and the overall study.

One type of reporting for qualitative research concerning interviewing participants is the Consolidated Criteria for Reporting Qualitative Research (COREQ). COREQ was incorporated in the study by authors Baatiema, de Graft Aikins, Sarfo, Abimbola, Ganle, & Somerset (2020) when researching improving care for individuals with low to middle incomes that suffered a stroke. Moreover, related to the study performed, Baatiema et al. (2020) acknowledged the importance of ensuring the research intentions were transparent and the participants engaged freely without pressure or incentivization. The researcher in the current study knew a few participants; however, participation in the study was voluntary, although some were familiar with the researcher's goal of investigating the underrepresentation of African American women in senior leadership positions.

Baatiema et al. (2020) discussed the possibility of participants being familiar with the intended research due to their association with the fields studied and previous research associated with the current investigation. The required documents to conduct an ethically aligned interview of participants contain specific areas completed to ensure complete disclosure of the researcher's intent and development (Cobern & Adams, 2020).

Authors Reuben, Danladi, Saleh & Ejembi (2021) argued, in research of participants on the knowledge, attitudes, and practices relating to COVID-19 illustrate that before interviewing participants, Reuben et al. (2021) explained consent obtained along with identifying a preferred age range supports the intended research. Reuben et al. (2021) utilized the snowball method and social media platforms that assisted in spreading their survey within the states of north-central Nigeria, including territories of Kogi, Nasarawa, and Benue. This methodology was employed as a backup to obtain the required sample size to adequately investigate the underrepresentation of African American women in senior leadership roles.

Neubauer et al. (2019) ascertained that performing studies of lived experiences of individuals relating to a specific phenomenon is a challenge due to surfaced emotions. Literature on several areas such as apperception (consciousness), sense (the phenomena provided in an empirical presence of perception), and imagination (requisite for a conglomerate of comprehension) contributes to unfurl of phenomenal consciousness. By the pathways of investigation of human sciences and use of philosophical attributes which Moustakas (1994), citing Heidegger (1977), ascertained, phenomena are the architecture for human science and the necessary foundation for obtaining wisdom (Moustakas 1994).

What Scholars Think about Human Exploration

As explained by Moustakas (1994), the term transcendental phenomenology elaborated on Husserl's declaration of the purpose and importance of understanding that transcendental phenomenology explains the attempts to eradicate possible assumptions and postulations. Neubauer et al. (2019), referencing Husserl's position on assumptions

in research on a phenomenon, should remain steady on those individuals' perceptions and vantage points. Therefore, Neubauer et al. (2019) posited that genuine and uninterrupted analysis without prejudice, speculations, and assumptions to obtain and maintain the investigation's integrity on the researcher's part, including the participants is essential (Neubauer et al., 2019). Thus, scholars must comprehend that neutrality eliminates any bias within phenomenological qualitative research, allowing the richness of participants' experiences to thrive (Neubauer et al., 2019). As mentioned earlier, participant criteria must be examined thoroughly to avoid incorporating individuals who conflict.

Mannathoko & Mamvuto (2018) proclaimed that ensuring participants are engaged efficiently in the assessment process is critical to aggregating purposively selected individuals; to ensure the richness of the study. Conversely, they delineate that when participants are not fully engaged in the objectives and inquired assessment about fact-finding, the research needs to provide adequate and substantial data, which yields a weak study.

Mannathoko & Mamvuto (2018) conducted a qualitative study of 12 purposively chosen pedagogues from four schools, including four pedagogues that held specialties within functional areas of arts and educational design and assessment. Their study discovered that students regrettably had minimal participation in their artistic and practical work assessed due to minimal engagement, which resulted in a lackluster opposite of the investigation into art educational formation. Additionally, assessment for improvement, implication, and relevancy of evaluation within students' self-assessment includes the reduced insight accompanying the "visual manifestation of the process," offering genuine analysis (Mannathoko & Mamvuto, 2018, p. 2).

Further, Donkor, Lockett Aranda, Vanderpuye, & Phillips (2020) conducted their research on alternative educational programs surrounding negative interactions between students and schoolteachers. They explained that obtaining efficient participant criteria for both students and school pedagogues underpinned the research relating to students' negative interactions with school officials and the impact on program success (Donkor et al., 2020). Similarly, Murray & Holt (2014) proclaimed that program and policy improvement, specifically identifying practical issues relating to student-teacher interactions, is critical. Full disclosure and comprehension are paramount; thus, "program completion is more likely to occur when all involved are well-vetted and informed" (p. 4).

Qualitative research methodology supports a structure of investigation to offer explanations of the challenges to women, specifically African American women (Murray & Holt, 2014). There is a dearth of literature on African American women in senior leadership roles that span disciplines and fields. This initiated the use of qualitative methodology into a deeper examination of the underrepresentation of African American women attaining senior leadership positions, while navigating the 'outsider in' footing within the management realm (Smith et al., 2019).

Quantitative methodology seeks the true essence of the phenomena and the impact on a specific group of people. However, a quantitative study would fail to capture the subjective side and lived experiences that support the exploration of African American women's lack of presence in senior leadership roles (Sawyer, 2017; Smith et al., 2009). Discovering the necessity of particular vernacular and behaviors viewed by those experiencing the phenomena is essential for African American women to attain

senior leadership roles within organizations. Jones, Rodger, Ziviani, and Boyd (n.d.) contended that scholars' quantitative research is scientific. Therefore, laid-out problem and purpose statements and methodology employed are essential. Including research and participant questions directing a specific trajectory of intended investigation supports processes and the systematic approach required to develop a rich and robust study (Jones et al., n.d.). That explores legitimate accounts of the impacts of life situations by utilizing narrative interviews to include videotaping, producing text that the researcher interprets in comprehending the participant's expressions (Lindseth & Norberg, 2004) from sense to reference. Examining what is expressed and what that expression is referencing a specific engagement captures knowledge and understanding of individuals associated with the investigated phenomena (Jones et al., n.d.).

Moreover, Jones et al. (n.d.) explained that hermeneutic phenomenology encompasses interpretive and descriptive components. That coincides with the researcher obtaining homogeneous, sound, and conceivable facets of the participant's narrative of lived experiences contributing to the explored phenomenon's attitudes, actions, and behaviors (Lindseth & Norberg, 2004).

Providing clear explanations and discussion on participants' emotions in past and present situations surrounding the phenomenon-including more probability instead of simple continuums between binaries such as "right, wrong, genuine, and false divergences." (Kruger-Ross, 2019, p. 2). In constructing an appropriate methodology, the researcher examined the rationale of the chosen strategy of exploring and providing a voice and platform in which African American women are allowed to reveal negative and positive personal accounts. That is, relative to their exposure, response, and truth

concerning the limited advancement of African American women to senior leadership positions. Moreover, Crowell (2020) avowed that hermeneutics supports the "thinking of the individual, society, and additional individuals relating to interdependence to which every phenomenon belongs" (p. 2).

Instrumentation

The researcher was the primary instrument for studying the underrepresentation of African American women in senior leadership roles. Furthermore, the researcher utilized both Zoom and teleconferencing interviewing, as requested and necessary. The concept measured by the researcher was to incorporate descriptive and interpretative strategies to delineate lived experiences of African American women in the underrepresentation of senior roles phenomenon through open-ended questioning (Moustakas, 1994). The researcher captured and preserved raw data through electronic programming, including written notes and tapped sessions (agreed upon by participants) from teleconferencing. Participants were given consent forms detailing the study. The privacy clause expressed that no personal information from the interview would be shared or used in any other manner besides the current study. Moreover, the researcher would obtain permission from any external instrumentation included in the study, which is incorporated in "Appendix B" detailing the questions asked by the researcher to participants.

Data Collection

A qualitative composition was selected for this research. Researchers may employ many methods in research to increase a study's credibility, validity, and overall quality (Ellis, 2021). One is triangulation, a technique most closely associated with validity and reliability that utilizes several sources and methods within a study (Sekaran

& Bougie, 2010). In phenomenological qualitative research, the richness of the study depends on the researcher's ability to capture the genuine and raw essence of individuals' lived experiences. Obtaining data from multiple sources adds significant substance; and displays the researcher's investigation in depth (Kursuncu & Bastemur, 2019).

For the research on the under-representation of African American women in senior leadership roles, the researcher employed member checking and validity to obtain a more accurate account of the lived and experienced phenomenon. Adding substantial depth to the study is fundamental. This reassures readers that conducted research is high quality, and data obtained through multiple channels supports the robustness of reporting findings (Ellis, 2021).

Validity

According to Creswell & Creswell Baez (2021), validity in qualitative research means the researcher's findings are accurate or plausible (p. 199). For the researcher to attain investigative validity, the researcher aggregates applicable facts to maintain the richness and not enervated the investigation (Cooper & Schindler, 2006). Thus, the greater the validity evaluation, the lower the assessed test will have inadequate interpretational results (Beck, 2020). Because validity assists the researcher with analyzing aggregated data, validity consistency contributes to content appropriateness, justification, and findings. "Common ground for qualitative researchers has previously related to the use of theoretical concepts and validity." (Creswell & Creswell Baez, 2021, p. 262).

Internal Validity refers to confidence within the casualty setting (Sekaran & Bougie, 2010). Beck (2020) contended that validity consists of more than a manner of

evaluation, but rather an explication in investigating relationship formation of characteristics and behaviors, medical studies, and specifications within groups. Furthermore, Onwuegbuzie (2000) explained that an experiment is valid since validity cause-effect relationships developed. The author argued that the results are justifiable only because of a manipulated independent variable. Similarly, Sekeran & Bougie (2010, p. 234) explained that internal validity is universal amongst indistinguishable organizational environments (i.e., external validity). Therefore, according to Beck (2020), content validity should measure what it claims to measure (p. 2).

External Validity relies on the researcher initiating an audit within the study conducted; Creswell & Creswell Baez (2021) explained the researcher from an outsider's perspective and cross-check the qualitative data for accuracy. Furthermore, research richness and strength increase when an unbiased reviewer examines data aggregated and throughout the methodology to researchers' findings (Creswell & Creswell Baez, 2021). Frederick, Burns, Langberg, and Becker (2021) ascertained in their research into adult concentration inventory (ACI), which examined the self-reported occurrence of sluggish cognitive tempo. With their study being the first of its kind, the researchers employed external measures to ensure their findings were robust reporting and added validity to the investigation. For this investigation, the researchers carefully selected research questions that played a significant role in the research design, which supported external audits and assisted the researcher in addressing the content of the study. Moreover, Kyngas et al. (2019) discussed dependability encompassing an audit trail which is essentially all field data in the form of written and audio (transcribed and verbally expressed) from

participants obtained by the researcher and scrutinized from the initial stages to account for findings.

Having credibility in a study examines any assumptions identify and acknowledge the unknown elements and biases that possibly contribute to the lackluster inquiry. Such that, researchers' credibility must not rely on assumptions alone but encompass tested validity (Cartwright, 2019).

Transferability Application

Applying transferability of research findings is defined by Kyngas et al. (2019) as findings that are also apropos within other contexts. Moreover, Nordstrom (2015) posited the term as not engaging in making broad claims concerning the body of research. Therefore, within this study, the researcher utilized transferability to provide specific revelations based on the evidence of firsthand field research on the phenomenon as told by participants, which allows the data to, in essence, speak for itself. In doing so, offered a structure that created neutrality on the part of the researcher and readers are not inundated with opinioned-based data that weakens, if not discredits the research.

Confirmability Application

Stenfors, Kajamaa, & Bennett (2020) defined *confirmability* as having an intelligible connection or relationship between the researcher's data and findings. Stenfors et al. proclaimed that one manner to identify research that possesses confirmability is the author's utilization of intricate descriptions and incorporation of statements of scholars relating to the study. Sabanci & Bulut's (2018) research on student development amongst gifted students in continual academic enrichment activities is an example. In this study, the researcher applied confirmability to display the repeated steps

in checking that the data connection and findings were valid and comprehensible.

Moreover, Stenfors et al. (2020) explained that conducting checks and balances between data and findings increases the credibility of a study.

Reliability

According to Creswell & Creswell Baez (2021), reliability provides a measure of consistency among researchers embarking on qualitative research involving database analysis and coding. Doing so adds to the refinement and accuracy of the qualitative study primarily due to a few individuals offering their input concerning coding examination (Creswell & Creswell Baez, 2021). Moreover, by incorporating a multi-layer vetting system in place, the reliability degree of the research reveals considerable consistency, clarity, and relevance to the body of knowledge in analysis (Beck, 2020).

Because multiple researchers are highly likely to have varying degrees of interpretation within the same data set when analyzing, Creswell & Creswell Baez (2021) explains the suggestion of obtaining an intercoder agreement. As explained by Kuckartz (2014), this is a highly recommended agreement is when submitting work for publishing in a field mostly quantitatively (Creswell & Creswell Baez, 2021). Oversight and monitoring of codes are essential in qualitative research. It supports necessary procedural changes and allows coders to compare the qualitative database, which is repeatedly suggested to provide critical information regarding the study (Creswell & Creswell Baez, 2021, p. 208).

Beck (2020) utilized reliability measures when assessing psychological and educational test results and the experts' role in the study. Beck proclaimed that pragmatic concerns would arise when formulating a test relating to cost and time. Moreover, the

critical need to ensure that specific criteria are met, sustained, and correlated to the test analysis is essential. When the question of monetary constraints arises during constructing exams and the continuity of reliability in research, Beck asserts that maintaining the reliability criterion is critical as content reliability and an assortment of bracketing.

Bracketing

Emiliussen, Engelsen, Christiansen, and Harnow Klausen (2021) contended that bracketing holds a significant position within phenomenology and surrounds Husserl's approach to phenomenology research. Bracketing is the art of reporting lived experiences of individuals (Creswell & Creswell Baez, 2021) and assisting the researcher with discussing the research topic (Moustakas, 1994). Furthermore, Emiliussen et al. (2021) note that bracketing supports the researcher in putting aside prejudices, biases, and researchers' positions relating to the phenomenon investigated. As explained by Emiliussen et al. (2021), bracketing is when the inquiry partially eliminates potentially deleterious preconceptions that may inhibit the richness of the research phenomenon. When embeddedness (the extent to which one's attitude is linked to or associated with a cognitive structure of memory) of preconceptions occurs without acknowledging existence, the result of the study perhaps is tainted and skewed poorly (Emiliussen et al., 2021).

Emiliussen et al. (2021) illustrated in their research an example of the embeddedness of a researcher on the topic of jealousy, citing Paley (2017). Using authors Amedeo Giorgio and a co-author gave the test to analyze the same empirical aggregated data. The result of revealed that both Giorgio and the co-author arrived at

significantly different interpretations of the data despite proclaiming that each scrutinized and employed identical analytical methods (Emiliussen et al., 2021, p. 4).

The researchers supported the argument of Heidegger's student, Gadamer, on the research on human understanding, behavioral attitudes, experiences, and the notion that preconceptions are not all necessarily negative. Furthermore, a rebuttal of the thought that an individual should cast aside all preconceptions in research to decrease error is not only impossible. However, it is, as explained by Gadamer, a prejudice of a more harmful form (Emiliussen et al., 2021, p. 3).

Epoche

Epoche (A-poh-kay) is a Greek term that means freedom from suppositions (Moustakas, 1994). Phenomenological research encompasses a technique of using epoche rooted in the reduction of preconceptions on the part of the researcher and as noted by Emiliussen et al. (2021). With an expectation of phenomenology research, the investigators set aside their preconceived notions as dubious in deciding if epoche aligns with Husserlian's beliefs. Epoche demands that researchers approach their study with a fresh perspective (Dowling, 2007), one that allows the flow of aggregated data to illustrate uncompromised feedback (Moustakas, 1994), despite the known reality of the researcher's possible association, knowledge, and preconceived notion(s) related to the study.

When examining a phenomenon's complexities, explicitly investigating the lived experiences and the individuals impacted requires a degree of separation from the researcher's side as the main instrument to maintain impartiality. Moreover, (Dowling, 2007; Moustakas, 1994) proclaimed that challenges with achieving epoche lie with the

researcher's ability to be diaphanous with ourselves. However, epoche is not without criticism related to bracketing and to what extent the lines blur concerning genuine use of the term as mentioned earlier, applied to the phenomenon. Thus, alluding to difficulty with achieving full epoche in exiling the consciousness of self in a study, which Moustakas (1994), referencing Husserl, states in a passage explaining the truth surrounding consciousness and self-awareness relating to transcendental consciousness research states: "What appears before me and in my consciousness is something I know is present regardless of how many others perceive that phenomenon differently" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 87).

Member Checking

According to Ramji & Etowa (2018), member checking is an effective technique to establish the credibility of study findings. It serves as an essential function of participants adding trustworthiness through triangulation to include analysis that furthers data aggregation specifically concerning recommendations. These researchers contended that member checking assisted in their research of international nurses in the workplace by ensuring the participants have a voice concerning accurate representation post-interviewing.

Furthermore, member checking, in this case, ensures that when the researcher interviewed nurses on the issues surrounding workplace diversity of nursing, skill assessment, continuing education pursuit, retention, and recruitment, member checking functioned as a keeping the researcher honest (Ramji & Etowa, 2018). It is essential to allow the participants to engage comfortably in conversation that they deem appropriate

and necessary. To get the researcher's experience with the topic and how they reacted when faced with challenges concerning international nursing issues.

Ethical Standards

In this section of the paper, the researcher discusses the relevancy and importance of possessing and maintaining a high level of confidentiality of the participant and obtaining informed consent before conducting and engaging with any participant associated with this research.

Confidentiality

Protocols in research require specific attention to detail. The research must include a baseline that ensures the researcher has taken careful steps to address trust and any ethical issues that may arise (Creswell & Creswell Baez, 2021). Confidentiality is described by Ngozwana (2015), citing authors McMillian & Schumacher (2006), as where the environment and participants' identity are not disclosed within the research; nor shared externally of the research paradigm to include all additional reporting. Ngozwana (2015), in her reporting, utilized a code numbering format in which she, as the researcher, was able to differentiate among the participants and their shared expressions, feelings, and ideas when transcribing and translating aggregated data.

Because confidentiality is a central and critical aspect of research of any kind in the Western World, confidentiality protocol mitigates possible issues. However, this starkly contrasts African territory's view of confidentiality and employment (see Department of Health, South Africa [DHSA], 2015). In this investigation, the researcher utilized protocols as required by governing bodies to protect the integrity of research and volunteer participants.

Moreover, by establishing and maintaining research protocols when interviewing participants, the researcher perhaps avoided inflicting any secondary trauma considered sensitive to the participant (Kiyimba & O'Reilly, 2016). Participants were provided a private one-on-one meeting room to ensure confidentiality and guaranteed privacy during the interviewing process. This included consent that laid out the expected day of the interview and the participant's rights to stop during questioning or elect not to answer a specific question(s) in part or all together, and end the interview without retribution or defamatory commentary on the side of the researcher.

Informed Consent

Informed consent, as mentioned previously, provides the participant with transparency in the study (Creswell & Creswell Baez, 2021). Furthermore, ease to not being informed on the day of the interview and leading up to expectations, identifying objectives, and reiterating that engagement for the participant, is entirely voluntary. This researcher sent participants the consent form "Appendix C," which was filled out to accept the consent and sent back to the researcher before proceeding with the study. The researcher utilized a coding system that only identified participants by a given number (Ngzowana, 2015), ensuring confidentiality and discussing with the participant before questioning.

Data Analysis

The data analysis development utilized within the study was Moustakas's (1994) tempering of the van Kaam method and exploration of phenomenological data. According to Creswell & Creswell, Baez (2021) posit that researchers new to qualitative research and data collection must comprehend the significance and essential elements of

the data collection section. Furthermore, Sekaran & Bougie (2010) proclaimed that qualitative research possibly presupposes repeated measures of sampling and aggregated data to include data evaluation.

The qualitative analysis was initiated after only the post-collection of some of the data (Sekaran & Bougie, 2010). Therefore, the researcher's cognizance of the rules and guidelines driving a practical activity and efficiently executed study was vital. Sekaran and Bougie (2010) explained qualitative research difficulty in terms of conducting analytical method(s) due to qualitative analysis not following the standard operating procedure to step-by-step guidelines, albeit scholars such as Moustakas' (1994) offered modifications to previous scholars' checklists.

In contrast to quantitative evaluation, Sekaran & Bougie (2010) ascertained there is a "proportionately limited developed and commonly accepted strategy routinely established for qualitative analysis" (p. 370). The researcher conducted analysis proceedings; after data was obtained from the interview of participants, the researcher utilized the recordings and hand-written field notes.

Once the analytical portion started, the researcher's position toward the investigation was set aside (although not completely). Thereby assisting in alleviating bias, preconceived notions, prejudices, and learned behavior because of upbringing, exposure to the phenomenon, and cultural and religious beliefs. The researcher employed the technique of epoche, which Moustakas (1994) contended does not remove all prejudgment, biases, and perspectives; however, the researcher must continually practice neutrality concerning the study.

The researcher maintained the focus of the investigation on the participant. Upon completion of interviewing and transcript, data was uploaded into NVivo computer programming, where themes were formulated by coding (Creswell & Creswell Baez, 2021, p. 159). The researcher selected NVivo over other programming software due to several factors that involved the ease of integrating data, storing, and organizing, writing and managing memos, locating and sorting textual information, and comparing and connecting corresponding code labels (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Furthermore, Nvivo offers a means of streamlining data and safeguarding aggregated data within a singular portfolio. Classifying codes into themes required the researcher to process data and establish an analytical strategy, such as determining the most appropriate critical framework regarding coding (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Thereby, coding rules incorporated into the study assisted with mapping data terms into themes formulating notable quotes and representational diagrams connecting relationships amongst themes (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Moreover, the researcher was able to employ analytic strategies such as those of Madison (2005, 2012) that evaluated individuals and their culture in an ethnographic manner.

Similarly, according to Creswell & Poth (2018), scholars such as Wolcott (2010) approach human studies in an ethnographic manner more so applied to case study research. However, Creswell & Poth (2018) ascertained this application as a valuable tool in the knowledge with the investigation of individual and cultural relations. Creswell & Poth also mentioned related authors such as Huberman & Miles (1994). These researchers discussed the significance of selecting and maintaining a systematic approach when researching a phenomenon of lived experiences. The potential adverse outcomes

when a detailed systematic approach is not established nor followed by the researcher, essentially devaluing the research and potential richness of content obtained by the participants (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

However, data coding may cause issues when attempting to decipher information if the researcher's input data contains prefigured or emergent elements (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Creswell and Creswell Baez (2021) discuss using predetermined codes as not optimal as it does not allow the theme formation to occur naturally and genuinely. Developing and accessing interpretational ideas stemming from participants' input is complex concerning appropriate information, such as cultural themes, stories, and experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Raskind, Sheldon, Comeau, Cooper, Griffith, and Kegler (2019) contended that data analysis for a researcher, whether experienced or beginner, poses difficulty.

Data analysis is the least understood yet the most critical aspect of research, requiring a rigorous evaluation to illuminate the complexity encompassed within human behavior. Including relationship interactions and development offers the participant a voice in research (Raskind et al., 2019). Representation and display of aggregated data coincide with the chosen software programs on the part of the researcher as he or she must determine how most effectively and efficiently to represent and provide assimilation of information collected (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Raskind et al., 2019). Obtaining the absolute raw and genuinely lived experiences demands that descriptive theme analysis is performed in a structure that allows the individual to be present, containing all associated perceptions of realities. To include actions that directed the pathway trajectory relating to

common threads in an individual's conscious experience related to the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994, p. 71).

Raskind et al. (2019), citing authors Saldana & Omasta (2018), contended that there is no correct method for qualitative research. Although, according to research expressed (Moustakas, 1994; Creswell & Poth, 2018; Saldana & Omasta, 2018), the driving forces behind qualitative investigation lies in the chosen framework that is rooted in the research questions, objectives of the research, pool of participants selected, to include the purpose. Moreover, how research into chosen phenomenon investigated contributes to the current body of knowledge and future research (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Moustakas (1994) explained, referencing Husserl's position of a participant's presence, bringing attention to not losing sight that an individual's perception encompasses awakened memories, feelings, and judgment. In this instance, it constitutes a conscious reality for them, and comprehending the participant's emotional fixation on an event may radically differ amongst the participants (Moustakas, 1994, p. 71).

Raskind et al. (2019), referencing O'Brien, Harris, Beckman, Reed, & Cook (2014), posited that standard reporting of qualitative research within the selected methodology is more than mere descriptive jargon; the method must be justified to display the relevancy of research (O'Brien et al., 2014). Specifying methodology, Raskind et al. (2019) ascertained that research strengthens and enthralls the researcher's cognitive approach relating to assumptions, limitations, and implications of the selected technique (p. 6). That possesses an eidetic process of understanding participants' appearances, movements, and body language relating to the phenomenon.

Data analysis involves multiple steps associated with underlying paradigms in the data collection by accounting findings (Raskind et al., 2019). Thus, data andragogy is critical concerning the research framework (Bradbury-Jones, Breckenridge, Clark, Herber, Wagstaff, Taylor, 2017; Creswell & Poth, 2018; Patton, 2015).

The connection of data collection in human science research relating to phenomenology stems from the researcher's inquiry by interviewing the participants with specifically designed questions driving the trajectory of discovery. That provides the research with distinct meaning derived from the formation of themes that support further investigation and arouses analysis into the lived experiences of the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994, p. 59).

The researcher employed Moustakas's (1994, pp. 120-121) process of analyzing data for this phenomenological study:

- listed and populated rudimentary categories,
- condensed and eradicated themes,
- clustered the core themes of experience occurrence,
- organized and checked for explicitly and compatible statements associated with thematic expressions,
- formulated verbatim textual descriptions,
- formulated structural descriptions, and
- amalgamated textured-structured and distinct descriptions incorporating segment and themes.

The researcher, upon completion of obtaining participants' verbatim transcripts, read and analyzed the contents utilizing Moustakas's (1994) modified Van Kaam method of analysis for this study as outlined below:

1. The initial step of the analysis was horizontalization. The researcher maintained neutrality in recorded interviews, thus, allowing participants to express their experiences while granting each comment equal value and promoting a smooth transition between participants and researcher.

2. The researcher deconstructed the verbatim transcripts of semi-structured interviews obtained from participants, specifically African American women, and the impact and experiences of the phenomenon. In the deconstruction phase, the researcher scrutinized every sentence and phrase and elicited associated body language from research questions in the interview. The researcher closely examined each discovered theme repeated throughout the recorded interviews as it related to participants' vantage points, likeness to other participant phrases of experiences, actions, and behavior coinciding with addressing and navigating those experiences. The researcher also provided an interpretation of the developed themes.

3. The researcher provided a litany of remarkable affirmations from the participants, including how they felt connected to the phenomenon and how their experiences influenced their journey to attaining senior leadership positions. Moreover, the researcher ensured redundancy of verbiage was not included.

4. The fourth step demanded the researcher to search for statements made by participants that were compatible with the identified themes and structured in an

organized manner that allowed the researcher to determine what statements represented common themes pertinent to the researcher's investigation.

5. In the fifth step, the researcher constructed the semi-structured text from participants in a manner that distinguished identified themes between the textual descriptions.

In a case study concerning insomnia, transcriptions described the emotional state the individual studied endured concerning a severe lack of sleep. In the research, the documentation of insomnia revealed three main areas: one, occurrences during lack of sleep; two, thoughts and feelings exhibited because of lack of sleep; and three, challenges faced by individuals having to face insomnia (Moustakas, 1994, p. 133).

6. The sixth step laid out the detailed capturing of a phenomenon within the structural manner. Moustakas (1994) proclaimed that individual structural descriptions support the participants' experiences underpinning the scintillating emotions concerning a specific phenomenon. Moreover, Moustakas (1994), referencing Aanstoos's (1987) research on 'Being Left Out,' discussed a participant's texts and captured a succinct but informative textual description that revealed the participants' situation, condition, and relationship to the investigated phenomenon of exclusion.

7. The seventh and final step of Moustakas's (1994) phenomenological approach involved the blended textual organized and apparent descriptions relating to the underrepresentation of African American women in senior leadership roles. With this step, the researcher examined both constructs of the essence of the experienced phenomenon. Furthermore, Moustakas (1994) described the connection between combined textual and structural areas by referencing Yoder's (1990) research on guilt and

the effects on both the physical and mental states should guilt be left alone and undisputed. It was noteworthy that Yoder (1990) proclaimed that the mere discussions and acknowledgment of guilt would assist in the participant's recovery of self. However, the author noted that individuals face guilt and acknowledge that the pressure and isolation foster individuals to obtain support which increases the attainment of self and a sense of being at peace with oneself (Moustakas, 1994, p. 189).

Limitations

Limitations in research are expected and commonly noted in a researcher's body of work (Moustakas, 1994). In this qualitative investigation, the researcher identified some restrictions. One was the overall sum of participants encompassed in the study and their demographics. Additionally, the limitations of qualitative research were conducting interviews and the length of time and transcription required for each interview (Creswell & Creswell-Baez, 2021). Moreover, the researcher organizing data and ensuring participants approval of transcription before advancing in the study may have added to the control within the study (Moustakas, 1994). Participants' accounts foster the subjectivity of the research and whether full transparency with truthful experiences was displayed (Moustakas, 1994). Furthermore, in the restricted scope of the interviewed participants, with all framing from African descent, ethnicity was limited to include gender as an additional constraint.

Summary

The chapter concluded with the researcher discussing the research and design selected for the phenomenological qualitative investigation into the underrepresentation of African American women in senior leadership roles. The chapter also detailed the

best-chosen method to study African American women's lived experiences. It included the importance of full study disclosure, obtaining the consent of participants, researcher's role and responsibilities before, during, and after the study was concluded. Additionally, participant sampling and parameters were required to participate in the study, ensuring no coercion or promises were made on the researcher's side.

Chapter three outlined how data is aggregated, analyzed, and recorded utilizing Moustakas's (1994) modified Van Kaam method within a study. Additionally, the chapter highlighted the importance of validity and member checking, obtaining appropriate documentation, and vetting participants, ensuring research guidelines were met. Furthermore, the researcher discussed the snowball method that afforded the researcher the ability to capture potential participants to add richness and insight to the investigated phenomenon.

Moreover, the chapter included a discussion of software employed for accurately interviewing participants with identifying themes, which assisted the researcher in correctly pinpointing them in an organized manner relevant to the investigation relating to participant statements. Lastly, the chapter offered a framework for conducting human subject research ethically and voluntarily.

CHAPTER 4: RESEARCH, DATA COLLECTION, AND FINDINGS

Overview

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to investigate the lived experiences of 11 participants of African American descent all over the age of 30 in various leadership positions currently or previously (e.g., senior regional manager, team lead, department head, etc.) with a minimum of five (5) years within their respective fields. Participants were posed with 16 investigative questions allowing for expression of work and lived experiences from the African American women's perspective. The researcher utilized Zoom and phone conferencing that consisted of open-ended questions that were recorded sessions. The aggregated data was organized and coded utilizing NVivo 10 and Microsoft Excel Program (Office 365). The researcher employed Moustakas's (1994) modification of van Kaam's analysis of data as follows:

- Listing and Preliminary Grouping
- Reduction and Elimination
- Clustering and Thematizing
- Validation
- Individual Textual Description
- Individual Structural Description
- Textual-Structural Description (pp. 120-121).

Purpose Statement

This study aimed to conduct a phenomenological qualitative study to identify the under representation of African American women and their presence in senior leadership roles, including discussions of organizations that employed diverse environments or were

in the process of diversification. The study addressed the underrepresented African American women including current literature that offered an analytical and comprehensive view on the lack of African American women's presence in senior leadership roles. The study explored the obstacles that impeded the advancement of African American women, which speaks to the underrepresentation. This qualitative phenomenological exploration study of the underrepresentation of African American women in senior leadership reflected progress hindrance. The dearth of advancement of senior leadership roles was examined by providing in-depth analysis that could add to the existing body of knowledge. Furthermore, the data aggregated within the research might have offered additional perspectives on the African American women's limits or utter absence, and how the lack of representation might have a lasting impact on current and aspiring leaders among African American women in the workplace.

The critical attention given to African American women's representation sheds light on the unique barriers to career progression and success (Finkel, 2019). For both African American and European American women, gender, as explained by Curtis (2017), is the one area where common ground is shared when referencing discrimination and inequalities with leadership. The contrast, in this case, is the lived experiences navigating the workforce, which notably vary significantly in approach and attitude (Curtis, 2017).

Curtis (2017) declared when discussing and examining the lived experiences, including, and not limited to, family dynamics, varying backgrounds, cultural and religious aspects, and educational successes are not acquired as a monolithic entity. Each separate experience is a part of heritage, struggle, and traditional attribute, which

supports the range of perspectives amongst heterogeneous groups of African American women. Similarly, Curtis (2020) explained that the lived experience of African American women serves as somewhat of a guided structure, relating to expected behaviors and attitudes, internal and external, of their specific groups, and that corporate leadership may view the behaviors as unprofessional and typical. Which, in some instances, feasibly negatively influences negatively directs the pendulum of promotion to senior leadership roles (Curtis, 2020). However, Smith, Watkins, and Carlton (2019) deduced that African American women that displayed atypical behaviors reduced the perceived biases of higher echelon leadership while increasing opportunities for selection into senior roles (Smith et al., 2019). Likewise, performing research into a marginalized group such as African American women of their specific experiences offers not only an in-depth analysis of why under-representation occurs in an intersectionality form. It possibly prompts discussion amongst scholars on gendered ideologies, the structure of labor, position of power, and cathexis (Wells & Kerwin, 2017).

For instance, Adib and Guerrier (2003) performed a narrative study with several African American women that disclosed the salience of shifting identities. The women explained that their experiences, whether multiple identities were emphasized or not, minimizing their cultural and ethnic behaviors is one way that African American women attempt to conform to corporate expectations. Moreover, the women noted that corporate America expects senior leadership to exhibit specific predetermined attributes that may not include minorities and women of color to advance toward senior-level positions (Adib & Guerrier, 2003). The researchers discussed women and racial minorities within the senior athletic administrative areas aspiring to obtain an athletic director position at

the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) Division 1 level. Their study offered support for the underrepresentation of people of color, particularly among African American males (AAM), but African American women were not viewed as potential senior level administrators.

The Institute for Diversity and Ethics (TIDES) revealed in a 2020-2021 study that educational institutions with Division 1 level departments that received higher grades on the Racial and Gender Report Card (RGRC) than lower college levels concerning gender and race hiring practices obtained an RGRC score of B-, a significant increase, from 10% to 12% for race. Additionally, educational institutions in the same grading category received an F- for gender, with European Americans holding 10%, Hispanics at 0.9%, and Black women at 1.5%. Still, it only reached slightly higher marks than the college level of C-minus to C-plus, with AAM making up 22.3% of athletic administrative positions and African American women in the Division 1 level holding two spots for every 30 director positions (TIDES, 2021).

African American women (AAW) in the workplace, as mentioned earlier, face specific challenges and barriers that are unique. Thus, it is essential that African American women seek appropriate mentorship and training programs to support obtaining the credentials and experience required to assume senior leadership and boardroom positions (Dickens & Chavez, 2018). Access to resources that support increased educational and job opportunities is essential (Dickens & Chavez, 2018). Furthermore, corporations' acknowledgment of diversity issues impacting African American women, including code-shifting their identity and language is vital to cultural embracement (Smith et al., 2019). Moreover, for corporations to exhibit transparency

and receptive attitudes toward diversity, research might be conducted to address the concerns of African American women and marginalized groups; openness is required to yield success in the workforce (Dickens & Chavez, 2018).

Research Questions

The presented research questions permitted the researcher to offer data into the investigation of the underrepresentation of African American women in senior leadership positions:

1. What structural societal barriers factor into the underrepresentation of African American women in senior leadership positions?
2. Are less African American women's engagement in executive and career-enhancing preparatory programs affected by resource attainment?
3. How does genetic endowment factor into individual thinking toward senior leadership attainment?

In this qualitative phenomenological investigation into the underrepresentation of African American women in senior positions, the researcher presented 16 open-ended structured questions to 11 participants. The participants' demographics were established separately from interview questioning, ensuring study criteria were met that encompassed: (a) job title, (b) years in the field, (c) educational level, and (d) age. The researcher screened questions separately by colleagues in academia and the governing body of the university, which questions were either adjusted, re-written, or removed to maintain clarity and ease of answering for participants.

During the interview phase, the researcher addressed any concerns or questions participants had prior to initiating the study. Additionally, the researcher re-explained the

purpose of the study and the relevance of the questions to the investigation. Moreover, participants were assured that the Zoom recordings and written field notes were for the sole use of the researcher and would be kept confidential, as outlined in their signed consent forms. The researcher informed participants that in asking the probing questions, they were permitted to answer in any manner that conveyed their feelings and truth with no interruption from the researcher. Lastly, the researcher informed participants that they could request restatement of question(s) and were permitted to skip and return to any question as an option. Below are the participant interview questions employed and the reasoning for each presented question:

1. How would you describe your current position, and how do you feel in that role?

Question 1 was asked to gain insight into the current role and feelings operating in role.

2. How might resources assist in obtaining senior leadership roles for African American women? Please explain with examples.

Question 2 was asked for an opinion on how helpful resources are for advancement.

3. What exposure to mentorships have you had, if any, and what was your experience? Please explain with examples.

Question 3 was asked to discover if mentorship played a significant role or at all with advancement.

4. In general, describe your journey through the process when it comes to training opportunities required for advanced senior roles.

Question 4 explored personal experience in attaining training.

5. Have you ever or currently had experience with sponsorship? Please explain how you feel about it.

Question 5 explored participants' views and thoughts into relevance of sponsorship to progress in leadership roles.

6. How does increased education factor into leadership roles? Please offer examples.

Question 6 was to investigate the viewed value of increased education for advancement among African American women.

7. How do you believe advanced education increases senior leadership opportunities for African American women? If so, can you describe some examples?

Question 7 explored if having advanced education improved position attainment for African American women.

8. What challenges, if any, were encountered in ascending corporate America? Please offer examples experienced.

Question 8 examined how participants viewed and characterized their challenges and if those challenges contributed to altering approach to workplace situations.

9. Have you ever or currently experienced being the only African American in your work environment? How did that make you feel?

Question 9 wanted to explore any possible feelings of oneness within the work environment and gain insight into how those emotions were managed, and

interactions experienced between co-workers.

10. How would you describe the degree of importance concerning representation of African American women?

Question 10 explored how African American women expressed their feelings in representation, and if representation affected motivation (self-motivation) within work environment.

11. How important are forging professional relationships, and why? Please offer examples.

Question 11 explored participants perspective of professional exposure assisting in career enhancement and if reduced or lack of professional exposure significantly factored into African American women under served in leadership roles.

12. How do you believe individual thinking of both employer and employee are factored in when discussing African American women in senior roles? Why? Please offer examples.

Question 12 was to explore how environmental, and upbringing may factor into the misunderstandings of African American women to include the misunderstanding of employer in the same sense and if genetic endowment was possible.

13. How do you believe African American women contribute to societal assumptions and biases (negative and positive) relative to their leadership capabilities?

Question 13 was to examine how participants viewed actions both negative

and positive of what they deem as possibly culturally appropriate and inappropriate behaviors correlating to work competence.

14. Code-switching includes the altering of one's behaviors, language, and appearance to fit into a dominant culture, with that said, do you believe there are any advantages or disadvantages for African American women optimizing it? Please explain with examples.

Question 14 examined participants' views on code-switching, if they utilized it and if they felt their identity (culturally) were impacted and to what degree.

15. What are some rewarding and disappointing times in your current position?

How did you feel?

Question 15 examined what occurrences fostered satisfying and unsatisfying emotions and how participants navigated them.

16. How do you believe your rewarding and disappointing times have or will determine your longevity within your organization? Please explain. Question 16 was a follow up to 15 to determine if participants considered both occurrences when considering continuing in work environment and why decision was important.

Research Methods and Data Collection Procedures

The research method and data collection procedure into the underrepresentation of African American women in senior leadership positions included a literature review, posed research, and participant interview questions. Moreover, potential voluntary participants who were solicited via email were sent a structured script providing the purpose of the research. Additionally, the researcher scheduled interviews, secured

participant times, and date availability, addressed any concerns, and any requested clarity before the commencement of interviews. The study consisted of 11 African American women in various professions and degrees possessed, ranging from some college to advanced terminal degrees within the California region. Before the study, all participants were located in California; however, three participants relocated, two to the southeastern region of Virginia Beach and one to the middle region of Nashville, Tennessee, all due to family or professional commitments. Nonetheless, participants could provide experiences based on lived experiences within the California region for study requirements.

Interview Process

The researcher conducted interviews via Zoom or phone conference based on the participant's accessibility. Before the interviews, the participant and researcher reviewed the consent form; the researcher informed the participant that the researcher was in a secure location to avoid any interruptions and to maintain the confidentiality of the interview. Additionally, the researcher ensured that the participant was comfortable and emphasized that at any time during the interview, they could stop participating without repercussions from the researcher.

The participant was reminded that the interview would be recorded, and field notes were for the sole use of the researcher to document facial expressions, body language, and any motions to brought emphasis toward the questions to capture the participant's responses. Furthermore, the researcher engaged in an easing opening conversation to ensure the participant was relaxed and ready to initiate the interview. As mentioned, participant demographics were obtained to ensure criteria were met, such as

educational level, job title, and age. Table 1 displays data collected prior to the interviews.

Table 1

Demographic Data

Participants	Job Title	Age	Education Level
P1	Regional VP of Operations	54	Doctorate Degree
P2	Financial Team Supervisor	45	Master's Degree
P3	Chief Petty Officer	41	Master's Degree
P4	Adjunct Professor	45	Doctorate Degree
P5	Department Head Patient Relations	57	Bachelor's Degree
P6	Adjunct Professor	53	Doctorate Degree
P7	Financial Supervisor	45	Some Years of College
P8	Physician OBGYN (Ret LCDR, USN)	50	Doctor of Medicine
P9	Physician OBGYN (CAPT, USN)	46	Doctor of Medicine
P10	Adjunct Professor	50	Doctorate Degree
P11	Project Manager Team Lead	37	Master's Degree

Coding Process

The coding process occurred once all participant interviews were completed. Once participants authorized the use of their transcriptions, the researcher uploaded utilizing Microsoft Program Office (365) into Nvivo 10 software. According to Moustakas (1994), the coding process and analysis consist of listing and preliminary grouping (horizontalization), reduction and elimination, cluttering and thematizing, validation, individual textual description, individual structural description, and textural-structural description (pp. 120-121). The researcher has provided explanation of each within coding process below:

1. Horizontalization - During this phase, the researcher assembled all relevant responses of the experience.
2. Reduction and Elimination - The researcher utilized this to decide if invariant constituents met the necessary constituent experience and if sufficient understanding of the constituents of the experience. Additionally, examining if the invariant constituent may possibly be abstracted and labeled, and eliminating constituents that do not meet criteria.
3. Clustering and Thematizing - The researcher labeled themes revealed from participant experience.
4. Validation - The researcher utilized the identification of concluding invariant constituents.
5. Individual Textual Description - The verbatim transcripts of participants were used to discuss the relevant and validated invariant constituents that produced participant themes.
6. Individual-Structural Description - The researcher utilized the participant experience from the Textual Description variation to formulate the Individual-Structural Description.
7. Textual-Structural Description - This was employed to capture the essence and meanings revealed by invariant constituents and themes from participants (pp. 120-121).

Presentation and Analysis of Data

During this qualitative phenomenological research, the researcher preserved participants' confidentiality by assigning numbers from 1-11. Each participant was

referenced in the study as the following: P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, P6, P7, P8, P9, P10, and P11.

The subsequent tables were designed utilizing Moustakas (1994) modified van Kaam's method of data analysis. Moreover, the researcher applied Creswell and Creswell-Baez (2021) methodology of data analysis of qualitative phenomenological research. To ensure data aggregated maintained bias free reporting with interviewing and transcription of participant's experiences, the researcher employed Epoche, which allowed researcher to view aggregated data from a fresh perspective, receptive space and information presented in the form from participants' view and lived experiences (Moustakas, 1994).

Research Questions Results and Findings

Upon completion of interviewing, transcribing, and coding, the researcher was able to reveal emerged invariant constituents. To capture the common essence and recrudescence of declarations from emerging themes, the researcher organized them into groups that allowed for individual textual descriptions to form. Moreover, the researcher applied Moustakas's (1994) modified van Kaam's evaluation of participants' transcribed interviews. Once each question was posed, the researcher discovered clustering that displayed among many questions, subsequent tables labeled Table 2 through Table 15, employing Moustakas (1994) modified van Kaam's reduction and elimination for data analysis.

Reduction and Elimination

1. How would you describe your current position, and how do you feel in that role?

Table 2

Emerging Themes – Question 1

Emerging Themes	Participants
Undervalued	P1, P2, P4, P6, P11
Confident	P2, P3, P5, P6, P8, P9, P10
Enjoyable	P4, P5, P8, P9, P10
Stressful	P1, P2, P6, P7, P10, P11
Demanding	P1, P4, P5, P6, P7, P8, P10, P11

Question 1: Based on the findings (see Table 2), five participants felt *undervalued* in their current positions and data also depicts seven participants while they felt confident in their capabilities to perform required tasks, interviewees explained that *confidence* within the job comes with a high mental tax of always needing to work harder and keep themselves in the limelight to appear as a team player when that mentality is not inclusively reciprocated. Eight participants revealed high demand requirements placed on them to not only meet deadlines but to take on multiple projects to validate their position within the organization. *Stressful* was another area that revealed elevated ranking from the participants with six, discussing the amount of pressure placed on them that they felt was not equally shared within the organization. *Enjoyable* ranked the same as undervalued with five participants discussing despite the extra requirements expected

of them, they enjoyed being able to assist with affecting change and utilizing their skill sets even if the organization undervalued their capabilities.

P1 stated:

Demanding and feeling like I am not important is something that I have come to expect working in my field and I understand that I am not going to get the total just and due credit that I am entitled to, I work my a---off to produce outstanding work and constantly having to show all the damn time that I am that n----a that is solving all your problems here but yet I am the last person to get recognized, which is just bullshit but God forbid if I express that because you know I would just be characterized as mean, unapproachable, or even angry. But I keep forging ahead because I know that I have to no matter how stressful it is I have to keep going because that's what us Black women know how to do.

P6 stated:

In my role as an adjunct professor at ---- university, while I enjoy my role in teaching and preparing the next generation of thinkers, I feel that my ability to bring different perspectives within the department is met with subtle and underhanded degrees of microaggressions, but they know that they can't say too much and tread lightly but I know all too well what is occurring, the black women knows the game and I understand that despite how I feel, moving ahead and making a way in spite of co-workers is vital. I am here for the students and not for them, it's a challenge but I know I have to be creative with everything I do and say, with black women professors in short order supply, I know my role is

important and I can't allow smallminded mentality of these men affect or show they affect me in any way.

2. How might resources assist in obtaining senior leadership roles for African American women? Please explain with examples.

Table 3

Emerging Themes – Question 2

Emerging Themes	Participants
Required for advancement	P1, P7, P8, P4, P6, P11
Not readily advertised	P1, P2, P3, P6, P10, P11,
Black community not priority	P2, P5, P10
Funding is vital	P8, P6
Self advocating for funding	P9, P4,

Question 2: Based on the findings (see Table 3), of participants and their responses that were posed during the interview with two areas that displayed to have significance. There were six participants for both themes relating to, *required for advancement* and *not readily advertised*, which indicated that these two themes were poignant enough to have a strong response from more than half of participants. The significance of advancement and advertising of training supports the theory of fair representation and the hurdles that many African American women contend with in gaining the necessary resources to obtain training to be competitive candidates for senior leadership roles. P11 stated, “*resources are pivotal and not always made available, I*

have the degree but, need the training and exposure to move ahead.” Moreover, the other areas had participant responses, however, they did not show to be significant to prove a strong theme.

P8 stated:

Funding and having access to resources is important and, in my field, I need to have the resources to secure funding and when the information regardless of what they say um, is available you know, it's just not made easily accessible to us you know, I understand that we have to dig and scratch to get the right amount of resources to become successful in everything, but geez, it's just mindboggling how the hunt can be to secure what is needed. I believe that they are out there, yes, but if you don't have someone helping you navigate all the ropes and not restricting yourself to just one area of searching, you're in a bind, it's crazy you know, but when information is not advertised, do you blame the person for not knowing or the person for not putting it out there when they have it, I just think black women have to stay aware of what is out there and ask a lot of questions when we don't see what we are looking for because let me tell you it's out there.

P3 stated:

Resources are beneficial for African American women and is the basic foundation in addressing all issues in any organization, with me being active duty military for over 20 years, and as a diversity officer, even in the military there is discrimination and racism that I have to contend with in obtaining the necessary resources to run certain programs believe it or no, I mean it doesn't make any sense for me having to pull nail and teeth, justify the freaking why's to only get

informed by the man, that I have to wait until the next fiscal year blah blah blah stuff you know what I mean. Like come on dude, I am only trying to address shit that is occurring within this organization and trying to keep our boss the Captain from having to answer to higher people on why we are experiencing such unsatisfactory scores when it comes to diversity, like ok, well I guess I can highlight my own fight with obtaining resources, oh and the black women that is running it and telling you that things are messed up but hey it is what it is you know. A lot of things are not advertised properly, and it makes my blood boil honestly, but I choose my battles and keep marching on.

P4 stated:

Resources are the utmost important, social connections equates to capital. Capital is needed to position yourself within a specific social construct and vouching for someone is extremely important to ensure resources whether it is funding, marketing assistance, or even helping me get into a position that I know I am qualified for but need those resource relationships to help. When advertising is not overtly seen, then I know I have to get my mind right and get working on reaching out and carve a path to not help me but be a resource to the next black women coming behind me so she can replace me in that senior role.

3. What exposure to mentorships have you had, if any and what was your experience? Please explain with examples.

Table 4

Emerging Themes – Question 3

Emerging Themes	Participants
Significant to moderate exposure	P4, P5, P6, P8, P9, P10, P11
Minimal to no exposure	P1, P2, P3, P7,

Question 3: Based on the findings (see Table 4), of participants revealed that an over whelming number of participants experienced *a significant to moderate amount of exposure* with mentorship with seven of the 11 interviewees reflecting on positive and vital aspects that mentorship holds for African American women success. Furthermore, four participants reported *minimal to no exposure* with mentorship within the current or prior positions which participants explained may assist women specifically, African American women in advancing in their careers.

P7 stated:

In my current role, having mentorship would have been nice to help me understand my Job better and maybe get hired into the role that I know I am qualified to do but I had to Figure things out like I am just walking in the door and they say ok, here you go, this is what I need you to do, I had *no mentorship* so yhea, ha I guess I'm on my own is what's going through my head so yhea mentorship would have been really nice.

P2 stated:

When I was on active duty, pretty much *minimal mentorship* is something that is forced mentoring to meet military guides to say you had mentoring but times you don't necessarily have the right person that can stir you in the direction that is needed for your success. Now that I am out and working in my current field there is really no mentoring occurring, actually its funny you ask this question because there is no one of color to assist me especially when I would like another African American female that I can relate to and ask those questions that the men here and white men may not get where I'm coming from. Not that they can't help but, I think the language barrier, and I mean the black girl words and corporate world don't really mesh if you know what I mean? But mentoring is important and if you have the right person makes a huge difference for breaking that glass ceiling you know.

P5 stated:

Mentorship provided me with great opportunities and allowed me to meet different people of all types of backgrounds and connect in ways that without mentoring wouldn't be possible in my opinion, mentoring another person whether is of the same race, ethnicity, or religion is valuable and, in this case, this is something that is extremely vital for African American women to have. Having a mentor showed me that I have potential to do all the things that I wanted but having that mentor in my corner giving me the ins and outs of what areas I needed to focus on made a world of a difference and helped pave my future into my current role. I have been really lucky in my career to have had a *significant*

mentorship experience, it has helped me as a leader and had the ability to apply what I learned, and mentorship is invaluable.

P8 stated:

Mentorship started for me as a child with my mother and has become instrumental when I wanted to become a doctor, my mom placed me in positions to meet up with influential people to show me what I needed to do to apply for medical school even from what classes I needed to take to prepare, that was all mentoring that gave me the guidance and confidence, that yes, I can do this and yes, I will do this no matter what, why? because I had that additional support outside of my mom. When I was a doctor on active duty and now retired, mentorship had played an even more *significant role* with me opening my own practice and securing loans and researching licensure and laws and regulations that apply to me, I had and still have mentors that I continually connect with to bounce ideas and thoughts off that I have or even future business ventures I would like to explore. Mentorship has gotten the overlapping title of the person that knows all things to help you but, mentorship is the umbrella of many people that help or at least have helped me to be successful.

4. In general, describe your journey through the process when it comes to training opportunities required for advanced senior roles?

Table 5

Emerging Themes – Question 4

Emerging Themes	Participants
Jumped at opportunity	P4, P6, P8, P9, P10
Challenging	P1, P2, P5, P11
Created training	P1
Motivating	P1, P7, P8, P10
None required	P3

Question 4: Based on the findings (see Table 5), participants described navigating through training opportunities, with five participants expressing the need to immediately *jump on* training opportunities that may benefit them in their current role and assist with them advancing much sooner. The data also revealed that four participants also described their journeys as equally *motivating* while being *challenging*. P1 stated, “there was limited possible promotions due to no concrete training in place, it definitely was a challenge, so I developed the training for leadership and exceeded expectations.” There was only one participant who reported no training was required due to specific promotional guidelines in place within the military construct. Moreover, participants who expressed the need to jump on the training provided reasoning that supported the discussion on attracting, keeping, and training an organization’s greatest assets, their human assets.

P4 stated:

When I find out there is a training opportunity I jump on it so fast because I know down the line I will need it or I can use the training to help guide another prospective mentee with knowledge and a sense of clarity not only in my field but in general. There are many times that I have seen where training offered has little attendance especially for African American women and I found myself looking around the room and thinking what is going on? Why are there so few black and brown women in this training so I know that I have to do my part and attend so I can pass on what I have learned so my overall journey with gaining the training has been pretty much steady as she goes while it did have moments of frustration and challenges, I persevered.

P9 stated:

You definitely have to ask, due to my mom always instilling in me my roots of family, God, and believing in myself has helped me navigate the training paradigm which can be tricky. As I got up on the ladder of leadership I would just observe and still do observe a lot and ask many questions to see who I was dealing with. Trainings at my level of leadership is something that is a constant even informal training at the job, as a physician and leading a department there is always training needed so just because I may not go to an external training site there are plenty of trainings that occur within the vicinity of my job site that I can take advantage of.

P11 stated:

Training didn't exist, as I continued to grow there was less training from my experience and there were no specific criteria for training, it was basically a sink or swim kind of mentality that many have come to just accept which is completely unacceptable and just shows how much____ & company appreciates their workers. I remember having to reprimand a subordinate on his work habit with not getting back to me when I asked him to keep me informed of a project I was leading and the deadline had come and gone and I purposely waited an additional day just to see if he would get back to me with of course his excuses on why this and why that couldn't get done, so I finally contacted him and called him in my office to discuss and of course counsel him on his multiple accounts of unprofessional behavior and lack of communication towards me, anyway long story short I approached him respectfully but firmly and wanted to know what was the status on completion and other stuff and of course he's passive aggressive towards me but because I attended this training of which I completed on my own time, it helped me better deal with leadership scenarios like that and how to move forward with the situation and my team member which was a whole other set of challenges.

5. Have you ever or currently had experience with sponsorship? Please explain how you feel about it?

Table 6

Emerging Themes – Question 5

Emerging Themes	Participants
Yes	P1, P3, P6, P8, P9, P10, P11,
No	P2, P4, P5, P7

Question 5: Based on the findings (see Table 6), an overwhelming number of participants reported that they received sponsorship in some form or fashion and offered their perspectives on how they felt about the experience or just the overall thought of being sponsored. There were four participants who indicated that no sponsorship occurred for them. However, P9 stated, “sponsorship is powerful.” Furthermore, several other participants explained specific occurrences where sponsorship they received played a significant role in their success.

P8 stated:

Sponsorship for many people is the difference between getting in and not, it opens doors and you walk in. Sponsorship is something that is truly valuable and thankfully I had the privilege of receiving both mentorship and sponsorship which really came into play for me during COVID-19 pandemic when I was searching for resource pertaining to medical insurance programs. Sponsorship not only helped with a lot of the stress that I was dealing with but helped me get what I needed much quicker.

P10 stated:

Sponsorship is deeply personal to me. I went to an historically black college and university (HBCU) because I wanted that inclusive feeling and that's where I met and interacted with first black PhD, which I gravitated toward to have someone that I can relate to as far as representation, and the fact that I got to express my thoughts and feelings on my college experience and overall discuss life situations made a difference which I may not have received at a predominantly white institution (PWI). Having someone sponsor me allowed me to gain access to additional resources that may not have been available to me or even discussed as an option when it came to my career and college choice.

P4 stated:

I have not had any experience with sponsorship but I feel that they're wonderful if you can obtain it. Sponsorship to me I feel is another avenue of social capital and I mean that when someone sponsors an individual, he or she are utilizing those connections to showcase skills that you have and why that organization wants you.

P5 stated:

I never had any experience with sponsorship but, very much a fan of it because it could help underprivileged areas because people are victims of their environment, but if the opportunity and exposure to different things, sponsorship can definitely help with this. For example, I wanted to open a home for unwed moms which would help single young mothers stay in school and be successful. However, life had other plans for me but if I did open that home it would have put me in the south or Midwest and

not California. I feel I'm sponsoring young Sailors about family life, military adjustments, and other areas. Because I've moved around many areas of the military with my husband being stationed at ____ and ____ I truly feel that I am sponsoring because I offer outside resources when these Sailors want another perspective when making decisions.

6. How does increased education factor into leadership roles? Please offer examples.
7. How do you believe advanced education increase senior leadership opportunities for African American women? If so, can you describe some examples?

Table 7

Emerging Themes – Question 6 and Question 7

Emerging Themes	Participants
Valuable	P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, P7, P8, P9, P10
Brings credibility	P1, P2, P4, P5, P6, P8, P9, P10, P11
Double-edge sword	P1, P2, P3, P6, P10
Doesn't always help	P1, P3, P5, P11

Questions 6 and 7: Based on the findings (see Table 7), with questions six and seven, data revealed a strong response from participants who viewed increased and advanced education as valuable and something that brings credibility to African American women. In both areas nine of the 11 participants had similar responses. However, the findings also revealed similar responses with African American women attaining increased education as a double-edge sword which five of the 11 participants explained that advanced degrees may possibly be viewed as an imitating factor. Similarly, four of the 11 interviewees expressed that increased and advanced degrees

despite being valuable and beneficial does not always help African American women get hired in many instances or even attain leadership roles.

P1 stated:

Not having advanced degrees is not really an option for most black women because, in order for us to have a say in what happens within our surroundings that degree is vital for our survival, and you can't take that lightly. There are many facets that African American women face in corporate America and when we have to make a way, having that degree gives you an extra edge at work but also is that double-edge sword that we have to deal with, it is mostly inevitable because my skin color and gender walks in the room before I do and that is the first thing that is seen and judged but, when someone finds out that I have a Doctorate degree then all of a sudden I'm credible and they approach and speak a little different, that is just crazy and shows that even in the 21st century African American women are still facing issues with credibility and doubt of intellect which is an aspect of the black girl experience that is based on many untrue factors. Which is why diversity and equality is something that we can't stop working on, not letting up on the peddle for our advancement and place in society and that is why getting advanced education and degrees are imperative and a must.

P10 stated:

Ok, this is a topic discussion that I have had with many other African American educators because with all the issues that are occurring today in society there is the notion that African American women are less educated or not as driven which

is clearly absurd but unfortunately that manner of thinking is a reality for many out there on their views of us. Having increased education we are seen as a threat to others in the upper echelon of leadership that may have less education, there is the fear that we and I mean me as a black women with a terminal degree will take your job if I get promoted and replace them. If I have the degree for that role and any other qualifications then you might have to look out In that case if I was looking at getting promoted into that specific position. However, most of us don't come in with that mentality of I'm here to take over, as for me as an educator and having a Doctorate degree in microbiology there is that mentality that I must be the exception for us when it comes to excelling in the STEM field and teaching it and that couldn't be far from the truth, because we know that African American women have long been the innovators in many areas within the STEM field but historically may not necessarily get the appropriate acknowledgment and accolades warranted. Really thinking about the question, you asked on advanced degree I have asked myself pondering questions such as Dr. ____ what is it that I want to do with this degree, and do I want to be in the office or classroom? Which is a catch 22 but it doesn't necessarily have to be, but thinking more about it and I will end with this, understanding what you want to achieve and why in my opinion are prolific questions anyone can ask themselves but critical so that you know where to put your energy within an organization. Starting there is first and foremost.

P7 stated:

Education and higher education gained is undeniably the means for success, when we understand and uphold our value of not only the education and experience we have but the fact we are bringing our perspectives that can help turn around things in many different situations within our work place and we know it then that in itself is invaluable you know, that advanced degree helps with yes promotions but negotiations such as pay and other associated perks of the possible new position but if we don't understand or make known of our value that our advanced education carries then we are doing ourselves a disservice and only cheating ourselves out of many things like compensation and allowing employers to continue their treatment and behaviors towards us that is damaging. I have to remind myself and after my fourth interview I said I will not settle for less, pay me my worth or I'm walking the hell out of here. There are companies that will hire and pay me my worth as a financial specialist and if company A won't then there is company B that will.

8. What challenges, if any, were encountered in ascending corporate America?

Please offer examples experienced.

Table 8

Emerging Themes – Question 8

Emerging Themes	Participants
Racism	P1, P2, P4, P6, P9
Authenticity	P1, P3, P4, P9, P8, P11
Staying positive	P1, P2, P5, P8
Remaining confident in role	P2, P3, P9, P10
Miscommunication	P1, P2, P8, P11
No room for error	P5, P8, P11
Male-dominate environment	P1, P3, P5, P6, P7
Assumptions	P3, P5, P7, P9
Gender preference	P1, P2, P3, P4, P6, P11

Question 8: Based on the findings (see Table 8), participants explained the areas they viewed as challenges within their respective workplace. The data revealed that there were nine themes with interviewees having a similar ranking in each area however, gender preference and authenticity ranked slightly higher with six of the 11 participants in each expressing that gender factored into specific roles in and around their organization. Moreover, interviewees explained that being their authentic selves was another challenge that required them to adjust or navigate around the workplace.

P11 stated:

Working at ___ in such a highly male dominated field doesn't necessarily bother me to the degree of me leaving my job but females get the bad end of the stick when it comes to leadership and management where I am because of men thinking that anytime that a women especially a black women is upset or getting in their a—ss in line we're being emotional or its that time of the month honestly it is just insulting, how about maybe you're making a mess of a job or something and I am just frustrated because you are not taking my suggestions seriously and blowing me off. I have made a complaint against a man in my office because he made a comment about the way I got my job as if I had to sleep with someone to get that position of course I went the hell off and bam just like that there goes the stereotype of me being an angry black women now, unbelievable. I handle the supplies and track the financial records for our clients and things like that and asked this person to send me his reports from his department so I can cross check against my list and informed him I needed it before end of day, so of course when I do get them he didn't ensure that the numbers were accurate and I was beyond upset with this mother----er but I stayed late to fix things so my bosses would have an accurate accounting and avoid an unnecessary and very painful audit, needless to say after I was done I let my superiors know what happened, luckily I had support from someone that recognized a pattern with that person, and he no longer works with me thankfully. I tell people that I have had conversations with that leadership is changing and the notion of the good old boy's clubs are a thing of the past and will longer be accepted nor get a pass so men get it together.

P9 stated:

When trying to figure out where I fit in requires me to analyze my surroundings and understanding that I have to well actually must choose when it is best to interject myself. There are many days that I have been in meetings watching how men respond to the few of us women that are in the room but more importantly, I watch to see the responses that are conveyed when any of the few black women in my direct area are received. Which I can tell you is me and one other women so there's that part___ well I can't say that I am not surprised with the gross low representation of black women. However, working in a male-dominated environment has it challenges for one, trying to be my authentic self without making others feel uncomfortable of my sheer presence is just ridiculous but___ doesn't have to worry about that. I tap into my faith everyday all day to ensure that I remember, that I am a child of God, and I have a purpose to bring care and compassion to those that I serve and the passive aggressive tones and even backhanded compliments I receive is just more reason for me to stay true to myself because these men look at me and see a highly educated women that is in the same field as they are and running my own department with natural hair and despite the underhanded tones spoken I shine and let those few men know without saying a word and letting my work and degrees speak for me that this one, this black woman, is here to stay so deal with it.

P6 stated:

There is no secret that men are typically the preferred gender and more so, a white man, to be more specifically for many reasons that you know dates back to historic times and how men and women are viewed as far as intelligence, value, and just sheer position in life; but my personal experience working at my previous job a tech company as you notice I said my previous job for a reason however, when I worked there I had just finished my Master's degree a year earlier at the time and there was an opening that I know I was very much qualified for, and applied for the position sending in all documentation that pertained to the role. More importantly, I had extra certificates that the job didn't even require that I knew would put me in a better position to get advanced. Now, you have to know that there were no in person interviews for this position, you apply for it and of course like I said send in all the paperwork. However, about a week went by and let me tell you I was informed that the position was given to someone else and that *He* was more excitable, excuse me? Excitable, what does that even mean? There were no interviews so how can they accurately evaluate His excitement. If that's the case, was I judged off my application as not being excitable, wow! I guess the employers are also mind readers and can see subjective emotions that others can't; what a joke, more excitable anyway. As time went on my career just lagged compared to my male counterparts, it was painfully obvious to me that they were the preferred as the favorite to fill many roles and advancement. So, needless to say, I left and took my knowledge with me, not going to keep getting pushed aside. It was hard for me to move up there so I had

to make changes that afforded me better opportunities but that company was definitely not the business as we say.

9. Have you ever or currently experienced being the only African American in your work environment? How did it make you feel?

Table 9

Emerging Themes – Question 9

Emerging Themes	Participants
Token black	P1, P2, P3, P4, P6, P8, P9, P10, P11
High responsibility	P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, P6, P7, P8, P10
High scrutiny	P1, P2, P3, P4, P7, P9, P10, P11
Low camaraderie	P1, P3, P4, P5, P6, P7, P9, P10, P11

Question 9: Based on the findings (see Table 9), participants discussed their feelings about being the only African American in their work environment. Data revealed four significant themes, with many responses, with more than half of the participants sharing similar feelings about their presence in all categories. Moreover, the researcher discovered a similar theme, tokenism, which was discussed with acceptance while other participants struggled with the thought of being the sole African American. Participants explained how each viewed the position of a sole representative of their race. Additionally, the participants revealed, if any, responsibilities being the only African American held from their perspectives and what those responsibilities accounted toward their jobs.

P4 stated:

Yes, being the only African American in my workspace made me feel powerful. I know that I am the token black here. However, I accept it with an absolute honor because I can help others, address ageism, and offer professional and different perspectives that non-blacks may not know. I get to set the standard and help the next person of color adapt easier, so I carry my race on my shoulders as the sole representative of the black race. There is a huge responsibility to ensure that I set the example. I have the say, not them. Being the only black face comes with higher scrutiny because of expectations. However, I continue to work hard and not allow the added pressure to get to me, because I get to determine what words and actions I respond to. No matter what, I cannot afford to show any appearance of being off my game or not being sure of something because, soon as I do, that's when things go south real quick. If I appear to be angered, I risk jeopardizing my stance and credibility in the company. Regardless of how consistent and sure I have been in the past. I know and understand, I am not doing this for me alone, there are and will be the next generational employees working here so, I always remember that.

P6 stated:

I have been, especially in California, the culture is so different as opposed to being here in Virginia Beach now. While working in California, the office was mostly white men and women with very few if any people of color more specifically, African American women. So, with me being the face of the black

community in my area, there is that inherent responsibility to do better than my best and not feed into the behaviors and stereotypes that I am sure were expected of me. When I was in the office, there was little effort to make me feel truly part of the team by something as simple as asking my thoughts on office function activities. For example, the office would do some sorts of team building activities that took place after hours most of the time. Including, going to the beach, hiking trails, and poolside gatherings which, I understood, was done to build camaraderie among the workers. I participated in all of them to show I am a team player; but let us be real, why do we always have to do these activities? how about going to the park and having a nice bar-b-que and relax? Nevertheless, yet, those never happened even when I would offer that as a suggestion for our office gathering. I obviously was outnumbered on suggestions such as that. I felt like I was invisible there and just accepted it to a certain degree because when you are thee one, I cannot show too much dislike or not interject myself in office activities. I hated that I had to represent my entire race as if, black women are all the same. I was for the most part, for some of the things, but not all things, color matters.

P9 stated:

I have experienced being the only black woman in my work area and honestly, I think it can be a good thing because being the token black, I can direct the narrative of what is the African American woman and that makes me feel I am in control. I have the responsibility to help break down those barriers and biases that corporate America has about African American women. It is not an easy task at all, but, if our ancestors can overcome slavery I can overcome and set the tone for

how I am perceived. I know that being the only one of any ethnicity is really difficult, because of all the hurdles, challenges, and stress that comes along with being the only one is critical because, the one sets the foundation for whether the next African American women will get hired, advanced, or even receive workers compensation in some cases.

P10 stated:

I am currently the only Black female professor in my department. Most of my students are white and male; on occasion, I will have two or three students of color, whether African American or Hispanic; however, it is scarce. I bring that part up because, being the sole representative in my department, having that imagery of an African American female professor standing in front of the class is extremely important. When students can see themselves and see that they have the capabilities and intellect to achieve whatever they want, representation matters. I take my job extremely seriously. When I am at work, I am the utmost serious and focused person, with what and how I execute my lesson plans and interact with my colleagues and students which can be viewed as standoffish, having an attitude, and being perceived as mean and a bitch. I have had a colleague ask me why I always look so mean. Excuse me sir, is what I asked him with a look that could split rocks, but I said very clearly I was not mean in any sense. I am focused at work and do not smile much naturally nor partake in water cooler gossip or innuendo discussions. So, if that makes me a bitch or mean person because I'm naturally quiet and do not indulge much, it is what it is. I cannot change how an individual may think. Maybe those with that perception of me

should come to my office and have a conversation to know more about me than having misconceptions based on their own preconceived notions and assumptions of how black women act. Furthermore, my colleague, who is a white male, asked me as an individual; and not the representative of black women everywhere but as Dr_____ the person. Having uncomfortable conversations and being able to make your mind up, and not going off a narrative that is engrained and weaved in society with the expected behavioral aspects of how I'm supposed to act will help break down many biases and possibly help with discriminatory thinking; at least, that is what I pray for.

P11 stated:

Being the only African American woman in my workspace is very much a challenge and irritating because I can't be myself and because I speak in a very stern voice and have a business focused mind I am perceived as an unapproachable and mean person, as if I am suppose to speak as if I am a timid or soft spoken woman, which I am not. I can't help it if my presence makes you uncomfortable or when I express issues with authority in my voice you shy away from me. I hate the feeling but at the same time I know I have the responsibility with not causing too many waves or an uproar but only if necessary. I know some ladies might like the fact that they get to be that token black representative of all sisters; and present how composed and nonaggressive and all the other stuff America thinks of black women, but I don't. It's unnecessary pressure to be placed on one person of any race but unfortunately it happens but for us black girls, it seems it's the norm. When I am at work, I have no one that I can vent to, no one to build true camaraderie with, I am on an island by myself. I have

tried smiling a little more but let me tell you, it's mentally taxing and overly stressful. I know that I can't just respond how I would like, always maintaining my professionalism and decorum and fighting back feelings of anger and frustration are hard but I know it is necessary.

10. How would you describe the degree of importance concerning representation of African American women?

Table 10

Emerging Themes – Question 10

Emerging Themes	Participants
Very important	P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, P6, P7, P8, P9, P10, P11
Inspirational	P2, P3, P4, P6, P8, P11,
Role model	P1, P3, P4, P5, P7, P11,
Necessary	P1, P2, P4, P5, P6, P7, P8, P9, P10, P11

Question 10: Based on the findings (see Table 10), the interviewees revealed four themes that addressed their perspectives on how they viewed representation of African American women. Four themes revealed similar results; however, two themes revealed that participants felt representation was necessary and very important, with all 11 interviewees seeing it being more significant, with P1 stating, “representation is super important.”

P2 stated:

Representation is extremely important. Black women are resilient and electric, and have something to offer such as our extraordinary experiences, good and bad, that has helped build the strategic manners in which we can adapt and maneuver and look at an environment differently because of the struggles we have and continue to endure. Our ancestors have paved the way for black women to operate in the most aggressive and unwelcoming environments that most women of non-black ethnicities may have little to no exposure to. African American women seeing themselves in positions of power and privilege is very much an inspiration and even more necessary. When I see an African American women in a role that is traditionally or historically have been reserved for whites or more specific white men, it makes me proud, that my daughter can see that level of representation like the first black woman supreme court justice, Ketanji Brown and know that yes, you can do the same thing and achieve all things so long as you work hard, and don't let anyone of any race tell you otherwise.

P4 stated:

Representation is something that can never be overstated, and the importance is beyond essential and necessary for all our young kids witnessing greatness and success. Having representation for African American women is and continues to be an uphill battle but, we are making strides. Having the image of someone that looks like me brings in the soul of humanity for blacks both male and female overly burdened by the world and reminds of how far we have come as a gender

and race. It also reminds us of how much more work is required to ensure that we are represented and give our founders and present day innovators their recognition. Having a seat at the table is essential because society in general has had their feet on our necks, when we have that imagery in the mist of adversity, discrimination, and all things associated with African Americans attempting to succeed is vital. Inclusion and honoring those that have come before us and those coming up now are important, having a picture on the wall of an African American woman that has made my life and other black women just a little easier because of her struggles warrants honoring and respect. We are crawling in the right direction in this country but like I said, there's still a lot of work left to get that foot off of us.

P6 stated:

Yes representation is the utmost importance and not only essential to the mindset and growth of black men and women, it is necessary that we see us, we need to see us and that in itself is inspirational and motivating. Black women must think outside the box in many instances and really have no choice. From the days of slavery to the present-day, African American women have been the blueprint for making things happen and finding a way, thinking and having that cognitive awareness of what is needed and when best to interject that knowledge is the hard part of being a black American, even more so as an African American woman. Why is this? Because of the threat of the knowledge and drive that African American women hold is something that is feared, because if we get and use that knowledge then there is no denying us even if they try. Which is always

attempted. I know from personal experience that having the ability to differentiate between areas that warrant my energy, time, and focus can be tricky because, honestly when you have my skin tone there is the feeling that everything coming at me is important and in reality not all issues warrant a response from me; that is where my cognitive abilities come in to play with knowing, if and when, I must respond or be present in terms of being at the table or even in the room in order to ensure I give my thought process of a situation, and give a different perspective to help solve or address the situation at hand is extremely important. Therefore, just me being the representative and giving that imagery to someone that maybe watching me from a distance is a heavy responsibility but most importantly, a necessary responsibility.

P11 stated:

When I think of the importance of representation, being authentic is the next thought for me because, of how difficult it is and still is for African American women to be their true authentic self without compromising or selling out which in our community is heavily frowned on. The day that President Obama got elected the first time and I seen that for the first time in history not only do we have our first Black president but look here, we have our first black first lady! I cried honestly because I never thought I would ever see that in America, I know that is sad to say, but I truly cried to see we can even be in the white house and maintain our authenticity like first lady Michelle Obama did, she was constantly being criticized for all things but she was there and stayed true to self regardless what they said about her she was on display and took that unwavering criticism with dignity, confidence, and poise for all those little black

and brown girls watching her. I watched her and Barrack Obama with my son and daughter, true representation held by two black people in the highest position in the United States of America, now, that was beyond important, that was life changing for a country where many blacks still are oppressed, and to see that, left me speechless. I just want my children to being able to see themselves when they walk out of the house in all facets of life from doctors, lawyers, police, and the white house. Representation matters, representation matters, representation matters, and I can't say this enough.

11. How important are forging professional relationships, and why? Please offer examples.

Table 11

Emerging Themes – Question 11

Emerging Themes	Participants
Networking	P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, P6, P7, P8, P9, P10, P11
Professional growth	P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, P7, P9, P10, P11
Exposure to industry	P1, P3, P4, P5, P7, P9, P11
Personal achievement	P1, P2, P5, P7, P9

Question 11: Based on the findings (see Table 11), 11 participants revealed how important building professional relationships are and how those professional relationships might assist African American women. Four themes emerged with participants expressing similar feelings of professional building engagement for African American women's success. Although, networking and professional growth were the more

significant themes amongst P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, P6, P7, P8, P9, P10, and P11, which all expressed the importance of professional relationships as the gateway to networking in building an achievable and sustainable business venture.

P1 stated:

Having and building professional relationships are undoubtedly important, this is what helps with understanding the industry you're in or trying to break into...I believe that without networking, it is virtually impossible for anyone to be successful. Having people in the industry that are considered experts are important for newcomers or even more experienced individuals looking to expand their current business. How can anyone truly be successful without linking up with other people, you know, but you better believe that African American women use our networking to the fullest because if there is one black woman doing it there are others trying to do the same, and gaining the knowledge on how she did it and how can I do the same is what networking is all about. It's like the saying, teamwork makes the dream work.

P2 stated:

The knowledge gained from networking is invaluable and honestly is apart of legacy building if is done correctly. You not only increase your knowledge of the industry but you are now that networking resource for another African American woman trying to pursue her business dream. What is given to me in terms of help I make sure that I give it back to the next black woman needing assistance. You never know when you might need that same person that you helped you know what I mean? Professional growth is like a child, and it must be fed with the fruits

of knowledge. So, in essence those professional relationships are just that, fruits of knowledge. I say, let's keep this going building our garden of African American entrepreneurs and leadership.

P4 stated:

Social capital is your networking and is absolutely important. With networking you have that exposure to the industry which allows for personal growth, opens doors, and fosters opportunities that you might not have even considered previously. Another thing to consider with networking or how I say it, tapping into your social capital is that you can receive that validation that your business idea is relevant and also can give you the praise and recognition for an idea or invention that you have created or improved upon making you that face of the new generational innovator and thinker. Something else to think about networking is that it can place you in positions by someone that have come to know of your work, dedication, reliability and other qualities from professional relationships that you developed earlier which helps with you getting that job, grant, or whatever you might have been turned down previously for, let me explain this. In 20-- I interviewed for an adjunct professor position at ____ and I had a total of four interviews, going through the entire process just to be turned down. I decided that I don't need to be stressing myself out trying to work here so I said the hell with it. Years later, yes years there was a Dr____ that I had met years earlier at another university that currently worked at the university where I interviewed at a few years earlier and HE somehow heard my name and discussed me to another colleague, Dr____ and the two of them discussed me along with

some other individuals and HE spoke on my behalf about what I will bring to their institution and why they needed me. I didn't have to re-interview or anything like that. Essentially, due to my social capital and having that professional relationship and rapport with Him I not only teach at the school I interviewed at years prior, I now sit on dissertation committees. A lot of the time it's not enough just having the knowledge or degree, you have to have that social capital of networking to get where you want to be.

12. How do you believe individual thinking of both employer and employee are factored in when discussing African American women in senior roles? Why? Please offer examples.

Table 12

Emerging Themes – Question 12

Emerging Themes	Participants
Open minded	P2, P5, P8, P9, P10, P11
Non-judgmental	P1, P2, P7, P8, P9,
Not enough discussions	P3, P6,
Quotas	P4, P5, P11

Question 12: Based on the finding (see Table 12), participants revealed being open-minded on both sides of the employer and employee was the standout theme. P2 stated, "Open mindedness is important, it helps to reduce assumptions." P5 stated, "Things are changing when it comes to leadership, and we are in different times and different perspectives are vital."

P5 paused and sighed when asked this question. P5 further stated:

Being open minded and receptive to inevitable change is commendable and while I rejoice at the notion of employers and employees both embracing differences while remaining on the same page, there is also the feeling that many employers are filling quotas to meet diversity and inclusivity measure to avoid backlash from communities of color. Another thought is maybe the right people are not in the right roles and are let's say there, because of these quotas. For example, like transgender, African American male, Asian women, while they are good efforts to help shift the balance of disparities in hiring practices. However, in my opinion, believe it or not, the very measures in place to help us are the same measures that can and quite possibly negatively affect African American women in the long-term due to broadening positions.

P6 rolled her eyes and stared at me when asked this question. She stated:

I don't believe organizations are having enough of these types of conversations of African American women at least where I work at, I have never heard any type of inclusion dialogue. I tell you, it is nonexistent at my job and it is definitely needed because there is no secret that black women are the fastest growing individuals obtaining degrees and still employers out here remain heavily situated in the old thinking of blacks period, all I can do is keep doing my job for now, but it makes me think for sure.

P8 stated:

How you are perceived should be based on capabilities to perform the job. But we know it isn't really that simple, wish it was but we live in the real world. To have the non-judgmental mentality it not only requires that open mindedness is

factored in, but understanding your role and put your personal feelings aside and this is applicable to both employer and employee. Employers must know how to lead without being closed off to the idea of difference in the workplace.

Employees have to get over yourself and do the job asked of them, as long as they are not asked to do anything illegal or demeaning, then do it. But, if there are any issues with clashing personalities, then there is when being open minded and receptive will pay dividends and when it comes to African American women and the personality difference, having a healthy discussion, this can help alleviate many of the misunderstandings and lower the tempers within a workforce and assists employers when they are looking to promote or hire someone in a senior role.

P9 stated:

African American women must be confident, open minded and most important understand the mission and vision of a company to ensure she understands what is required of the role being pursued. Furthermore, the employee in this case, the black women believing in what the organization stands for and how do they align with you as a women, but most importantly, how does it align to you as a black women functioning within their company. Now, the employer, understanding that inclusion, diversity, and having the qualities to do something that may be questioned is important especially being able to defend why you advanced a black women vice someone else of a different ethnicity and have the courage to stand by your decision.

13. How do you believe that African American women contribute to societal assumptions and biases (negative and positive) relative to their leadership capabilities? Why? Please offer examples.

Table 13

Emerging Themes – Question 13

Emerging Themes	Participant
Professional growth	P2, P3, P6, P9, P11
Attitude	P1, P2, P3, P4, P7, P11
Switch-up	P2, P4, P7, P9, P10,
Appearance	P1, P2, P5

Question 13: Based on the findings (see Table 13), the interviewee's data revealed four themes, with one theme, professional growth, reappearing when participants discussed positive and negative societal assumptions contributed by African American women. Among the four themes, professional growth, attitude, and switch-up displayed higher significance among the participants. Although not viewed as high, appearance still revealed that three participants felt this theme was essential to acknowledge concerning societal assumptions of African American women.

P1 paused and placed hands on forehead.

She stated: living up to expectations is the most difficult aspect to sustain...I mean, it is truly exhausting because on one hand you want to ensure that you are not feeding into negative stereotypes while simultaneously trying to display the positive attributes of being a black women. If I had to name a few for both areas of negative and positives that we may play a role in due to no necessary fault of our own is speech, appearance, and body language. Now, I am not saying that

there are not black women that do the most, however, when I say due to no fault of our own, I am basing this off our cultural interactions with each other and those normal tones, body movements, and speech. We have a certain way of handling stress, multitasking, and making hard decisions based off what is going on around us and that can and usually is taken in a negative light. Black women's strength of being resilient and strong to persevere through obstacles are some of the reasons for our actions because it's a shield to protect our mental state which takes a major hit and though it is a positive on the one hand, the work place can view it as being aggressive, bossy, and ghetto which we all know is just not true in all instances, you can be the most meek black women and soon as you raise your voice it's like we snatched the sun right out the sky... (participant laughing) oh no, how dare you speak up. Our appearance, and I am referring to our skin tone, plays into the negative and positive thinking when it comes to those assumptions. Light is viewed more favorably vice dark is looked down on, if you're dark skinned you get the looks as if you're less than, poor, dirty, thug, or worse, being more prone to being criminal minded, which is completely crazy. But, if you're light skinned then that's a different ball game there, that's the more acceptable negro and preferred black girl which is a problem of colorism which the black community has to deal with internally and externally. I don't know if we as a country can learn to truly see pass skin color in general because of the historical connections, but I know that with my skin color of a darker hue, I have to have tough skin and know that change is happening although slowly the mentality can't stay the same.

P4 stated:

Mentality determines the direction of how people perceive you, biases, assumptions are there and you have to be ok with knowing they are there however, you don't have to feed into them because they exist, you can change the narrative. So, how you respond to situations at different times and moments is the driving force of your narrative and only you direct that everything else are the mindsets and assumptions of others and that we have no control over, so why worry about it? Your social capital is vital in professional growth, and attitudes, even when warranted, must be controlled to be successful, not silent but controlled and used when necessary.

P7 stated:

You have to be aware of your surroundings and how you are acting within those areas, period. We have a way of communicating that is not necessarily seen as acceptable to them, not that it is bad it's just different and it is those differences that blur the lines of what is looked at as professional and unprofessional you know, so I can say to a certain degree we may contribute unintentionally to the hype even though we are just being our authentic selves, but it gets misunderstood as something negative. You have to be able to switch it up when you're at work and around your girls of course but there are times that it can be a challenge when you're in defense mode and that sister sister tone comes out...then hey it is what it is.

P9 stated:

Well social media and T.V. perpetuates the stereotypes of black women as being bossy, intimidating, loud and rude, and society has their own insecurities that are placed on us, which is why we always feel the need to conform or switch up our identities in order to secure our professional growth and development which we need to succeed. The positive attribute of black women is a double edge sword in being able to maintain our confidence and strength as superwoman, which also acts as a barrier in our professional quests, because feelings of isolation is real and the fact that we typically don't get that mental checkup because no one really does that, if I'm having a hard time dealing with something, I can't truly show any vulnerability if I do, then it will look as if I'm not senior leadership material. So, being viewed as overly confident is a good and bad thing, but that is the armor we must adorn when going out in the world that also can hurt us when it comes to promotions.

14. Code-switching includes the altering of one's behaviors, language, and appearance to fit into a dominant culture, with that said, do you believe there are any advantages or disadvantages for African American women optimizing it? Please explain with examples.

Table 14

Emerging Themes – Question 14

Emerging Themes	Participant
Authenticity	P2, P3, P4, P7, P8, P9, P10, P11
Opens doors	P2, P3, P6, P7, P8, P9, P10, P11
Individual choice	P2, P4, P5
Increases exposure	P1, P3, P4, P6, P8, P9, P10, P11
Mentally exhausting	P3, P6, P8, P9, P10, P11

Question 14: Based on the findings (see Table 14), participants' responses revealed five themes reflecting their opinions and lived experiences relating to code-switching optimization and explained if African American women gained advantages. Among the three themes' findings were *authenticity*, *open doors*, and *increased exposure*, with eight of 11 participants discovered to have significant scoring among them. Although one theme scored lower, *individual choice*, with three of 11 participants voicing code-switching as an option. Notably, this was not discussed as an option by eight of 11 participants but rather mandatory for African American women.

P2 closed eyes and sighed. She stated:

Code switching is one of those areas that we know deep down that is necessary although, I feel it should have some level of option attached to it but, being able to adapt to your surroundings is equally important. So, sometimes It is not an option, but the very opposite. When I was in the military I had to switch it up to conform to the environment while not losing my individual identity in the process and that can have some degree of frustration and require you to have a strong foundation of self and lean on that extremely hard to keep that balance...does that

make sense? Many might say that code switching is a practice that African American women have embraced as a strategic mechanism for survival, and I would agree. I haven't met any other black women that have not done some degree of code switching, its just apart of our way of navigating the muddy waters.

P3 stated:

Code switching, thank you for giving the definition, I didn't realize that there was an actual term for adapting to the majority. Well for me, I know that I must switch up when I am at work and not because of the obvious, being at work and dealing with clients, but switch up the way I may express certain emotions good, bad, and indifferent. I found myself adjusting my facial expressions and even lightly softening my tone inflection as not to come off as too aggressive (with a slight smirk) which is something in itself, the fact that my facial expressions can be misunderstood as intimidating or even being an angry or unapproachable, guess what, I'm just displaying my authentic self which is naturally reserved and even keeled. So, now I just smile a little more and try to give those little nods when I am walking in the hallways to give off more of ok, you can talk to her she seems nice vibe, which I am already nice...um but, that is sometimes not enough because, you can only be fake so long in a day and eventually my authentic self will show up, and my God, I try my hardest to ensure it is not at the wrong time, either way when black women use this form of coping in corporate America it is absolutely necessary and our livelihood depends on it a lot of the times.

Conforming to the masses even if it is mentally exhausting at times, allows me to get through the door and form a legacy for the next person coming behind me.

P4 excitably stated:

Switching up how you handle yourself for the benefit of success, I am all for it! White people code switch too if you didn't realize it. Yes, everyone wears a mask. God made you and you can choose when you need to use your God given attributes and gifts, whether it's confidence, mental stamina, or any other talents, I believe that you do what you need to, to get in the room. Being your authentic self is dependent on where you are. The advantage is being able to choose and I don't really see it as necessarily having a disadvantage, I will say that if you don't have self-awareness and confidence in your ability and talents then you can fall prey to losing yourself.

P6 stated:

I don't have any real opinion on code switching because I have never thought about it. Learning how to insert yourself into an environment is something that is learned at home and starts with your background and upbringing. You might be an anomaly because you perhaps are the only person of color in the room but so what, I am a strong and proud black women that walks around my workplace in my high heels with my recently very short blonde hair cut as you see (laughing, while stroking head) and my bold earrings and go about my way. If code switching helps with being in the "in" vice the "out" then I support it, all the way.

P10 stated:

African American women adapt to many cultures to fit in. When I am teaching in class I am in control of the narrative when teaching black history, I make sure that it is outlined in my syllabus that way if anyone has issues they can leave out the same door they came in because I am the head n---a in charge in my classroom so, I can offer a different perspective of black scientists and chemists which my degree in microbiology afforded me the opportunity to provide that to students. If I did not have a PhD in microbiology then I would not have that opportunity to share with my students. Thinking outside of the box is essential and being a black women, thinking outside of the box is our bread and butter of maneuvering in society. Having opportunities is the result of doors that have been opened for you and many times it may require some attitude or appearance adjustment. Now, I know what that sounds like, I mean that, being your authentic self can block those opportunities at times due to not exploring outside of the box. Which is needed to move up and if that still proves to be unsuccessful then you know and can move on possibly form the organization all together. Losing yourself is not worth the promotion regardless of the increased exposure you can possibly gain.

P11 tapping nails and sighing when asked the question stated:

Girl yes, code switch all day every day is how I function. I can't even go in to work with the kind of color and designs on my nails that I want because I would be looked at as ghetto and unprofessional so guess what here they are, look at my nails! They are this plain white color so I can blend in and not stand out, with oh I don't know, red glitter nails (annoyingly shaking her head and rolling eyes) it is frustrating. I

know code switching has helped me get my current position and certain projects, but why must I come to work and pretend and be fake? There is a girl in there that looks like a freaking rainbow bright and she doesn't get a second look. When I came to work with my hair in a nice blown out afro, I got all types of questions and girl let me tell you I had to dig deep and tap into my emotional intelligence and not slap one of them. I kept my responses short and if they even looked like they wanted to touch my hair I gave a stern look like you might not want to do that ma'am. So, now I come to work with my hair pulled back in a more relaxed look, plain nails, and less ethnic appearing jewelry because I get looks every single time I come in, it's like they taking bets on how I will show up to work today (P11, starting shaking head and closing her eyes tightly). Although, like I mentioned earlier that switching it up helped me get my current job, if you are not careful you can just fall into the false pretense that you are being more accepted because you have transitioned to the societal rules of what is viewed as professional for corporate America. Opportunities and exposure for me has increased my client growth and although I don't see this organization as a true embracement of diversity for us black girls I am utilizing the knowledge gained to better myself and help others become entrepreneurs while securing my future in financing by soon opening my own consulting business.

15. What are some rewarding and disappointing times in your current position? How did you feel?
16. How do you believe your rewarding or disappointing times have or will determine your longevity within your organization? Please explain.

Table 15

Emerging Themes – Question 15 and Question 16

Emerging Themes	Participant
Helped others progress	P3, P4, P5, P6, P7, P8, P9, P10, P11
Gained knowledge	P2, P4, P6, P7, P8, P10, P11
Unaccountability	P2, P3 P5, P8, P11
Ineffective communication	P1, P3, P5, P7, P8, P11

Questions 15 and 16: Based on the findings (see Table 15), four themes correlated to both questions, with recurring themes displaying significant relations when asked participants questions 15 and 16. Amongst the four revealed themes, *helped others progress* ranked highest, with all but two participants expressing similar sentiments. *Gained knowledge*, revealed to be an equal level of importance and value, explaining participant's views with seven interviewees discussing the knowledge base outweighed the disadvantages experienced due to long-term goals. The third theme that played an equally significant factor was *ineffective communication* which, participants appeared to emphasize an area that factored in whether they decided to continue with the organization. Lastly, *unaccountability*, while all participants expressed in different forms, appeared to score less and have less impact than previously mentioned themes.

P2 stated:

My disappointing moments which were many but, one that stands out is my current team partner, he is of a different nationality, I believe of Pakistan decent and he speaks to me in a condescending or more like, I would say in a disregarding tone and I don't want to stereotype him as I wouldn't want to be but, there is definitely some degree of cultural imbalance in our workspace and when I

am visibly frustrated or irritated, he asked me if I needed a mentor...umm really? Because I am frustrated about the lack of effective communication around here plus, the fact that when I expressed what I needed, it was not taken seriously at least from what I can see. Mentorship, are you serious? (P2 rolled eyes while sitting back in chair) while I am just over the time we have been in the same office which has been years, I stick around because I am continuing to strengthen my skillset, it's the information and knowledge base that I am not willing to sacrifice due to his low key misogynistic actions and behaviors. Once I am able to step out on my own, I will be able to help other people by starting my own business which is the ultimate reward for me.

P5 stated:

Being on active duty and in my current leadership position allows me to help my fellow shipmates and witness their growth through the ranks many times. I get to see a junior officer come to my department and leave the command and come back as a captain or one of my junior Sailors leave the department as an E-1 and next time I see them, they have made either second or first class petty officer or even chief. Getting to play a role in a positive way in my Sailor's lives is absolutely just an overwhelming rewarding feeling and keeps me going on days that are tough and I have feelings of wanting to go off the rails. Covid-19 made the disappointing times worse because morale was at its lowest that I have ever seen in over 20 years. The surveys that came out were just astonishing and shameful. Every year we do climate surveys to get a feel of what is going on in the command from diversity issues to the food. It helps leadership address these

issues. Another disappointing moment is how the pandemic had impacted the staffing levels to detrimental degrees because regardless of pandemic, deployments, illnesses, surgeries, and other healthcare necessities don't decrease so what do we do? Put more work on those that are already doing the work of two to three people already? and if they are civilians, we can't afford them to leave, it has stressed me out. It is not fair to the others but what really sucks, is having to tell one of my workers that he or she has to stay late to do a job when I know they have put in more than their share...(P5 shaking head) that is difficult, but we are the military, we keep pushing not matter what you know. The rewarding and disappointing times while both have their place to teach a lesson, they are not a factor for me because I am on the side of retirement soon.

P10 stated:

For the rewarding aspect, for me, receiving thank you notes from previous students expressing how I've helped them is an amazing feeling from a teaching perspective. I enjoy my job and love to see progress for my students, it is something that those in academia thrive off and keeps me motivated personally. As for disappointing...(P10 paused and signed sadly) I don't dwell on it but, for me, students dropping out of school due to a plethora of life situations whether it is, money, family issues, or personal. I found myself feeling down when I can't help all my students. I am not tired in my job and my students are my focus to teach and offer an educational foundation that they can take out into the world and make it better for the next generation. So, the very thing that is disappointing to a

certain degree is the same reason I will continue on teaching and sharing the knowledge with all students.

P11 stated:

Being able to help others is in itself a very rewarding feeling for me, because you're not only helping them but for me, I'm helping those members within the workplace that are or may possibly be apart of my team and that right there is the blessing coming back to me with giving. Currently my team is the best producing and has increased progress in project completion. Highlighting employees and giving recommendations for bonuses is something that is great. As for the disappointing part, even though that I have had successful teams and met and exceeded expectations, accountability is a pet peeve that I cannot overlook as a lingering issue at times and when I bring that up there is a sense of irritation in the air and I imagine it's the thought of not wanting to genuinely address it but rather upper echelon putting their head in the sand. But, when anything goes array on my team I address it immediately and when things are completely fumbled even though not my fault, I feel I should take full blame, but why?, It's just being accountable for my team even on my off day.... (she laughed) but that's what true leadership does, takes accountability. At times I question myself in relation to my job performance and my leadership. Dealing with many different personalities can be extremely exhausting and let me tell you, I have to schedule people to meet with based on their moods and mine. I have gained so much increased knowledge and exposure to other areas of the business side that it has made me more confident with making the necessary moves needed to improve

myself professionally. I am using both accounts of disappointments and rewarding moments at my current job and learned from them to ensure that I don't repeat the bad ones and improve the good ones. I will not be continuing on with this organization for long but as for now, I see it as a significant steppingstone with directing me on the path I want to be.

Summary

Chapter 4 concluded with the research data collection, and findings of the phenomenological qualitative study of the under-representation of African American women in senior leadership positions. The research explored the lived experiences of 11 African American women participants over 30 years old in the California region, in various leadership roles that spanned different professional fields such as medicine, academia, finance, and customer service. Additionally, among the participants were active duty and retired military members of upper and middle-class leadership positions. Participants were interviewed using 16 open-ended questions to assist the researcher in capturing the essence of their lived experiences by either Zoom or phone conferencing based on their availability. Furthermore, chapter 4 employed Moustakas's (1994) modification of van Kaam's analysis of data that included: listing and preliminary grouping, reduction and elimination, clustering and thematizing, validation, individual textual description, individual structural description, and textual-structural description which provided an outline for analytical investigation of human subjects.

The chapter incorporated horizontalization, which allowed for the presentation of expressions pertinent to the lived experiences. In addition, Chapter 4 discovered, analyzed, and presented multiple themes that derived from the questions asked of the

participants, which were placed into tables succeeding each question(s), depicting each of them and how many participants aligned with each theme. Transcriptions were annotated to convey participant responses and the emotional essence of each question.

Moreover, as the investigator, the researcher discovered a few significant themes, such as 'token black' and 'double-edged sword,' predominately because almost all participants mentioned a reference toward these themes within their responses, even if not purposefully mentioning the theme. The participants appeared to align with the specific emotions of oneness and the handling of the false dichotomy of the participants' specific individual characteristics being viewed in a monolithic form or as an outlier relating to leadership capabilities and professionalism.

Data revealed that the interviewees operating within corporate America and the military expressed similar emotions towards leadership opportunities and feeling supported, including their mental exhaustion of constant pressure to function above expectations with minimal space for correction. Cognitive diversity discussed along with fair representation appeared within a few participants' responses relating to the importance of representation and resource attainment to acquire leadership positions. There were questions highlighting the importance of having varying perspectives within the workplace as a relevant and needed aspect of innovative thinking outside the box including in strategizing plans and addressing and solving issues.

Furthermore, participants discussed a wide range of their lived experiences, which were similar in views on how society values their knowledge, presence, and overall individuality within their respective organizations; and as African American women separately. There was an overwhelming consensus on the emotional and mental

frustrations of African American women navigating both corporate American and military ranks. The researcher would be remiss, however, in not mentioning the outliers that were on the opposite spectrum for a few questions relating to code-switching and being the only African American in the room. In those instances, even the participants who identified themselves as not experiencing having to code-switch or feeling oneness explained the importance for black women to have the option to switch as a necessary and vice mandatory in all areas of society. However, participants acknowledged that it may also foster even more challenges.

Additionally, participants explained that not conforming in some specific fields can significantly decrease their opportunities to foster professional relationships that may propel their professional goals of attaining senior leadership. The research revealed that the can-do and must-do attitude that many women projected during the interviews conveyed immense perseverance and eagerness to advance academically, professionally, and socially. In addition, the data displayed repetitive themes among four questions when participants discussed having increased education, including how their rewarding and disappointing times factored into their feelings within their workspace. They discussed how and if those same feelings weighed in on their longevity at their organizations. Furthermore, participants revealed that confronting hurdles and obstacles requires a strong foundation. Some participants expressed that their religious beliefs and family upbringing were essential in navigating the workplace and assisted with maintaining a certain degree of level-headedness in dealing with challenging situations and negative biases, assumptions, and stereotyping.

The interviewees discussed being receptive and having an open mind as imperative on both sides of the aisle, specifically between employer and employee, to achieve and be aligned with an organization's mission. Participants emphasized that while not losing their identity in the process is more important, understanding where one stands is equally essential. The women further explained that value, self-awareness, knowledge, and networking are essential aspects of individual makeup and some of the main links to success.

When sponsorship and mentorship were discussed, all the participants appeared to have an across-the-board consensus on their importance and whether or not they were exposed to these perks. Seven of 11 participants expressed that they have had minimal to maximal sponsorship, emphasizing why they viewed it as a needed entity that played a significant role in their current roles and any future positions they pursue. Additionally, participants explained how having sponsorship and mentorship in the black community adds needed resources to assist with attaining other outreach programs, making connections, and being able to advocate for themselves to direct the trajectory of business or academic goals.

The research on the underrepresentation of African American women in senior leadership revealed intimate thoughts and genuine emotions on their journeys in navigating the workforce. In doing so, it offered the researcher additional perspectives that have and continue to shape the thinking of the 21st-century African American women functioning in America's military and corporate America. Chapter 5 includes sections discussing conclusions of major findings, unexpected findings, implications for

action, and recommendations for continued research, including remarks and reflections on research findings.

CHAPTER 5: FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of this phenomenological qualitative study was to investigate the lived experiences of African American relating to their underrepresentation in senior leadership positions. Participants consisted of 11 African American women, all over 30 years old, operating within divergent professions spanning medical, financial, and customer service, with a minimum of 5 years' experience while occupying current or previous leadership positions (e.g., senior regional manager, team lead, department head, etc.). The investigation into the phenomenon of African American women underrepresentation aimed to reveal where the correlation of gender and race factored into African American women's promotion into senior roles. It sought to determine how they perceived societal constructs applied to them as an increased hindrance when discussing assumptions, biases, and stereotypes.

The researcher's methodology to investigate the participants was conducted by interviewing via Zoom and phone conference, employing 16 structured open-ended questions to capture the genuine essence of participants' experiences as they related to questions. The aggregated data was organized and coded utilizing NVivo 10 and Microsoft's Excel Program (Office 365). The researcher employed Moustakas's (1994) modification of van Kaam's data analysis for thematizing participants' data, along with validation.

Moreover, the researcher set out to acquire dialogue to assist with addressing research questions which were:

- What structural societal barriers factor into the underrepresentation of African American women in senior leadership positions?

- Are less African American women's engagement in executive and career-enhancing preparatory programs affected by resource attainment?
- And, how does genetic endowment factor into individual thinking toward senior leadership attainment?

Furthermore, the investigation into the underrepresented phenomenon of African American women allowed participants to deliver unfiltered emotions, and expressions that contributed to the study's themes that revealed varying and similar lived experiences. Therefore, the investigation connected participants' lived experiences and conversations of diversity and inclusivity within senior leadership. Chapter 5 discusses:

- research findings
- unexpected findings
- significance of the study
- conclusions
- implications for action
- recommendations for further research
- concluding remarks
- and reflections on the underrepresentation of African American women in senior leadership positions.

Major Findings

In an ever-changing world of globalization and demographics in the workforce, how gender and race are discussed and approached requires a fundamental inquiry into the challenges and how, if any, those challenges impact the underrepresentation of

African American women in senior leadership positions and attempting to occupy senior leadership positions. Rattan and Dweck (2018) discussed having a mindset of openness and receptiveness, which authors categorized as fixed and flexible when addressing diversity and prejudices in the workplace, specifically amongst women and minorities. Today's generational makeup, accompanied by a wide range of personalities, cultural backgrounds, and lived experiences, demands a welcoming workplace environment (Valentine, 2020). Furthermore, developing a welcoming environment for prospective and diverse talent addresses systemic barriers, challenges, and biases that hinder African American women's senior leadership progression is vital (Rattan & Dweck, 2018).

This qualitative phenomenological study proved to be indispensable in understanding the underrepresentation of African American women in senior leadership positions. Thus, offering perspectives of the lived experiences that related to the research questions and investigating how those participants possible lived experiences reflected strong congruence to the theories of fair representation, cognitive diversity, and intersectionality. All of these were discussed in this dissertation's Chapter 2, literature review and helped to explain contributing factors that hamstring senior leadership positions held or attempted by African American women. To evolve and support growth for all, organizations must ensure that they recruit and promote individuals that not only possess the organization's needs, but query heterogeneous talent, both unvetted and vetted candidates, by orchestrating an unbiased approach (Valentine, 2020). Prior to addressing the challenges endured by African American women in ascending the metaphoric ladder to senior leadership. People are at times unaware of their unconscious thinking, attitudes, and behaviors and impedance with decision-making. This can hinder addressing

hot topics at work such that non-acknowledgment of biases filters into the workplace. Thus, causing possible contention and misunderstandings when discussing gender, race, and hiring practices (O'meara, Culpepper, Templeton, 2020).

Chapter 4 detailed themes related to how participants' daily experiences contributed to their perspectives and approach when eyeing senior leadership positions. Additionally, themes were derived as a response to discussing and addressing the uphill battle and societal constraints applied to women and minorities, specifically African American women, when applying for and occupying senior leadership positions. African American women generally must bear the unfair treatment and extraordinary barriers and hurdles of all ethnicities: addressing inclusivity, credibility, and the struggles to insert themselves to diversify the workforce. However, historically, African American women have been and continue to be disproportionately affected more than any reported ethnicity, which reflects incongruity with professional growth (Orbach, 2017).

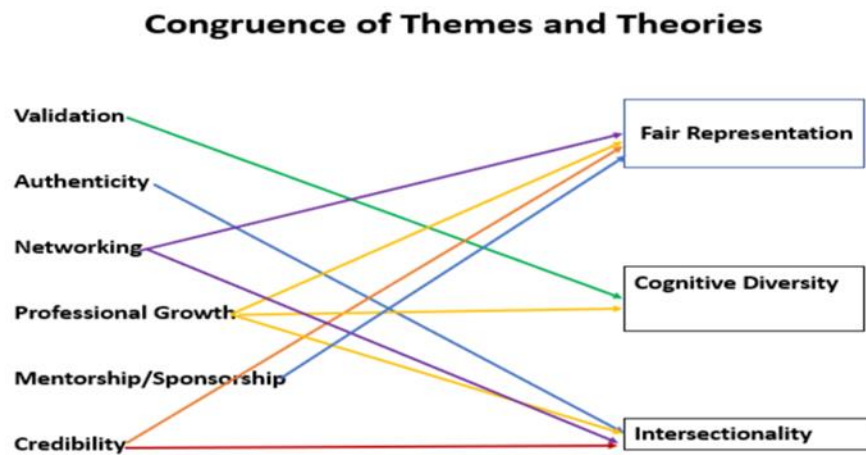
The investigation yielded many subjective themes concerning the research and participants' questions. There were six primary themes identified when the researcher conducted the coding and grouping through NVivo 10 and manually in Microsoft Office Excel (365), validating the findings of themes, which were:

- networking
- authenticity
- professional growth
- sponsorship/mentorship
- validation
- credibility

The researcher documented repetitive themes during the interview phase in field notes and transcribed them using Microsoft Office Excel (365) and compared them to themes that emerged within NVivo 10 to validate findings of reoccurrence and accuracy of participant's expressions from posed questions. Additionally, participants unknowingly made references to the researcher's theories impacting the minimal or absence of representation of African American in senior leadership positions, which were fair representation, cognitive diversity, and intersectionality (see Figure 1). Which appeared to display a symbiotic relationship when investigating the phenomenon into the low representation of African American women in senior leadership spanning multiple professional fields to include retired and active duty members of the military.

Figure 1

Congruence of Themes and Theories



Note. The display is a discovery of the congruence of participant driven themes and research themes outcome from the conducted qualitative study.

Unexpected Findings

Within this qualitative investigation, two discoveries were revealed during the interview process. One was the embracement of the 'tokenism' or 'oneness' aspect and

how the participants explained the importance of their role in representing African American women that may recuperate in the future. Also, how their positional status, attitude, and approach in situations impact not only them but others. The participants provided in-depth accounts of how critical their representation is, including being a role model, expressed by several participants as not an option, but an immense responsibility. Interviewees offered their vantage points of directing the narrative and not allowing perpetual stereotypes to overwhelm them.

Maintaining a keen awareness of what they do today may positively or negatively affect African American women successors was heavily emphasized. Participants veered into their roles as the gatekeepers of inclusivity, setting the stage for advancement. Interviewee P2 explained: "I know I am the first one here, and that's ok with me, but I will not be the last, so I have to do my best to ensure I am not hurting the next black woman." The second unanticipated discovery was the 'mental tax,' explained in various ways during the interviews. Participants explained the daily stress and frustrations endured trying to maintain a solid and unbothered mentality. P11 stated: "When I leave my house, for me, there is the immediate feeling of stress going into work because I know I have to play my position, and it is extremely stressful and draining."

Participants explained that the mental tax that occurs weighed heavily on them when deciding to remain or depart from their organization and leave a possible promotion. Furthermore, the fatigue expressed and experienced by participants offered insight into the daily internal, and often, silent struggles that African American women dealt with when attempting to occupy space in the workplace. Examining the research theories and how they related to the underrepresentation of African American women, the

researcher developed a conceptual model to depict the symbiotic relationships concerning the underrepresentation of African American women in senior leadership (see Figure 2).

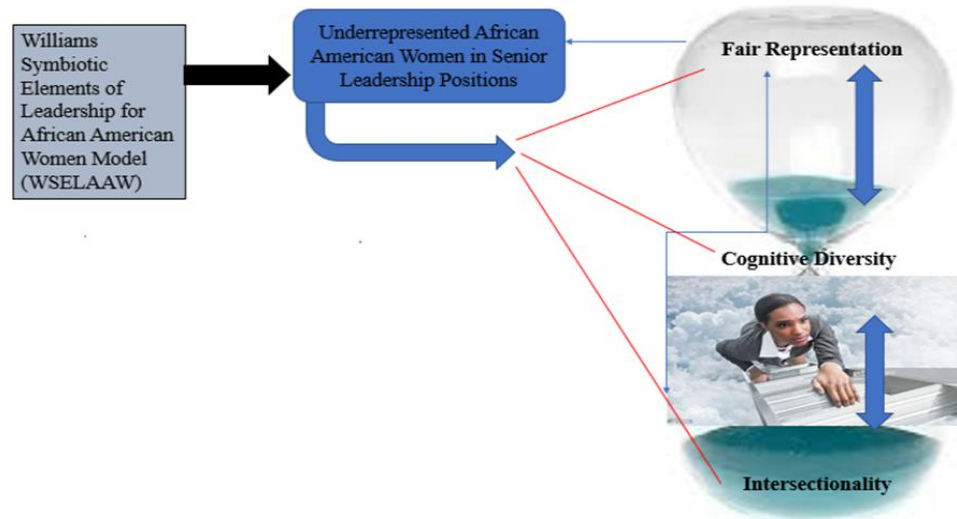
Within the realm of advancement for African American women, there have been and continue to be hurdles endured. Whether it is racism, sexism, discriminatory behaviors and actions, and homophobia, African American women historically have pushed against the cement ceiling and career ladder for centuries, with a positive swing of the pendulum towards inclusivity, diversity, and representation. However, the trajectory for advancement and breaking down the negative assumptions, biases, and stereotypes continue to impact African American women when attempting to insert themselves within the workplace and, even more so, in senior leadership positions. The Williams Symbiotic Elements of the Leadership of African American Women model (WSELAAW) utilized three theories to investigate African American underrepresentation to convey an illustration to depict

- *intersectionality* which acknowledges the multiple oppressions experienced by minorities;
- *cognitive diversity* that examines the various perspectives and cultural backgrounds that contribute to how an individual may address a situation and solve problems;
- and, *fair representation* showing how the gap widens once cognitive diversity was reached contributing to the dismal number of African American represented in senior leadership positions.

Figure 2

Williams Symbiotic Elements of Leadership for African American Women

Williams Symbiotic Elements of Leadership for African American Women



Note. The conceptual model shows how there is a symbiotic relationship between the theories where each theory relies on the other.

Leadership development and attainment for African American women require that they navigate a multilayered social construct designed without them in consideration. African American women possessing a degree of self-confidence in their ability plays a significant role in how they evolve professionally, including confronting the hurdles and challenges that are dependent upon intersecting identities. According to intersectionality theory, a conglomerate of facets contributes to an individual's identity, including capabilities and developed skillsets. Ruggs, Bilotta, Membere, King & Rosette (2023) posited that an organization's understanding of leadership ability and development will lessen the detrimental impact that challenges, assumptions, and discriminatory actions place on women of various ethnic backgrounds can have.

Intersectionality theory allowed the needed exploration into how race and gender (Ruggs et al., 2023) for African American women heavily influenced and increased barriers to attaining and sustaining senior leadership positions. In addition, it addresses the lack of value placed on the Black women's perspectives and lived experiences when examining their knowledge, skills, and assessments (KSA). Cognitive theory related to intersectionality derived from the evidence based feedback obtained during participant interviews. When the African American women addressed workplace situations, crisis management, and the human resource department, specifically personality conflicts, these theories supported participants' views. This included experiences of being unable to fully insert themselves within the workplace without appearing overbearing and bossy when providing their thought process concerning a specific issue.

Fair representation was discussed as an outcome of intersectionality and cognitive theories relative to the research. It revealed the relationship amongst all three theories in that when discussing intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1989), such narrative offered a segue into an understanding of cognitive abilities based on cultural backgrounds and identities intersecting. This includes representation of various backgrounds and how to successfully use them to improve the upward trajectory of African American women occupying and sustaining leadership positions. During interviews discussing fair representation, the participants explained there is large disparagement of women, specifically African American women, in senior leadership positions. Additionally, Ruggs et al. (2023) contended that when looking at the statistics for women of color-led 500 organizations or board member membership in 2022, women of color were almost non-existent, representing a disappointing 1.2%.

Significance of the Study

The gravity of this qualitative phenomenological research was to investigate and capture the essence of lived experiences of African American women currently in senior leadership and those striving to obtain senior leadership positions. In doing so, the study was able to aggregate relevant data to gain a better understanding of the challenges, barriers, and overall strategy used and skills that might be necessary for participants to become successful at attaining senior leadership. Thus, the researcher was able to analyze personal emotions, varying perspectives, and cultural and spiritual positions during interviews revealing raw and genuine expressions relative to navigational strategies employed in the workforce, including the mental state required (personally), for them to foster a trajectory on a path to senior leadership.

The study's relevance is even more evident in examining African American women's professional occupancy amongst leadership positions. Interviewing the participants elicited a wide range of feelings. Although the feelings ranged between anger and indifference many times, the exposure to mental anguish was minimal. The women could proceed and provide needed perspectives to acquire vital data. The researcher acknowledged in field notes the germaneness of the study of the low number of African American women in roles of authority and leadership, spanning fields such as science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM), including areas of the military leadership paradigm. The researcher was able to investigate where, how, and if the participants connected to the presented theories to assist in answering questions of why there are so few African American women leading in a range of fields. Furthermore, how personal perspectives and exposure to a wide range of positive and negative

circumstances factored into their positional stance on African American women's advancement, specifically in the U.S. and, even more specifically, the southern region of California.

Conclusions

The investigation examined the underrepresentation of African American women in senior leadership positions. The purpose and problem statements presented brought attention to the consistent and continual issues concerning the representation of African American women in senior leadership positions. The research utilized 16 open-ended questions in a structured format to a specifically selected pool of participants to contribute their negative and positive accounts that shaped their thinking and approach to various situations to address biases and stereotypes in and out of the workplace. Moreover, the research identified challenges the participants experienced and how they could combat their hurdles towards attaining senior leadership positions. Also, the qualitative phenomenological research provided a safe and unrestricted place where participants could be unfiltered to express themselves.

The investigation identified connections of hurdles for military participants (retired and active duty) that experienced similar instances of stagnation. However, as explained by participants, their challenges acted as a springboard to continually pursue personal goals of attaining senior leadership, whether with the current organization or not. The interviewees displayed an unwavering attitude of 'if she can, I can' and possessed a mindset of perseverance and remained steadfast in their responsibilities concerning others (the Black community) but, most importantly, authenticity to self while pursuing their definition of greatness and success in corporate America.

Implications for Action

This research and study aimed to explore the dearth and sizeable gap between African American women leaders in senior positions. Employing a qualitative approach and phenomenological methodology allowed the researcher to analyze the essence of the participant's lived experiences concerning representation within senior leadership ranks. The researcher selected a specific group of women to perform exploration and offered detailed accounts of interactions conveying personal viewpoints of the phenomena. The primary purpose of this study was to examine the challenges and societal barriers affecting the lack of African American representation. The study's theoretical construct and benefit were discovering additional attributes uniquely related to African American women that may have yet to be thoroughly discussed, while simultaneously contributing to the body of knowledge in a phenomenological manner. Subsequently, the researcher discovered unexpected factors that played a part in African American women's leadership attainment and underrepresentation.

Recommendations for Further Research

Within this qualitative phenomenological study, the dynamics of the research incorporated and focused on the lived experiences of 11 African American women in various leadership positions (senior regional manager, team lead, department head, etc.) spanning across the medical, academic, financial, and customer service fields. The researcher aimed to draw a reasonable connection between three presented theories, intersectionality, cognitive diversity, and fair representation; and underrepresentation of African American women in senior leadership positions. Additionally, with all best efforts, the researcher provided in-depth interviews, a literature review, and a methodical

approach to display the need for continued investigation of African American women's place in society, specifically, leadership. Still, there remain areas discussed in length with others subtly mentioned that warrant more attention in addressing the aperture of senior leadership and African American women. Future research should explore areas on

- intersectionality and the mental health consequences of identity overlapping
- genetic endowment concerning mindsets within the workplace
- evaluation of professional enhancement programs for professional growth and development
- resources for continued education of senior leaders
- code-switching and vernacular of African American women in the professional setting
- and, diversity and inclusion programs within organizations with low or no diverse leadership among women in senior leadership positions.

Additionally, research into the embracement of the tokenism factor of being a responsibility and not a choice voiced among several participants, which was an unexpected theme, is an area that should be investigated for correlation with mindset flexibility and behavioral approach within the workplace. Moreover, exploring these areas is essential to continue the discussion of gender and race in the workplace and how to break down barriers and address the challenges that hinder African American women.

Concluding Remarks and Reflections

During this journey, the researcher was forced to tap into inner strength to address a hot topic such as race and gender because many consider it polarizing and uncomfortable. This research opened the researcher's eyes to views and perspectives that were new and unexpected but necessary. The researcher also learned more about how many participants' spirituality helped them cope and progress while others kept their struggles internal. The investigation proved to be more than about the representation of African American women in leadership; it showed that we as human beings must do better to ensure we are open to difference and be willing to have tough conversations to avoid misconceptions. This researcher hopes future researchers push past their current state of comfort and explore all things that will contribute to a better world of inclusivity and acceptance of our differences.

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APPENDICES

“APPENDIX A”

Global Gap Report

Labor Force Statistics from the Current Population Survey

Search Labor Force Stat [Go](#)

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See also [PDF](#) and [XLSX](#) versions of this table. (See other [annual average tables](#) or tables for [other years](#).)

HOUSEHOLD DATA

ANNUAL AVERAGES

11. Employed persons by detailed occupation, sex, race, and Hispanic or Latino ethnicity

[Numbers in thousands]

Occupation	2022					
	Total employed	Percent of total employed				
		Women	White	Black or African American	Asian	Hispanic or Latino
Total, 16 years and over	158,291	46.8	77.0	12.6	6.7	18.5
Management, professional, and related occupations	68,099	51.5	77.7	10.2	9.0	10.9
Management, business, and financial operations occupations	29,350	44.8	80.4	9.4	7.3	11.3
Management occupations	20,199	40.5	81.6	9.0	6.6	11.5
Chief executives	1,780	29.2	85.9	5.9	6.7	6.8
General and operations managers	1,165	35.4	82.4	9.1	5.3	11.5
Legislators	14	-	-	-	-	-
Advertising and promotions managers	68	49.7	80.3	13.8	4.4	8.9
Marketing managers	656	58.9	83.9	6.8	7.5	11.4
Sales managers	566	34.2	88.3	5.9	3.5	11.3

“APPENDIX B”

California Baptist University Research Subject Consent Form

Research Title: Underrepresentation of African American Women in Senior Leadership Positions

Faculty Advisor: Dr. Henry Petersen

Researcher: Tameeca M. Williams, TameecaM.Williams@calbaptist.edu

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 investigate underrepresentation of African American women in leadership positions.
- Eleven (11) 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 contribute to investigating obstacles and challenges addressing underrepresented African American women in senior leadership positions.

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.

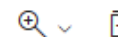
Upon request, you will receive a copy of this signed form and the summary of the study that will be discussed with you.

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

“APPENDIX C”

IRB APPROVAL LETTER

IRB 061-2223-EXM - Exempt Determination Approved



Principle Investigator: Tameeca Williams

Co-PI: NA

Faculty Advisor: Henry Petersen

College/Department:

IRB Determination: Exempt Determination **Approved** – Student research using confidential interviews; no minor participants; no more than minimal risk/risk appropriately mitigated; no deception utilized; acceptable consent procedures and documentation; acceptable data protection procedures. Data collection may begin, in accordance with the final submitted documents and approved protocol.

Future Correspondence: All future correspondence about this project must include all PIs, Co-PIs, and Faculty Advisors (as relevant) and reference the assigned IRB number.

Approval Information: In the case of an unforeseen risk/adverse experience, please report this to the IRB immediately using the appropriate forms. Requests for a change to protocol must be submitted for IRB review and approved prior to implementation. At the completion of the project, you are to submit a Research Closure Form.

Researcher Responsibilities: The researcher is responsible for ensuring that the research is conducted in the manner outlined in the IRB application and that all reporting requirements are met. Please refer to this approval and to the IRB handbook for more information.

Date: January 11, 2023