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# A Phenomenological Exploration of the Leadership Development Experiences of Black Women

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*Walden University*

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# Walden University

College of Management and Technology

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Oresha Sharlene Greenidge Foster

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Walden University  
2021

Abstract

A Phenomenological Exploration of the Leadership Development Experiences

of Black Women

by

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M.Phil, Walden University, 2019

MBA, Davenport University, 2002

BBA, Detroit College of Business, 1998

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Applied Management & Decision Sciences

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## Abstract

The leadership pathway for Black women has unique challenges and obstacles due to the double jeopardy of their race and gender. The lack of critical empirical work on the leadership development of Black women has left a gap in the understanding of how racial and gendered identities influence their development as successful leaders. This research was conducted to examine how Black women developed as leaders and how they made meaning of their leadership development experiences. A qualitative transcendental phenomenological study was conducted framed by concepts of intersectionality and gendered racism to produce a comprehensive description of the phenomenon of the leadership development experiences of Black women. Purposeful sampling was employed to collect personal narratives from 15 Black women leaders via semistructured interviews. Moustakas modified van Kaam analysis was applied to uncover descriptive themes and to attain the essence and meaning of the participants' lived experiences. Sixteen themes emerged describing challenges and success factors extracted from the interview data through descriptive coding, member checking, and reflective journal notes. The results from this study may provide a framework for Black women aspiring to advance into leadership and may assist corporate and organizational leaders in spotting talent and promoting leadership development opportunities that increase the prospect of career advancement for this population of women. The study also provides a conceptual approach to guide the thinking and practice that brings about a profound and meaningful social change toward equity for Black women in leadership.

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## Dedication

I thank God for giving me the vision to pursue my doctorate and for the strength to see it through to completion. I dedicate this dissertation to my sons, TréVon and Jackson: You have been a driving motivation for me to finish this journey. To my mother, Amalia: You have always supported me through every challenge, obstacle, and success in my life. You are a source of inspiration and strength. You continuously have my back. I know that I can always depend on your support in every aspect of my life; you are the epitome of a strong Black mother!

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## Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

For more than 70 years, women's participation in labor force activities has been expanding. According to the U.S. Department of Labor (2016), women now comprise over 56.8% of the labor force. However, women earn less than men on average and remain underrepresented among business leaders (Catalyst, 2019). According to the Center for American Progress (2017), women in Michigan only held 38.3% of managerial jobs, despite making up 52% of the state's population. Women also held fewer executive officer positions at the state's largest 100 public companies. In 2017, there were only four women of color executive officers and nine women of color board members among Michigan's largest firms (Center for American Progress, 2017).

Black women are the most underrepresented women of color subgroup in management (Allen & Lewis, 2016; Davis & Maldonado, 2015). Black women comprise slightly more than 12% of the female workforce, but only 7% of the 2.9 million managers in the private sector (Catalyst, 2019). The numbers are similar for Hispanics and Asian women. The Bureau of Labor Statistics (2017) showed that, in the United States, Black women (61.6%) were more likely than Hispanic (58.7%), Asian (58%), and White (57.9%) women to participate in the labor force. Education is a great factor in the employability of these women (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2017). Black women dominate lower-level management jobs and are marginally represented in executive-level positions. Davis and Maldonado (2015) contested that even though women and minorities have increased representation in the labor pool, they continue to hold mainly middle

management positions. Hunter-Gandensen (2018) highlighted that Black women are significantly underrepresented, are far less likely than others to be promoted to manager, face everyday discrimination, and are less likely to receive support from leadership. The underrepresentation of Black women in senior leadership roles, despite robust academic credentials and work experience, often suggests a broader problem: a workplace that fails to offer every employee equal access to opportunities for growth (Roberts et al., 2018).

The pathway to leadership for Black women involves unique challenges. Black women experience some of the most inherent hurdles in the workplace (Beckwith et al., 2015; Dillard, 2016; Roberts et al., 2018). Black women cope with pay inequities and daunting roadblocks that stifle the meaningful dialogue that would help them make professional progress (Barnes, 2017; Catalyst, 2018; Roberts et al., 2018). Black women also struggle to obtain leadership development opportunities (DeFrank-Cole et al., 2014). More information is needed about how successful Black women developed and progressed in leadership positions. Understanding how this subgroup of women navigated and emerged as leaders may provide a model to support other Black women in sustaining their ambitions to advance into leadership.

There is a lack of critical empirical work on the leadership development of Black female leaders that can aid in understanding their experiences (Bierema, 2016). Most of the literature on leadership neglects to address the influences that race, and gender may play in individual leadership development. This exclusion has left a gap in the understanding of how racial and gendered identities influence the development of Black



women as leaders. Understanding the experiences and perceptions of Black women may assist corporate and organizational leaders in spotting talent and promoting leadership development opportunities that increase the prospect of career advancement for this population of women.

Chapter 1 provides the foundation of the study by stating the problem, purpose, and significance of the study and the background and historical factors that have hindered the leadership development and advancement of Black women in top executive-level positions. The chapter also includes descriptions of key concepts that provide the framework for this research project.

### **Background of the Study**

Gender equality has slowly improved for women in the workplace (Cook & Glass, 2014; Rhode, 2017). Women make up a substantial percentage of the workforce, and more are evolving into leadership roles, executive-level decision-makers, or influencers of an organization. According to the labor and statistics reports in 2015, women represented 39.2% of the 17 million people employed in management occupations. According to Catalyst (2015), women held 4.2% of CEO positions, 9.5% of top earner positions, 25.1% of executive/senior-level officials and managers positions, 36.4% of first/mid-level officials and manager positions, and 44.3% of total employees were women. Black women made up 16.5% of workers in S&P 500 companies, yet only held 3.9% of executive, senior leadership, or managerial roles (Center for American Progress, 2017).

Black women are a uniquely talented and highly motivated group of employees (Catalyst, 2018; Holder et al., 2015). Many Black women have the drive to hold a powerful position with a prestigious title, yet their advancement into top leadership positions is often met with resistance. Black women's credibility is frequently questioned; they face stereotyping and are often not afforded access to critical leadership experiences, which excludes them from influential social networks (McGee, 2018).

As a result of this exclusion, many Black women seeking to advance in the workplace engage in identity shifting by adopting dual identities that appease both White and Black communities (Dicken & Chivex, 2018; Mullet et al., 2017), a practice known as *code-switching*. Code-switching is shifting or altering of cultural behaviors and languages to deemphasize a negatively valued identity. Some Black women elect to diminish their identity or self-concept to maximize their perceived leadership abilities (Dickens et al., 2019).

Black women develop coping strategies, such as identity shifting, to diminish the negative consequences of discrimination (Dicken & Chivez, 2018). Quality social networks are crucial for career advancement. These inequities often block critical business experiences needed for Black women to advance into leadership. In traditional male-dominated structures, implicit knowledge of organizational culture, availability of advancement opportunities, and access to leadership development occur through social networks that Black women cannot access (Davis & Maldonado, 2015; Ely et al., 2011;

Sales et al., 2019). The absence of access to knowledge often prevents this population of women from seeking out professional advancement opportunities (Ely et al., 2011).

Women, especially women of color, have been largely ignored in the literature until recent years. As leadership development programs foster skill enhancement and career advancement, participating in this form of training provides opportunities for networking and career mobility (Clarke, 2011). The lack of empirical research on the experiences of these marginalized women has resulted in limited support and their experiences not being fully understood (Sy et al., 2017). Black women are equipped to assume leadership roles; many have the education and the drive, yet they do not fit organizations' perceptions of an ideal leader (Bierema, 2016). Leadership advancement for minorities is hindered when judgments about them do not match the perceived cultural norm (Sy et al., 2017).

Theoretical and empirical studies on leadership have paid little attention to leadership development as a process, especially for women (Day et al., 2014; Gipson et al., 2017). Leadership is a process of using influence on significant objectives, motivating behavior that leads people toward these objectives, and assisting in shaping the culture of a group or an organization (Bass, 1985; Gardner & Avolio, 1998; Glamuzina, 2015; Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995; Katz & Kahn, 1978). The literature focusing on the challenges that women endure as they advance from employee to leader do so in the general sense (Barnes, 2017). The research has touched on leadership styles, salary disparity, and acceptance. Focusing research on female leaders of color can help expand current

research and leadership theory to be more inclusive. Research findings may also identify essential tools and strategies to help elevate the career trajectory for this population of women.

### **Problem Statement**

The research on Black female leaders often assumes the feminist tenet and does not contribute to the understanding of the intersectionality of race and gender that Black women face in their leadership development (Davis & Maldonado, 2015). In addition, leadership development programs often do not address the experiences that Black women encounter with executive career development. Traditional leadership programs may also lack the ability to address the unique developmental needs of ethnic minorities (Sy et al., 2017). Conventional leadership programs can create problems, and even barriers, for Black women (Chuang, 2015; Davis & Maldonado, 2015; Rapp & Yoon, 2016). The social problem is that Black women continue to be underrepresented in top-level leadership positions and remain disproportionately concentrated in lower-level jobs, compared to their White male counterparts (Koval & Livingston, 2017; Tran-Quon & Leung, 2017).

According to Davis and Maldonado (2015), Black women face experiences that differ from the experiences of their White counterparts. These women face multiple obstacles throughout their pursuit of career advancement into high-ranking executive-level positions (Davis, 2012). More focus is needed on expanding opportunities for the advancement of women of color, especially Black women, in key leadership roles (Ely et

al., 2011; Rhode, 2017). This population of women endures fewer opportunities to advance into leadership. There is an insufficiency in the understanding of how intersectionality influences the leadership development of Black women. The specific management problem is that little is known about the lived experiences of leadership development among Black female leaders (Barnes, 2017; Davis & Maldonado, 2015).

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this qualitative transcendental phenomenological study was to explore how Black female leaders describe their lived experiences with leadership development. The desired outcome of this study was to obtain rich and detailed data and identify themes or commonalities in the lived experiences of Black female leaders. This study provided the participants with the opportunity to tell their stories about how they advanced into leadership. Participants discussed the challenges they faced and the opportunities that aided them in their success. To understand this phenomenon, transcendental phenomenology was used to explore the challenges and success factors that Black women experienced in their leadership development.

Qualitative methodologists support that no more than 15 participants may be used to reach thematic saturation for a qualitative study and that long interviews with up to 15-20 people tend to be sufficient for a Ph.D. phenomenological study (Hennik, 2017; Mason, 2010; Moustakas, 1994). To ensure the trustworthiness of data and the potential to affect positive social change, this empirical transcendental phenomenology study's data were analyzed by distinguishing between the internal horizon, the construction of

trustworthiness as it takes place within the research project, and the external horizon that points to the impact of the study results in the world mediated by trustworthiness (Moustakas, 1994).

### **Research Question**

How do Black female leaders describe their lived experiences with leadership development?

### **Conceptual Framework**

This qualitative transcendental phenomenological study was framed by two key concepts that focus on the challenges facing Black female leaders with leadership development: (a) Crenshaw's (1989) concept of intersectionality and gendered racism and (b) Parker's (2005) concept of intersectionality as it relates to Black female leaders. The selected framework helps to produce a comprehensive description of the phenomenon of the leadership development experience of Black female leaders. An in-depth discourse analysis of how race and gender inform the leadership development experiences of Black female leaders is needed to challenge the traditional discourse that has omitted this population of women (Crenshaw, 1989; Parker, 2005).

Intersectionality frames how interconnected systems of power influence society's most marginalized people (Crenshaw, 1989). Crenshaw's original interpretation of intersectionality and gendered racism was grounded in critical race theory (Bell, 1995). Critical race theory is based on the social construction of race, and socially constructed categories of race and racism are endemic, permanent, and intersect with other forms of

oppression such as gender and minority oppression (Bell, 1995). Crenshaw (1989) affirmed that Black women experience disadvantages through multiple sources of oppression, such as race, class, gender, sexual orientation, and religion. Intersectionality is one of the six tenets of critical race theory (Bell, 1995) concerning race and gender and illustrates the various ways Black women have experienced oppression due to their race and gender (Rocco et al., 2014). Delgado and Stefancic (2017) described the critical race theory movement as a collection of activists and scholars engaged in studying and transforming the relationships between race, racism, and power.

The central premise of intersectionality as it relates to Black female leaders defines how race and gender affect the lived experiences of Black female leaders (Parker, 2005). Parker (2005) also grounded her conceptual work on Black women leaders in Derrick Bell's (1995) seminal work on critical race theory. Parker's (2005) research described intersectionality as a conceptual lens for interpreting the experiences of Black women holding leadership positions within predominantly White organizations. The concept of intersectionality is appropriate for exploring leadership in the workplace for minority women because it defines the connection between how leadership identity shapes multiple identities and social identity (Sanchez-Hucles & Davis, 2010).

### **Nature of the Study**

The purpose of this qualitative transcendental phenomenological study is to explore how Black female leaders describe their lived experiences with leadership development. Transcendental phenomenology was selected to gain a deeper

understanding of the lived experiences of Black women with leadership development. This methodology provides researchers with mechanisms to study complex phenomena. Transcendental phenomenology provides an ontology of real and ideal objects and focuses on exposing the meaning of the phenomena rather than arguing a viewpoint or constructing a theory; it seeks to identify phenomena as perceived by its participants (Husserl, 1970; Moustakas, 1994). The central concern of transcendental phenomenological research is to return to exemplified, experiential meanings aiming for a new, complex, and opulent description of a phenomenon (Neubauer et al., 2019).

Transcendental phenomenology is an interpretive research methodology directed at gaining an in-depth understanding of the nature and meaning of everyday lived experiences. Phenomenology is a philosophic attitude and research approach. Understanding the meaningful, concrete relations implicit in the original description in the context of an event or experience is the primary focus of transcendental phenomenological inquiry and knowledge (Moustakas, 1994). Quantitative analysis was not selected for this study as it is not an applicable research method for this study (Lampard & Pole, 2015). Quantitative methods are best suited for studies seeking causation or for documenting results related to range and correlation (Harkiolakis, 2017).

Qualitative inquiry is the in-depth insight of the phenomenon under investigation (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016), which contrasts a quantitative inquiry, where conditions are controlled, and variables are managed. Qualitative research is conducted naturally in everyday life settings related to the phenomenon under study. In a qualitative study, the



researcher discovers meanings through interviews, reflexive journaling, and analyzing the participants' first-person narratives in their natural settings to connect to a phenomenon (Denzin & Lincoln, 2017; Padden-Denmead et al., 2016).

The population for this study consisted of Black women who have held middle-management or executive-level leadership positions across various business sectors and professions (education, nonprofit, banking, marketing, technology, human services, and healthcare). The highest-level leadership position for this study includes C-suite executives. The essential criterion is that the participants experienced the phenomenon (Guest et al., 2020; Moustakas, 1994). This qualitative study may provide an enhanced understanding of the professional development experiences and career pathways of Black female leaders.

Moustakas' (1994) modified approach to the van Kaam method for analyzing the data provided a structure for the study. To reach saturation, I aimed to interview 25 participants. Guest et al. (2020) found that small samples of five to six interviews produce new information in a data set and that little new information is gained as the sample size approaches 20 interviews. However, the sample size can be increased as necessary to clarify emerging data further until data saturation is achieved. Leung (2015) affirmed that saturation is an important aspect of rigor in qualitative research. Saturation or thematic saturation occurs at the point in data collection when no additional issues are identified, data begin to repeat, and any further data collection becomes redundant (Hennik et al., 2017).

I followed the epoche protocol by bracketing preconceived thoughts and assessing the events from the most objective viewpoint possible (Moustakas, 1994). Second, clusters of meaning units and themes were created to extract meaningful expressions from interview transcriptions (Moustakas, 1994). Finally, themes were synthesized for the textual and structural descriptions of the meanings and the essences of leadership development experiences of Black female leaders.

### **Definitions**

The following definitions are provided to ensure a common understanding of the terms used in this study.

*Black women:* Used to describe women of African descent, this includes African, Afro-Caribbean, Afro Latina, and Black; this term is based on the biological assignment and does not take into consideration self-identification of gender having origins from any racial group from Africa (U.S. Census Bureau, 2018).

*Concrete ceiling:* The degree of difficulty Black women face as they attempt to advance into leadership (Barnes, 2016).

*Exemplary leadership:* Five core behaviors and practices held by effective leaders related to commitment and engagement, which include (a) inspiring a vision, (b) challenging the process, (b) enabling their followers, and (d) encouraging the heart (Kouzes & Posner, 2012).

*Glass ceiling:* Intangible barriers that prevent qualified individuals—women and minorities—from advancing upward in their organization into management-level positions (Catalyst, 2015; Sanchez-Hucles & Davis, 2010).

*Intersectionality:* A subset of feminism that describes how race, gender, and social and political discrimination overlap (Crenshaw, 1989).

*Leadership development:* Process of developing an individual's skills and capacity to perform leadership roles within organizations (Kouzes & Posner, 2012).

*Lean in:* Term used to describe the process of women seizing opportunities during their careers and not limiting themselves; the metaphor is of women taking hold of opportunities without hesitation (Sandburg, 2013).

*Old boy network:* An informal system of friendships and connections by which men use their positions of influence to provide favors and information to help other men (Lalanne & Seabright, 2016).

*Women of color:* Non-Caucasians who are Black, Hispanic, Middle Eastern, Asian, Native American, and other Pacific Islander and American Indian or Alaskan natives (U.S. Census Bureau, 2018).

### **Assumptions**

There were several assumptions for this study. The primary assumption of this study was that leadership development creates exposure to more opportunities for Black women to advance into top leadership positions. It was assumed that Black women share

unique leadership experiences, especially the complex process through which they come into leadership. Another assumption was that these women have a personally unique story to tell related to how they overcame challenges to succeed in White male-dominated organizations. It was also assumed that all the participants in the study would openly and honestly answer interview questions regarding their leadership development experiences, and the responses would be subjective in nature.

This study focused solely on Black women to gain a better understanding of their trajectory into leadership positions. Although these women yield from different business sectors and personal backgrounds, they shared commonalities regarding their experiences with leadership development. These assumptions guided the interview questions that were asked and may have ultimately influenced the way findings are interpreted. Analyzing accounts of how Black women came to leadership through the lens of intersectionality and critical race theory creates a viewpoint that fights against the cultural dominance of intellectual inferiority and powerlessness and sheds light on how marginalized women can succeed.

The final assumption was that this study may provide insight into the challenges, barriers, and success factors to aid Black women who aspire to advance their careers to senior-level positions. The findings of this study create an opportunity for these women to learn from the experiences of the participants. Learning from these successful women may also help researchers understand how to help Black women succeed and navigate through the career pathway to leadership. Data from this study may be helpful to

organization leaders, human resources, and leadership development professionals so they may increase leadership development opportunities for Black women. Additionally, future researchers can expand on the findings and increase the transferability of the study.

### **Scope and Delimitations**

The focus of this study was understanding the lived experiences of Black female leaders based on their descriptions of their lived experiences with leadership development. This population was selected because Black women are among the largest population of women in the U.S. workforce, but they remain underrepresented in top leadership positions (Catalyst, 2017; Glass & Cook, 2016).

The inequities of opportunities for Black women desiring advancement into leadership positions have been identified as an invisible barrier hindering ascension beyond a specific level; lack of mentorship, networking, formalized leadership development opportunities hinder professional growth (Beckwith et al., 2016; Glass & Cook, 2016). I intended to obtain rich data in this study that would serve as a baseline for future studies on the intersection of race, gender, and leadership development for Black women.

The data collection for this study delimited to participants who met the following criteria: (a) identifies as a Black woman; (b) has held a leadership position for more than 12 months, (c) works for an organization or corporation located in the state of Michigan, and (d) possesses a well-developed attitude, opinion, and understanding regarding the leadership development opportunities and experiences of Black women. This study has

the potential of transferability to future research on the development experiences of Black female leaders. Additionally, I explored contextual factors that may influence how Black women emerge as leaders.

### **Limitations**

The major limitation of this study was that it only focused on a small sample of Black women. The data collection also came from Black women in the state of Michigan, and I did not examine factors that influence women in other regions of the United States. The restriction on the size limits generalizability and the assumption that the study participants would give a vibrant and accurate description of the phenomena. Additionally, a potential limitation in this study's design was researcher bias or a tendency to see in the data outcomes that were anticipated (Pigott & Valentine 2017). I made every effort to protect the data from undue influence inherent to my own bias, assumptions, motivations, and influences based on my racial and gendered lens.

### **Significance of the Study**

The study findings could highlight common experiences of Black women seeking professional advancement. The study could assist organizational leadership and human resources in developing appropriate models and opportunities to address career planning and progress for Black women. This study may provide recommendations for the development of programs to enhance the leadership competencies of Black women. The research may also aid in understanding the impact that gender and race have on the professional development of Black women. There is a substantial gap in the literature on

how Black women are developed and moved into leadership roles (Davis & Maldonado, 2015; Madson, 2017). Black women make up a substantial portion of the workforce; supporting their successful attainment of leadership development opportunities allows for increased diversity in top leadership positions.

### **Significance to Practice**

This study may contribute to a greater understanding of the leadership development experiences of Black women, including their experiences of how leadership development opportunities, race, gender, or culture influenced their professional development and career progression. The information from this study may provide a framework for Black women aspiring to advance into leadership positions in all business sectors. The study may also provide a conceptual approach to guide the thinking and practice that has the potential of bringing about profound and meaningful change toward equity for Black women in leadership. The significance of this study is to illustrate the personal and professional perceptions experienced by Black women in their accession to leadership.

The path to leadership for Black women has unique challenges. Black women experience some of the most inherent barriers in the workplace. This study focuses on Black women who have advanced into leadership positions across various business sectors. The goal of the research was to obtain explicit data related to the participants' unique experiences of leadership development and their trajectory into leadership positions. The data collected from the participant interviews may be used to identify the

skills, tools, and experiences necessary to equip aspiring Black female leaders to advance in their careers.

The study may also add to a growing body of research and contribute to the overall understanding of the experiences of Black women who have successfully advanced into executive-level leadership positions. By presenting information on the perceptions of Black female leaders, this study may provide organization leaders, human resources, and leadership development professionals with resources to increase leadership development opportunities to augment the representation of Black female executives (Carter-Sowell & Zimmerman, 2015). Furthermore, this research opens the opportunity for discourse on the topic of leadership development and the underrepresentation of Black women in executive leadership positions.

### **Significance to Theory**

I explored the leadership development experiences of Black women with the goal of contributing original qualitative data to the theoretical literature. Leadership development is integral to cultivating Black women into leadership positions. Leadership development theory explores how leadership progresses throughout time and is predicated on the continuous skills development of individuals to make them effective leaders. Implicit leadership theories influence how individuals view themselves relative to leadership effectiveness. The dynamics of race and gender of this population of women provide a unique perspective to the theory of leadership development by exploring its influence on perceived leadership effectiveness and personal trajectory of development.



### **Significance to Social Change**

The purpose of this qualitative, transcendental phenomenological study is to explore how Black female leaders describe their lived experiences with leadership development. Prior research on Black women and leadership has shown that this group is underrepresented in top leadership positions and often face biases. The findings from this study can promote positive social change by introducing an understanding of the underrepresentation and disenfranchisement of Black women executives. Insights from this study may help identify potential barriers to success and provide strategic options to enhance the leadership development opportunities of Black women and other women of color. Supporting a richly diverse group of women into leadership roles can help organizations maximize their human capital and become more inclusive. As more Black women occupy positions of leadership, inquiries into how they developed their leadership identity and how they navigated to achieve executive status can provide rich insight into the adeptness of Black women leaders. The research data can help in understanding Black women's unique leadership experiences, especially the complex process by which they came to leadership.

### **Summary and Transition**

In Chapter 1, I addressed the gap in the literature and provided the background, problem, purpose of the study, framework, nature, and significance of the study to theory and practice of leadership development. The information in the literature suggests that the leadership development experiences of Black women may differ from that of White

women and White men, and even the experiences of women from other minority groups. Many leadership theories primarily focus on White American men and the assumption that their leadership strategies apply to all other demographic groups (Parker & Ogilvie, 1996).

For this study, I used intersectionality as a concept for understanding the complexity of the lived experience of Black female leaders with leadership development. Intersectionality was used as an analytical tool that highlights the varied nature of an individual's identity (Collin & Bilge, 2016) and long standing permanence of racial inequality. Using transcendental phenomenology, the central research question regarding the intersection of race and gender and its influence on the leadership development experiences of Black female leaders was explored. Chapter 2 contains a detailed literature review of the perspectives, challenges, and obstacles experienced by Black women as they advance into leadership positions.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

Black women continue to be underrepresented in top-level leadership positions and remain disproportionately concentrated in lower-level jobs, compared to their White male counterparts (Koval & Livingston, 2017; Tran-Quon & Leung, 2017). The literature review section of this dissertation begins with a discussion on the concept of leadership development and its various theories. The term *leadership* has evolved throughout time; a long and robust history of leadership extends over a century (Day et al., 2014). While many definitions of leadership have emerged, nearly all include the following components: process orientation, influence, group context, and goal attainment (Chin et al., 2018). The practice of leadership has increasingly gained the attention of the research community that explores the diversity of the approach of the leadership process.

For more than a century, scholars have studied leadership traits in attempts to identify the innate qualities that make some people leaders (Davis & Maldonado, 2015). Traditional leadership development focuses on developing the leadership attributes and abilities of individuals (Bass, 1978; Burke, 2007; Greenleaf, 1970; Knippenberg, 2004; Uhl-Bien, 2006). However, leadership development must concentrate on the context of leaders, such as the experience of being a female leader and the broad social context that dictates gender roles, cultural norms, and expected behaviors. Gipson et al. (2017) wrote that leadership development occurs at the systems level and combines multiple methods to develop leaders.

The objective of leadership development is to enable individuals to learn how to become self-leaders (Ross, 2014). Leadership development has the potential to foster transformational change by allowing an individual's awareness of problematic habitual patterns and providing insight for envisioning and practicing alternative patterns (Debebe et al., 2016). The intersection of race, gender, and individual backgrounds may provide barriers to leadership development opportunities, especially for Black female leaders (Apugo, 2020). The position of leader is one that encompasses power and influence (Burns, 1978; Bryman et al., 2006). Leaders with diverse experiences, viewpoints, and backgrounds are crucial to inspiring different perspectives, expanding world views, and fostering innovation (Gotsis & Grimani, 2016). Organizational leaders need to cultivate a culture that supports equity and engenders outcomes beneficial to all employees.

Burns (1978) posited that leaders have a strong drive for responsibility and task completion, vigor, and persistence in pursuit of goals, and they have daringness and originality in problem-solving. Leaders also possess a drive to exercise initiative in social situations, self-confidence and a sense of personal identity, a willingness to accept consequences of decision and action, readiness to engross interpersonal stress, ability to influence others' behavior, and capacity to structure social interaction systems to the purpose at hand (Burns, 1978). How people become leaders and how they assume the leadership role are fundamental questions. There are increasingly more studies conducted on women in leadership in which researchers attempt to identify key success factors or

pitfalls; most of the research has been focused on women at lower-level positions (Day et al., 2014).

Black women represent a growing section of the mid-level leadership pool, but they continue to fall behind in holding top leadership roles in organizations (Ely et al., 2011). The lack of Black women in leadership may be a result of a misguided perception that women are ineffective leaders. Identifying factors that prohibit the advancement of Black women in leadership is critical to foster pathways to professional development. Achieving gender parity in leadership is a matter of fairness and equality. According to Hill et al. (2016), achieving a top leadership position has the potential to open the door to status and privilege. Top leaders are the most highly compensated individuals in an organization, followed by managers and supervisors. The ability to achieve parity in leadership is essential. Exclusion from top leadership denies these women the ability to use their skills and knowledge to make a difference in their organizations and society in general (Glass, 2016).

The number of Black women in top leadership positions does not reflect the number of women in the workforce. However, some Black women have been able to break through the social and institutional barriers to advance into top leadership and C-suite positions. These women include Condoleezza Rice, the first Black Secretary of State of the United States; California U.S. Representative Maxine Waters, who has served since 1991; Stacey Caywood, CEO of Wolters Kluwer Legal & Regulatory, a \$1 billion global legal and compliance firm; Ursula Burns, CEO of Xerox from 2009 to

2016; Mary Winston, the former interim CEO of Bed Bath & Beyond in 2019; and Ramona Hood, the first Black female CEO of FedEx. Understanding how Black female leaders succeed may help other Black women aspiring to advance into leadership roles.

The literature has revealed that women have made considerable advancement, moving into managerial and executive-level positions, which includes increased earning power. However, this picture may not reflect the career advancement and leadership development of Black women. The process of increasing the number of Black women in leadership roles needs to be improved. The exploration of female leadership development informs the advancement of theory, education, and practice (Ely et al., 2011).

Conventional research on leadership tends to ignore the role of gender and race concerning leadership development, style, and effectiveness (Sanchez-Hucles & Davis, 2010). The purpose of this qualitative transcendental phenomenological study was to explore how Black female leaders describe their lived experiences with leadership development. This section provides a review of current literature on the intersection of race and gender as it relates to the leadership experiences of Black women.

### **Literature Search Strategy**

The literature review strategy included the use of the Walden University Library. The search terms included publication dates between 2015 and 2020. The databases used were Thoreau Multi-database, Google Scholar, Research Gate, Wiley, ProQuest Central, ERIC, EBSCOhost, Science Direct, and Taylor and Francis Online. I used full-text, peer-review articles, books, and ancillary information from professional journals. The search

terms used in various combinations were *leadership development, race, gender, Black women, African American women, women of color, minority women, leadership, intersectionality, critical race theory, experiences of Black women in leadership, mentorship, experiential leadership, leadership identity, stereotyping, networking, Black female leaders, and barriers to leadership*. I used the search terms to explain the framework for the study.

### **Conceptual Framework**

This qualitative transcendental phenomenological study was framed by two key concepts used to focus on the challenges facing Black women in leadership development: (a) Crenshaw's (1989) concept of intersectionality and gendered racism and (b) Parker's (2005) concept of intersectionality as it relates to Black female leaders. The selected framework helped to produce a comprehensive description of the phenomenon of the leadership development experience of Black female leaders. An in-depth discourse analysis of how race and gender inform the leadership development experiences of Black female leaders is needed to challenge the traditional discourse that has omitted this population (Crenshaw, 1989; Parker, 2005)

Intersectionality frames how interconnected systems of power influence society's most marginalized people (Crenshaw, 1989). Crenshaw's original interpretation of intersectionality and gendered racism was grounded in critical race theory (Bell, 1995). Critical race theory is based on the social construction of race, and socially constructed categories of race and racism are endemic, permanent, and intersect with other forms of

oppression such as gender and minority oppression (Bell, 1995; Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). Crenshaw (1989) affirmed that Black women experience disadvantages through multiple sources of oppression, such as race, class, gender, sexual orientation, and religion. Intersectionality is one of the six tenets of critical race theory (Bell, 1995) regarding race and gender and illustrates the various ways Black women have experienced oppression due to their race and gender (Rocco et al., 2014). Delgado and Stefancic (2017) described the critical race theory movement as a collection of activists and scholars engaged in studying and transforming the relationships between race, racism, and power. Kahn (2016) highlighted that critical race theory utilizes many methodologies and focus on numerous key theoretical substructures such as racism.

Critical race theory is a social and not a biological construct of the intersectionality of race, gender, sexuality, and class. It uses biographies, autobiographies, stories, and counterstories to give voice to the marginalized. The aim of critical race theory scholars is to familiarize society at large with the notion that no phenomena of social, culture, political, gender, or circumstances are solely the result of independent actions. All human beings are interdependent, and therefore, societal problems arising as a consequence are also interdependent. Hence, race, gender, and ethnicity cannot be studied in isolation (Kahn, 2016).

According to Solorzano and Yosso (2002), critical race theory helps to validate the knowledge and experiences that Black people and other historically marginalized minorities bring to research and reassess the theoretical premise and framework of the



implicitly White male-dominated discourse, often used to describe experiences of people of color. Scholars and activists use critical race theory to dispel the notion that racism is isolated and individualized. Most racism remains obscure, hidden beneath a veil of normality. Kahn (2016) affirmed that critical race theory's emphasis on the intersectionality of race, gender, class, and the justice system enables researchers and scholars to look at issues of discrimination holistically. Dixson and Rousseau (2017) argued that a significant shortcoming of critical race theory is the overreliance of the counternarrative tenet and storytelling as a source of knowledge to identify the important personal and community experiences of people of color. However, Parker and Villalpando (2007) contended that critical race theory is a valuable lens with which to analyze and interpret administrative policies and procedures and provides avenues for action in the area of racial injustices.

Grounded in Derrick Bell's (1995) seminal work on critical race theory, Parker (2005) research described intersectionality as a conceptual lens for interpreting Black women's experiences holding leadership positions within predominantly White organizations. The intersectionality concept is appropriate for exploring the leadership development experiences of Black women because it helps to reveal the connections between how leadership identity shapes multiple identities and social identity (Sanchez-Hucles & Davis, 2010). Intersectionality theory conceptualizes the interconnected nature of social classifications such as race and gender as they relate to an individual or group, creating overlapping and interdependent systems of discrimination or disadvantage

(Crenshaw, 1989). The intersectionality theory expresses “the multi-layered forms of discrimination experienced by women while being Black” (Moorosi et al., 2018, p 1). Scholars often use intersectionality to articulate individuals' complex nature and experiences based on their gender and ethnic identity. Intersectionality theory applies to various business sectors, influences employment, education, healthcare, politics, and many other areas where race, gender, and even social class interact. Intersectionality is used to address and question how multiple forms of inequality and identity interrelate in different contexts and over time” (Dixson et al., 2017; Gillborn, 2015). The intersectionality theory has evolved over the past few decades, stemming from the Black feminist theory and critical race theory (Crenshaw, 1989; Collins, 2000). These theories provide a platform for researchers to explore Black women’s voices from their unique experiences (Davis & Maldonado, 2015).

Intersectionality and critical race theories are often used in concert to explore how race and gender influence the leadership development of Black women (Collins, 2019; Collins & Bilge, 2016; Curtis, 2017, Dixson et al., 2017; Sanchez-Hucles & Davis, 2010). The intersectionality framework provides a mechanism for describing how various forms of discrimination or oppressive barriers influence the career trajectory for Black women seeking to advance into leadership. Likewise, critical race theory provides a theoretical underpinning for revealing inequalities in leadership development of Black women, using narrative stories to uncover the lived experiences of Black women in how successfully attained leadership positions. Critical race theory provides insight into the conscious and

unconscious bias and forms of racism that may exist for Black women in their ascension into leadership (Marcias & Stephens, 2019).

### **Review of the Literature**

Research on women in leadership has increased substantially over the past decade. Morossi et al. (2018) noted that great focus is given to White women's experiences and challenges. More recently, efforts were afforded to Black women due to the emergence of the Black feminist movement. The Black feminist movement formed to meet the needs of Black women involved in the Black liberation movement and the women's movement who felt they were subjects of racial and sexual discrimination. The Black feminist ideology presumes Black women as powerful, independent subjects (Griffin, 2016). By concentrating on multiple oppressions, historical scholarly descriptions have created misconceptions, which hinders the ability to discover and appreciate that Black women are not victims.

Black feminism allows for an in-depth examination of the many ways in which the intersections of race and gender influence the leadership development of Black women. Collins (2002) stated that to capture the interaction of race, gender, and social class in Black women's lives, we cannot consider the feminist tenet as it was solely developed based on the experience of middle-class White women. Black women face unique experiences of discriminatory uses based on racism and sexism (Torino et al., 2019). The U.S. Department of Labor (2016) reported that Black women are the fastest-growing labor force group. However, Black women remain poorly represented in high-

level executive roles, remaining between 1.0%–1.1% of chief executive officers and board members (McGirt, 2017). Black women experience biases due to their race, gender, and class, representing 7% of the U.S. workforce (McGirt, 2017). Black women continue to maneuver between sex and race and all the stereotypes associated with these identity markers.

There has been a considerable amount of research on the bias against women in leadership. Much of the current research centers on overt experiences of race and gender discrimination (Torino et al., 2019). The studies looked at the perceptions regarding women's leadership potential and stereotypes, which generalized women across racial and ethnic groups. The incongruity between leader and gender roles occurs because of prevailing stereotypes affiliated with female gender roles that are perceived as inadequate when paired with male leadership characteristics (Rosette et al., 2016). Research conducted on the effects of gender and race on the career advancement of Black women found that these women contend with experiences in the business world that is different from White women or even Black men (Catalyst, 2015). Black women often must rely on their resilience to succeed; because of the frequency of which they encounter obstacles and setbacks resulting from the intersectionality of race, gender, and other identities (Roberts et al., 2018; Williams, 2020). The intersectionality perspective premise that effects of race and gender are not independent of one another but are intertwined and have multiplicative proportional representation (Burton, 2020; Smith et al., 2019).

Roberts et al. (2018) noted that business leaders often struggle to advance underrepresented groups because they model their development strategies on their own paths to success. Black women often succeed, not strictly on their merit, but due to the willingness of others to recognize, support, and develop their strengths and talents. The road to leadership demands a shared vision that supports diversity in the expression of women's values, shaped by their perception, understandings, and lived experiences (Curtis, 2017).

Intersectionality and critical race theory are used in this study to explore the lived experiences of Black women in leadership roles. The critical race theory can address and provide suggestions for racial inequities that may help leaders and decision-makers take action that increases equity and diversity and eliminates racism (Capper, 2015). The critical race theory approach encourages more in-depth discussions regarding inequalities, provides critical thinking, and strengthens multiple perspectives. Studying the participants' lives in their contextual background offers a deeper understanding of structural and political intersectionality (Morossi et al., 2018).

Based on the intersection of their race and gender, Black women may encounter different barriers and opportunities in their career (Nunez, 2014). Collins (2000) recognized the interlocking nature of the systems of oppression of racism and sexism, which made the experiences of Black women leaders unique. Diehl (2014) noted that barriers are higher in women's career experiences in all business sectors, especially for Black women. The intersection of an individual's race and gender could influence their

entry into leadership. Critical race theory is an essential paradigm for all those scholars who engage with marginality issues like race, class, gender (Khan, 2016).

The recognition and affirmation of one's identity as a leader helps sustain the development and practice of complex leadership skills (Ely et al., 2011). Literature focusing on the causes of the continuous underrepresentation in leadership positions has seemingly moved away from looking at intentional efforts to exclude women to more obscured barriers to women's advancement. Sandberg (2013) discussed gender equality and why women are underrepresented as a valuable part of our global workforce. Sandberg addressed how women unintentionally hold themselves back from advancing in the workplace; however, she did not address how racial identity influence or hinder success. Sandberg (2013) coined the concept of Lean In, which is a woman's ability to exercise assertiveness to lead rather than follow, provides strategies that may help women break into top management, but does not explore the boundaries that exclude minorities from access to leadership roles. Sandberg's affirmed that women are often hindered by barriers that exist within themselves. In her writings, Sandberg offered practical tips, backed by research, to equip women with strategies to proactively progress in the workplace instead of shying away (Phipps & Prieto, 2020).

Ely et al. (2011) posited that people learn new roles by identifying role models. Compared to their male counterparts, aspiring female leaders have less social support for learning how to claim their leadership identity credibly. Individuals especially observe and compare themselves to role models. Studies that consider gender separate from race

often failed to capture the multifaceted experiences of Black women. A significant number of these studies indicated that Black women experience different treatment than their White counterparts. White women have been able to shatter the glass ceiling that many Black women cannot penetrate (Davis & Maldonado, 2015).

Organizational culture often feeds into the stereotypical biases that consider Black women as incapable of leading, intellectually inferior, and morally inept due to their race and gender profile (Gipson et al., 2017; Rosette et al., 2016). There have been varied discourse on the leadership gap between men and women. Past research focused on gender bias, stereotyping, and discrimination as factors to the gender gap in top-level positions (Gipson et al., 2017). Stereotyping is a powerful technique for justifying the status quo and maintaining a hierarchical process (Vial et al., 2016). Black women are at an intersection of discrimination and chauvinism in the workplace. The dual status of racial and gender minorities' leads Black women to unique and unexplored barriers that impede their career and leadership development.

Leadership development is a key that is essential to unlocking individuals' creative potential by equipping them with the necessary skills and knowledge to meet the current and future needs of organizations. Evaluating the influence of race on developmental experiences and work experiences is heuristic in obtaining insight into women's viewpoints regarding their emergence to leadership within an organization (Glass & Cook, 2016). The role of race and gender in leadership development is a complex enterprise, but it has a significant influence on leadership development and

leadership effectiveness. Bass and Bass (2008) posited that good leadership develops through a continual process of self-study, education, training, and the accumulation of relevant experience. There has been an increase in leadership development literature, focusing on traditional theories such as great man, trait theory, behavioral leadership theory, and more contemporary theories of transactional leadership, transformational leadership, and authentic leadership.

### **Intersectionality**

For nearly forty years, scholars have been arguing on the precise definition of intersectionality. Some identify intersectionality as a methodology, while others coin it as a framework or lens to look at racial and ethnic minorities. The term has evolved to include all marginalized groups. Crenshaw (1989, 1991) expressed intersectionality as an exploration of how different power structures interact in Black women's lives. Additionally, Crenshaw argued that the dominant conception of discrimination conditions individuals to think about disadvantages occurring along a single categorical axis, which erases Black women in its conceptualization. Collins (2009) declared that the experiences and social position of Black female leaders are unique. According to Stanley (2009), the lived experiences of Black women are not established within separate spheres of their race, gender, and social class. The intersection of the spheres creates the social realism that is not captured within traditional feminist discourse. Intersectionality attends to analyze the various ways identity groupings intersect to compound discrimination (Aaron, 2020).



Intersectionality, grounded in Bell's (1995) critical race theory, is often used to illustrate how racism continues to be dominant in society. It involves the use of stories that challenge majoritarian narratives anchored in stereotypes and misrepresentations of racially stigmatized and marginalized groups. Cabrera (2018) described it as counter space for scholars of color to challenge and transform racial oppression. Critical race theory was developed in the early 1980s from the work of legal scholars and those seeking racial reform, including Derrick Bell (1995), Kimberle Crenshaw (1989), and their colleagues as a mode to confront and challenge the ideologies and practices that enable racism to persist and to seek liberation from systemic racism. Critical race theory also seeks to analyze marginalized groups' experiences and the existing power systems that oppress marginalized groups' members. Critical race theory views race, gender, or class marginality as essential processes of rich information to empower transformation.

Critics such as Brahm (2019) argue that intersectionality has transformed into a form of victimology. He noted that well-intentioned consideration of either race or gender, independent of one another, could lead to perverse consequences for those affected by both racism and sexism simultaneously. Hancock (2016) highlighted the historical underpinning of the intersectionality movement to illustrate how intersectionality challenges the notion that women's experiences are based solely on their gender. Yuval-Davis (2006) addressed the need for analytical distinction. She rejected the conception that Black women suffer from triple oppression: race, gender, and working-class members. Yuval-Davis argued that thinking of someone as being oppressed by her

racial identity rather than her gender does not always make sense (2006, 2011).

Intersectionality force too much emphasis on identity formation, untheorized categories, and social structures (Cho, 2013). Others argued that it is ambiguous and does not offer an adequate explanatory framework for addressing the root cause of social inequalities.

Aaron (2020) affirmed that Black women form their identities around their race and gender. She stated that to understand and explore their enactments and ways of knowing, one contends with their intersecting identities.

Gunnarsson (2017) contended that the arguments regarding intersectionality are polarized and create artificial arguments amongst theorists regarding the way of dealing with the more substantial and political issues of intersectionality. Conagham (2009) viewed intersectionality as once innovative but now just a rehash of Black feminist ideology. Collin (2014) argued that the critics of intersectionality inaccurately represent the tenet of intersectionality; it enables an understanding of how individuals carry multiple identities and highlights race and gender oppression and a range of other interrelated forms of institutional and direct oppression. To address the injustices that individuals, mainly, Black women, experience, there must be a recognition of how they are impacted by their multiple identities.

Crenshaw (2005) identified three aspects of intersectionality that affect non-White women: structural, political, and representational intersectionality. Crenshaw highlighted how the experiences of women of color, especially Black women, differ from that of White women. Jones and Solomon's (2019) study of women in conservation leadership

identified that the women experience gender-related challenges in their careers and that women of color reported struggling with race-related informal exclusion and assumptions of inadequacy. The researchers also identified the need for increased support for empowering women leaders. Intersectionality is a way in which social and cultural constructs such as race and gender interact to gain a better understanding of the complexities of the dual status that Black female leaders experience in the workplace (Davis, 2016).

There is generally not one factor, event, and condition that shapes one's life. Many factors shape an individual's life, such as their culture, race, gender, and social status, all of which work in concert and influence one another. Collins and Bilge (2016) asserted that intersectionality is a way of understanding the complexity of the human experience. The interlocking systems of race, gender, and social class give Black women a voice regarding their intersectionality experience in their leadership development (Davis & Maldonado, 2015). Through intersectionality analyses, researchers seek to understand how the structure of the inequality gap is synchronously racialized and gendered for Black women. Some scholars assert that interlocking systems of oppression and gender are addressed simultaneously (Rosette et al., 2018), while others contend that emphasis on gender diverts attention from critical issues of race (Rodger, 2016).

The degree to which Black women identify and ascribe their professional development and attitudes with race and gender is influenced by personal and contextual factors. Research that omits intersectionality cannot sufficiently address the ways in

which Black women are subjugated, resulting in the underrepresentation of Black women in leadership roles. Crenshaw (1989) asserted that it is necessary to illumine how the intersections of race and gender and other personal and social identities interact to shape the multiple dimensions of Black women's employment experiences.

### **Black Feminism**

During the civil rights movement of the 1960s and 1970s, Black women found that their individual needs did not fall into the realm of the feminist movement, which looked solely on gender issues. Black feminism emerged from the exclusion of the Black female experience from the women's rights movement and even that of the Black Power movements (Aaron, 2020). Black feminism challenged traditional feminists who claim to speak universally for all women (Rodger, 2017). The Black feminist scholarship makes the lived experience of Black women the pivotal point of theorizing and treats their experiences as a valid subject of inquiry. Davis and Maldonado (2015) supposed that the Black feminist theory provides Black women the opportunity to speak from an experience unknown to other women.

Black women needed a multi-lens tool or concept, which enabled them to address the complexity of the social issues they faced as both females and an ethnic minority (Griffin, 2016, Moorosi et al., 2018; Rosser-Mims, 2018; Rosette et al., 2016). Black feminism, as posited by Collins (2000), embodies a point of marginalization in which Black women differ from White or even other women of color.

Crenshaw (1989) argued that Black women are, at times, excluded from feminist theory and antiracist policy discourse centered on experiences that often do not accurately reflect the interaction of race and gender. Black feminism is a movement to awaken the consciousness and understanding of Black women to empower and stimulate them to embark on a path to personal freedom (Collins, 1999; Griffin, 2016). Black feminism epistemology builds on the tenet of the traditional feminist perspective, which posits a societal structure based on a patriarchal system that split men and women into gender-specific roles (Collins, 2009).

Early feminism ignored racial injustice; there was a lack of attention to race, class, and gender equality in the fight for social and political equity. The feminist ideology and movement advocated for social, political, and economic justice for White women but failed to consider the sociocultural factors of Black women (Collins, 2009). One of the primary objectives of the Black feminist movement is to empower Black women through the obtainment of knowledge, which, through leadership development, enables them to develop and assume roles as leaders more effectively.

### **Gender and Leadership**

According to the Center for American Progress (2017), the latter part of the 20th century brought considerable progress in women's professional advancement in the United States. Gipson et al. (2017) stated that women held less than a quarter of corporate leadership positions. However, women remain substantially undervalued even though they make significant contributions in the areas of management and leadership. The

gender wage gap has narrowed in most professions, and women climbing the management ranks is at a steadily increasing. Yet, there are considerable racial and ethnic differences in terms of women's success in moving into top-level jobs. Women still do not match the success of men in accessing top-level positions (Glass & Cook, 2016; Krivkovich et al., 2017).

Critical race theory offers guidance to extricate the meaning inherent to the lived experiences of Black female leaders. Crenshaw (2014) argued that Black women had been discriminated against in ways other than racism and sexism separately. Still, sexism was the widely acknowledged form of offense as it included inequality of White women. According to Davis (2016), a lack of understanding of the Black women's experiences with leadership development, ascension to executive leadership roles, and the intersectionality on race, gender, and social class constrain the process for Black women attaining executive leadership roles. There has been increased literature about gender diversity in leadership positions (Glass & Cook, 2018; Gould et al., 2018; Lyness & Grotto, 2018; Kossek & Buzzanell, 2018). Women have become more visible in leadership positions in business and have some have obtained national prominence in the political arena (Ben-Neom, 2018).

Despite the considerable advancement women have made in advancing in the workplace, there remains a gap in high-level leadership roles, including board leadership. Even though women are equally qualified to be corporate and political leaders, the gender leadership gap persists (Kossek & Buzzanell, 2018). Gender plays a complex role that

shapes the relationship between perceived ideals of womanhood and leadership (Curtis, 2017). There are opinions on the factors causing women to have difficulty in reaching senior leadership positions. A major factor is based on the lack of fit between women's characteristics, skills, and aspirations deemed necessary for effective leadership (Hoyt & Murphy, 2016; Lyness & Grotto, 2018). Beddow (2018) wrote, gender is a socially constructed, fluid concept that can be understood and experienced in many ways, but within many workplaces, it is still largely perceived as a binary system...women have to navigate many hidden but powerful barriers, which influence the way they present themselves in the workplace, advance their careers and learn and develop as leaders" (p. 1).

As more women (especially Black women) move into leadership positions, the need for support systems, which provide a sense of belonging, is essential as it allows for an environment that promotes inclusivity and success for these women. Women's ascent into the rank of leadership may come with some great opportunities as well as unique challenges. Women often seek to balance their careers and their familial obligations. The responsibility for domestic duties continues to burden working women (Lyness & Grotto, 2018). As a result, many women decide to delay their career progression; this decision frequently derails a woman's ability to attain positions in leadership. Lemoine et al. (2016) affirmed that gender is one of the most salient and influential factors in determining leadership emergence. The literature on women in leadership indicates that women also face many challenges, which include unfair treatment, unequal pay, sexism,

and stereotyping. Davis and Maldonado (2015) addressed the double standard that many women in leadership face in the workplace.

Women often face challenges working in male-dominated industries and environments. Many times, female leaders must adapt to these environments and corporate cultures to succeed. Davis and Maldonado (2015) commented that as women ascend into leadership, barriers to assure continuity and return at top levels, female executive talent entails more complexity. Women are preemptively discriminated against for leadership positions because they are not perceived to hold the necessary masculine qualities (Kelinsky & Anderson, 2016).

### **Race and Leadership**

Intersectionality depicts how various forms of discriminatory practices interact and uniquely affect Black women differently from other racial or ethnic groups (Crenshaw, 1989). Through critical race theory, the key factors of oppression that affect Black women are drawn to the forefront. The theory identifies that Black women are not afforded adequate access to leadership development opportunities and recognizes the fact that racial discrimination is one of the facets that can have detrimental effects on these women. Unfortunately, for many Black women, race, gender, social class, and differing lived experiences limit their opportunity for progression into leadership (Barnes, 2017; Burton, 2020). Black women occupy unique social spaces where gender oppression interlocks with racism. The unique and complex experiences and challenges for Black



women, tied to their intersecting marginalized identities, have largely been overlooked in management research (Smith et al., 2019; Wheaton & Kezar, 2019).

Crenshaw (1989) posited that being a Black woman cannot be fully comprehended by independently comparing racism and sexism. In their critique of intersectionality, Wheaton and Kezar (2019) advanced that it is difficult to research the experience of a Black woman without understanding how her racial and gender identities are locked together. The fundamental tenet of intersectionality is to identify how forms of discrimination overlap or are related to one another. The objective of this study is to understand how gender and race collectively influence the leadership development of Black women as leaders. Black female leaders' emergence is largely shaped by external and internal forces that affect their everyday lived experiences (Davis, 2016).

Black women have a strong history of leadership. Even in the darkest hours of our history, Black women have held the role of mothers, providers, and champions of the family (Rosser-Mimms, 2018; Williams, 2020). These women have a sense of confidence and responsibility that is often inspired and motivated by their sense of community and their spirituality (Lomotey, 2020). Black women have been at the forefront of the civil rights movement and have the strength of their community. Black women leaders have many external factors and influences that affect their identities as leaders (Curtis, 2017). There is limited empirical research on how race, gender, and culture may influence an individual's conception of leadership. There is also limited research on the influence of race and the leadership development of Black women.

Women of color are often generalized as one group, thereby negating their distinctiveness based on ethnicity, family, geographical location, philosophy, and aspirations (Curtis, 2018). Crenshaw's (1989) viewpoint of intersectionality revealed underpinnings of the common tendency to erase Black women from the experiences of racial and gendered beings by grouping them as one unified entity. Schmidt (2014) argued that the intersection of race, socioeconomic benefit networking opportunities, advancement in education, and cultural knowledge. Women experience barriers to leadership opportunities on a large-scale compared to men. The opportunities to advance in the ranks of organizational leadership are even more difficult for women of color than their White counterparts. Although there have been substantial advancements toward gender equity and equality, disparity still exists within senior-level positions for women of color (Seo et al., 2017).

Leaders may be judged differently based on their ethnic background (Sy et al., 2017). As a result, these leaders may have specific and unique development needs. Since the adoption of civil rights laws, there has been a substantial increase in the diversification of economic growth and opportunities for minorities (Holder et al., 2015). Despite the diversification in the workforce, people of color are underrepresented in executive-level positions in the United States (Holder et al., 2015; Krivkovich et al., 2017). Context should always be considered in leadership research when asking participants to rate the effectiveness of a leader's behaviors. Black women may be viewed as less capable of leading organizations when compared to their White

counterparts (Cook & Glass, 2013; Davis & Maldonado, 2015). While some leadership behaviors are considered universally effective across contexts, their effectiveness may change depending on the circumstances of the situation. A significant amount of the research on two types of biases against female leaders, perceptions that women have minimal leadership potential and counter-stereotypical behavior, have generally presumed that the descriptive, prescriptive, and proscriptive stereotypes are comparable for women across racial groups (Davis & Maldonado, 2015).

Black women occupy spaces in which power hierarchies emerge to dominate the biological, social, cultural, and political aspects of their lives (Rodgers, 2016). Crenshaw (1995) addressed how images portrayed through the convergence of pervasive accounts concerning race and gender as well as the recognition of how contemporary critiques of racism and sexism marginalize women of color, especially Black women. Despite Black women's unprecedented contributions to the corporate sector, the fight for dignity and respect remains under attack decades after the civil rights movement (Rosser-Mims, 2018).

Black women face challenges and stereotypes in the workplace (Williams, 2020). Assertiveness and ambitious Black women are often labeled as angry Black women, and this informal description presumes all Black women are irate, irrational, hostile, and negative despite the circumstances (Rhode, 2017; Yamaguchi & Burge, 2019). The angry Black woman stereotype has unofficially crossed into the work environment but has a lack of representation in professional or academic literature. The angry Black woman is

aggressive, unfeminine, undesirable, overbearing, attitudinal, bitter, mean, and hellraising (Malveaux, 1989; Morgan & Bennett, 2006). In a study of women's journey into college presidency, Okeilme (2017) found that Black women and their White counterparts both experience sexism, harassment, or gender-based discrimination in the workplace; however, White women identified more benefits of gender compared to Black women. Davis and Maldonado (2015) suggested that the influence of intersectionality is a major factor to challenges that hinder the leadership development of Black women.

### **Concrete Ceiling**

Research on women in leadership has gained momentum; there has been a spike in interest in the phenomena over the past four decades (Morossi et al., 2018). While the challenges women face is well-documented, there remains a deficit in the understanding of the factors that inspired the success of women who were able to rise above the glass ceiling (Glass & Cook, 2016). Women leaders make significant contributions to organizations yet remain significantly underrepresented in corporate leadership (Krivkovich et al., 2017). Much of the literature that focuses on the challenges that women face advancing into leadership cover women in general; only a few have focused on the challenges of minority women (Barnes, 2017).

Morossi et al. (2018) noted there is a bias towards White middle-class women and less focus on women of color. White men and, to some extent, White female leaders often use their privilege to move ahead in the workplace. They also use their privilege to circumvent and control their Black counterparts; Black women leaders are often subject

to having their authority undermined (Roberts et al., 2018). Socially constructed hierarchies of race, gender, and social class serve to disempower the process of leadership for Blacks in predominately White organizations (Collins, 1999). Banes (2017) discussed the concrete ceiling metaphor used by Black women to describe a familiar glass ceiling that White women encounter to describe the degree of difficulty they face to advance into leadership. The metaphor illustrates that it is harder for Black women to advance to become leaders than their White counterparts. For Black women, their race is still externally an important factor, even when the individual chooses not to discuss her racial identity (Oikelome, 2017).

### **Stereotyping**

Black women have a strong tradition of independence and self-sufficiency. Unfortunately, these traits seldom grant them access to management or executive-level positions. Hoyt and Murphy (2017) explored the process and influence of stereotyping on women's leadership. They noted that individuals who are part of marginalized social groups are vastly aware of the stereotypes connected with their social group and how others may respond to them based on these stereotypes. Racial stereotypes have a long history of oppression and subjugation of minorities (Neal-Jackson, 2020). McGee (2018) asserted that stereotyping and exclusion from informal networks stifles the upward mobility of women. However, the nature of exclusion and stereotyping differ among the group of women.

Bierema (2016) noted that stereotyping is one of the major barriers to women advancing into leadership. Stereotypical assumptions about gender differences make conditions difficult for women to branch into leadership status (Davis & Maldonado, 2015; Gupta, 2019; Lemoine et al., 2016). In corporate America, gender and racial stereotypes affect and influence the culture and norms connected to women (McGee, 2018). Stereotyping is especially problematic for Black women. Stereotypes often center on their skill set and perceived inability to be effective leaders (Williams, 2020).

Racism and sexism are two factors that may affect this population of women leaders. Common stereotypes for women of color: Asian women are dorsal, Hispanic women, hot-tempered, and Black women, hostile or angry. Neal-Jackson (2020) affirmed that stereotypes are powerful ideological tools that work to support racism and other forms of oppression against minority groups. Critical race theory promotes systematic deconstruction of the perceptions and assumptions that support the visible manifestations of discrimination against marginalized women and provides a paradigm to recognize the forms of oppression that create disparities and barriers for advancement for these women (Collins, 2000; Crenshaw, 1989; Delgado & Stefani, 2017; Dixson et al., 2017).

### **Barriers to Leadership**

Black women and other women of color advance slower and have narrower pathways to success than their White counterparts. Most of the literature on leadership neglect to address the influences that race and gender may play in individual leadership development. The research generally focused on the barriers to equal opportunity or lack

of career advancement, rather than the experience of Black women (Davis & Maldonado, 2015). This oversight has left a gap in our understanding of how racial and gendered identities influence the development of women as leaders. Women have less upward mobility within organizations than men. Male-focused leadership strategies are barriers to women's success in leadership roles (Dwivedi et al., 2018). Female CEOs are more likely to fail in their roles because they do not fit the stereotypical perception of an effective leader (Dwivedi et al., 2018).

In their study, Beckwith et al. (2016) established that women encounter invisible work barriers that influence their experience; these systemic factors, including the glass ceiling, remain and are deeply embedded in corporate culture, work practices, and social norms. As a result, these insidious barriers persist to prevent Black women from attaining senior and executive-level leadership positions. The intersectionality lens acknowledges systemic discrimination due to a women's race and gender and the many ways in which these identities impact access to opportunity. Collins (2019) affirmed that intersectionality bundles disparate ideas that enable individuals to share ideas that were once forbidden. The intersectional approach allows researchers to focus on the experiences and diverse voices of Black female leaders. A key tenet of critical race theory is to give voice to the experiences of individuals with marginalized identities (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Flores, 2018).

The pathway to leadership differs for men and women (Eagly & Chin, 2010). Women are more dependent on more formal promotion processes than men. As a result,

women of color must manage their career plans. Women must be purposeful and proactive in their enhancing their career and leadership success. Although there is an acknowledgment that there are similarities in the sexes, there is also a difference in the approach that men and women take regarding information processing, motivation, work-life balance, and stress management. Men's trajectory is often a planned, linear line to leadership and socialized to achieve; the path for women is generally more of an emergent route (Ben-Noam, 2018). Dwivedi et al. (2018) argued that the past lens implicitly focused on differences between men and women in leadership effectiveness and deflected scholarly attention away from examining the factors that create variability among women who occupy executive roles. Women's career development often is discussed in the context of the male linear, upward progression. However, according to Bierema (2016), women's career development is typically a process of detours and diversions.

Women in leadership roles experience must overcome difficulties and various barriers as they serve in leadership roles. There is increasing more research studies seeking to understand the leadership success factors and stumbling blocks for female leaders. Some of the research focused on how gender might influence leadership (Gabow, 2017; Miranda, 2019). However, there is minimal research on how race and gender interact to inform the leadership development of Black women (Rosette et al., 2016). Davis and Maldonado (2015) posited that it is important for an organization to have the ability to identify a diverse workforce, which provides women and women of color skills



that enable them to meet the challenges of a new global market. Chishol-Burnset et al. (2017) posited that increased diversity is needed to combat the homogeneity of ideas, which stifles critical thinking and breeds complacency.

### **Diversity and Leadership**

Leadership theories need to be inclusive, include explanations of how dimensions of diversity shape the understanding of leadership and how the diversity of leaders and followers influences the enactment of leadership (Chin, 2010; Eagly & Chin, 2010). Women in top leadership promote diversity in perspective and contribution of new ideas (Chisholm-Burns et al., 2017; Rapp & Yoon, 2016). Women also bring diverse experiences that can prompt creativity, stability, and resilience within organizations (Rapp & Yoon, 2016). Gupta (2019) wrote that women leaders could create an inclusive culture that promotes diversity in organizations by their democratic and participative management styles. Rapp and Yoon (2016) acknowledged that unequal development opportunities, non-inclusion in social networks, and increased stress as barriers to women's career advancement, and noted suggestions solutions for overcoming the barriers, which include building a case for diversity, addressing gender-biased employee training, and driving the change for an inclusive culture. Rapp and Yoon (2016) contend that implementation of these changes enables an organization to create a workplace that supports women leaders.

Diversity among leadership and within institutions brings challenges and opportunities to the enactment of leadership and theories of leadership (Chin, 2010).

Fostering full participation for women in leadership is important for promoting a prosperous and civil society (Hoyt and Murphy, 2017). The high representation of women leaders at the lower and middle levels in organizations presents an opportunity to tap into their unique skills and style to develop into top leadership to benefit the entire organization (Gupta, 2019).

Women's leadership development initiatives focusing on developing resources for work, maternal, and organizational citizen role expectations are helpful (Kossek & Buzzanell, 2018). Kelinsky and Anderson (2016) recommended that discussions on gender stereotypes as an effective way to incorporate the intersectionality of gender and leadership. Diversity in leadership provides examples to Black women and to the women of color that there is a pathway to leadership. When there is a presence of diversity in leadership, especially of Black women, these leaders can take on the role of mentor and provide support to other women aspiring to advance into leadership (Apugo, 2020; Chishlom-Burns et al., 2017; Davis & Maldonado, 2015).

### **Leadership Development**

Leadership development is conceptualized as the pathway or factors that influence how Black women advanced into their leadership roles (Davis, 2016). Leadership development is a focus on the development of leadership abilities and behaviors in an individual. Leadership development is the process of enhancing the collective leadership capability of an organization through the engagement of its members in leadership processes (Day & Dragoni, 2015). It is every form of development that assists the

expansion of knowledge and expertise required to optimize one's leadership potential. The study of leadership dates back over a century; early ideas of leadership posited that leadership was a characteristic held by extraordinary individuals (McCleskey, 2017). The concept of leadership has formed the foundation for many leadership development theories and models and developed to explain why some people are effective leaders (Bass et al., 2003; Hersey et al., 2008). Burns (1978) depicted leadership as one of the most observed and least understood phenomena. Scholars have attempted to define and redefine the concept of leadership since the turn of the century.

There are many theories on leadership; however, comprehensive scholarly literature on leadership development is limited. Early research on leadership overlooked the role of gender and race due partly because it was primarily conducted by White male researchers who were not interested in such differences (Sanchez-Hucles & Davis, 2010). Leadership development focuses on behaviors and skills, which transcend race, gender, or even ethnicity.

The disparity between leader development and leadership development has been a point of confusion. The two terms are used interchangeably throughout the literature. Leadership development has a broader meaning, which goes beyond merely developing the leadership skills of individual leaders. Previous empirical studies looked at leadership development as an individual phenomenon, focusing on the performance and proficiency of the leader (McCauley et al., 2006; McCullom, 1999). Leadership was viewed as a result of training individual leaders to develop their skills and competencies. Senge

(1995) posited that the traditional leadership perspective was profoundly individualistic and non-systemic. Leader development and leadership development are both necessary attributes needed to increase leadership effectiveness in organizations. Leadership development is defined as the process of developing an individual's leadership competencies and behavior for this study. The availability of leadership development opportunities is a critical factor in assessing continuance advancement within an organization (Griffith et al., 2019; Roupnel et al., 2019 ). Leader development focuses on an individual's ability to be effective in a leadership role and the leadership process.

In leadership development, the individual changes some aspect of the way they think to enhance their full potential (Avivlo, 2011). Leadership development involves engaging with learning opportunities to build one's capacity and efficacy to take on the role of leadership. The objective of leadership development is to enhance the leadership abilities of individuals to perform leadership roles within the organization more efficiently. For decades, scholars studied leadership traits to determine what factors attributed to certain people becoming great leaders. Leadership theories, which focused highly on the traits of privileged White men, inadequately addressed the challenges and issues faced by Black women in leadership (Bierema, 2016).

Leadership development involves the study of leadership philosophies, application of those principles, assessment of its moving parts; it also requires the ability to have a vision. In addition, leadership is a continual practice that demands sound judgment and proficiency to access problems and identify opportunities accurately.

Leaders must take a proactive approach in all situations. Moreover, leaders must also have a keen sense of vision, which comes with time, study, experience, and application, which develops with the right training and development opportunities (Griffith et al., 2019; Glamuzina, 2015; Zaccaro et al., 2018).

With the changes in the workforce demographics, organizational leadership requires individuals to possess the capacity to forge positive working relationships with individuals from diverse backgrounds with diverse experiences. Good leaders are invaluable. Effective leadership is the glue that holds an organization together. For organizations to remain successful and competitive, they must have strong leaders. Leadership development enhances an individual's ability to perform leadership roles and responsibilities within an organization. Leadership development also provides opportunities for individuals to cultivate the qualities of highly competent leadership.

Traditional leadership development programs focus on the development of male leaders and may not address the unique developmental needs of women and ethnic minorities (Collinson & Tourish, 2015; Sy et al., 2017). Effective leadership programs develop around the advancement of the individuals involved. Leadership development is highly effective in increasing leadership knowledge and practice and moderately effective in improving behavioral outcomes. Formal educational opportunities can open access to leadership opportunities for Black women. Leadership development programs have the potential to influence the development and advancement of female leaders by allowing them to experience transformational learning.

Leadership development programs that are both effective and successful do not only train participants but also provide situations that require participants to apply their knowledge and grow. Organizations use leadership training to cultivate new leaders and enhance the competency of their current leadership pool. The demands for increased competitiveness and emergent and diverse leadership have led organizations to allow more women to participate in leadership development programs (Debebe et al., 2016). As organizations become more competitive, more organizational leaders are attending leadership development and education programs to help them enhance their abilities to become effective and inspiring leaders. These same leadership development opportunities can have encouraging results for emerging Black female leaders.

There is a gap in the research and literature on Black women's leadership development and a lack of understanding of the intersectionality of race and gender that Black women face in their leadership development (Davis, 2016). Glass and Cook (2016) explained that leadership development, mentoring and networking opportunities are needed to close the gap and increase the representation of women in top leadership roles. The literature does not attend to the differences that race and gender may play in shaping Black progression to leadership positions for Black women (Rosette et al., 2016). This gap has left an incongruity in our understanding of how Black women's racial and gendered identities influence their development as leaders.

Leadership is the knowledge, skills, and attitudes that comprise an individual's ability to engage in leadership activities effectively. Leadership is associated with

authority, power, and influence (Bryd, 2009; Chin et al., 2018). Rosser-Mimms (2018) wrote that the oppressive Eurocentric forces that reduced Black women to subordinate positions in society have also shaped how they emerge as leaders. Classical leadership theories and contemporary leadership models ignored Black women's contributions to their communities and the impact of class, race, and gender oppression (Rosser-Mimms, 2018). Sims and Carter (2019) commented that underlying many leadership theories is the study of primarily Anglo-American men and the assumption that their leadership strategies apply to all other demographic groups.

Roupnel et al. (2019) described leadership development as an evolution of the capacity to make more encompassing and adaptive meaning in a collective experience. Leadership development is a process of stages, where new competencies are intricately related to increased effectiveness. There has been an emergence of leadership development programs over the past decade, but very few concentrate solely on Black women. Emerging leaders often must participate in leadership development programs, integrated into many organizations, to progress into formal leadership roles (Luria et al., 2019). There are many theories and models on leadership, many of which address the personality and trait factors. Individuals have intuitive and preconceived notions of what it means to be a leader (Curtis, 2017).

Kouzes and Posner (2017) wrote that leadership is not a place but a process of building capacity and competency. An important foundational aspect of the leadership journey is to determine the deeply held value, beliefs, standards, ethics, and ideas that

motivate you. Exemplary leaders must be able to express their authentic selves (true self and not the persona created to conform to societal view) and communicate their beliefs in a way that is unique to them. Sims and Carter (2017) argued that the integrated multiple identities of gender, race, and leader are important if individuals are going to be true and authentic to who they are. The individual must also learn to find the voice that represents who they are and identify and clarify the values that guide them (Kouzes & Posner, 2012).

Exemplary leaders prominent in the Black community include Martin Luther King Jr., Dr. Mary McLeod Bethune, John Lewis, President Barack Obama, Claudette Colvin, and Shirley Chisolm. The forenamed individuals embodied the characteristic of exemplary leaders, which according to (Kouzes & Posner, 2015) are standards of excellence, models the way for others to follow, inspires a shared vision for exciting possibilities, challenges the existing process and search for new opportunities, empowers others to act to the vision. One's inherent character traits can hinder leadership effectiveness. Examples of character traits that may hinder leadership effectiveness include impatience, lack of empathy, lack of integrity, and inability to adapt to change, and narcissism. According to Bass (1992), the most important aspect of leadership effectiveness comes from a combination of emotional expressiveness, self-determination, self-confidence, and freedom from internal conflict.

An individual's personality traits have the potential to help or hinder their effectiveness as a leader. Avolio et al. (2011), Bass and Bass (2008), Bass et al. (2003),



and Ross and Offermann (1997) discussed how personality traits or characteristics support certain leadership styles, i.e., transformational, transactional leadership, charismatic, or laissez-faire. Leadership development can prepare individuals' leadership identity; it is ongoing; leaders acquire relevant experiences, skills, behaviors, and knowledge over time (Miscenko et al., 2017). Leadership development helps to grow an individual's leadership competencies and can occur in a traditional sense, which includes participation in leadership development programs, informally through networking, mentorship, or experiential learning. Morgan (2016) affirmed that a person's ability to empower and motivate people are framed on three important traits, accountability, vision, and ability to inspire.

As a leader develops, it is theorized that their identity also develops (Sims & Carter, 2017). Miscenk et al. (2017) noted that leader identity is important in the leader development process, motivates individuals to seek out developmental experiences and opportunities to practice relevant leadership behaviors. Clapp-Smith et al. (2019) noted that focusing on one's identity as a leader enhances continuous leadership development. Individuals develop as leaders based on their lived experiences and how they reflect and make meaning of those experiences. The process of developing effective leadership competencies involves linking individuals to the context, culture, and meanings of leadership and an understanding of one's leader identity. Leader identity is a subset of a person's overall identity and plays a significant role in leadership competence and development. Clapp-Smith et al. (2019) commented that leader identity focuses on how

the individual view and internalizing and perceive the concept of leadership, unlike predominate theories that focus on how other's analysis of an individual's leadership behavior and attributes. "Becoming an exemplary leader requires you to fully comprehend the deeply held values— the beliefs, standards, ethics, and ideals—that drive you" (Kouzes & Posner, 2017, p. 48).

Stewart (2016) affirmed that providing leadership development training enables aspiring leaders to learn how to develop and strengthen their leadership skills.; specifically, soft skills such as emotional intelligence, communication, managing and motivating others, and planning and organization. Alvarez and Alvarez (2018) asked three questions about leadership development: (a) if leadership development is an effective intervention in increasing the diversity and inclusiveness in an organization along dimensions of age, gender, race, and ethnicity; (b) What type of leadership development strengthens the organization; and (c) how leadership development programs can be structured to maximize the transformational influence of inclusion amongst individuals and organizations.

Alvarez and Alvarez (2018) found that leadership development opportunities gave leaders exposure to people and networking that they would not have normally encountered, help improve their leadership effectiveness and broaden the range of experience for its program's participants. Although this study focused on union leadership and succession, the finding has great implications for leadership development as a mechanism for increasing diversity and inclusion among the leadership ranks.

Bonparte's (2016) study of women leaders in the pharmaceutical industry suggested that the attainment and the retention of leadership positions held by African American women require preparation and learning that is constant and ongoing. The study also found that there is a need for Black women to develop support systems.

Leadership development is an approach taken to increase knowledge, strengthen skills, or enhance one's overall effectiveness; the leadership development process includes mentoring, training sessions, professional coaching, networking, and succession planning. Black female leaders often lack access to appropriate networks and mentoring, which are commonly available to their White male and female counterparts (Apugo, 2020; Elias, 2018). Women have fewer development and advancement opportunities than men and are less likely to take advantage of networking opportunities. They also lack equal access to influential mentoring relationships (Beddow, 2018). Elias (2018) commented that one of the most important things women can do is network; however, women tend to spend significantly less time networking and seeking out mentors than men.

### **Networking, Mentoring, and Coaching**

Strong female leaders are more likely to emerge when women join as a cooperative unit (Smith et al., 2018). Leadership networking is about professional development and using networks in a way that builds relationships and strengthens alliances. Through networking, individuals gain access to information, advice, support, and strengthen one's circle of influence. A vigorous leadership network can help provide

access to people, knowledge, and resources. Networking is an essential and valuable tool for advancing one's career (Burke & Cannonier, 2019; McGee, 2018; Zdroik & Babiak, 2017).

Burke (2015) stated that the duality of race and gender could create a distinctive challenge to gaining access to career networks, which is crucial to rising into the upper level of leadership positions. Career networks offer access to upper-level positions, being a part of one can provide opportunities and referrals for career mobility (Burke, 2015). Women who do not network may miss opportunities because they do not perceive an immediate value in certain connections (Elias, 2018; Murray, 2016).

Limited by both their race and gender, Black women often are faced with significant and inimitable obstacles as they pursue career advancement into leadership. (Mcglowan-Fellows & Thomas, 2004): "Black female executives have not been welcomed into the high-ranking, corporate relationships that include information sharing and one-on-one professional training or mentoring" (p. 6). Black women are often excluded from the inner workings of an organization from the position of an insider. Mentoring can play an essential role in whether a professional reaches the highest stratum of corporate rank and authority (Mcglowan-Fellows & Thomas, 2004).

Mentoring enables an individual to create a connection that develops their innate gifts or talents. Mentors also foster the development of coping strategies that correlate with the advancement of Black female leaders. Black women in leadership often employ coping strategies to protect themselves (Bonaparte, 2016; Burton, 2020; Williams, 2020)

and engage in informal networks to provide them with validation and support. More importantly, mentors provide emotional support to normalize the cultural stresses of the career success of Black women and may alleviate isolation and alienation that is felt in early career experiences (McGlowan-Fellow & Thomas, 2004; Zellers et al., 2008). According to Murray (2016), mentoring relationships are crucial to organizations, as it aids in career development, organizational development, improve self-efficiency, and personal growth. In their study of the leadership experiences of Black and White women, (Key et al., 2012) found that Black women had far less experience of encouragement to succeed and advance.

There is a growing need for Black female networks that represents the collective experiences and action toward empowerment. Since Black women have not had a preponderance of Black women leader models in mainstream American society, women with identities are likely to draw inspiration from their unique social context (Byrd, 2009; Rosser-Mims, 2010; Williams, 2020). It is incumbent on Black women to create their own support structures as they are less likely to receive formal support such as mentoring and networking than their White counterparts (Burton, 2020). Mentoring relationships diminish feelings of being isolated. Those fortunate enough to form these types of connections benefit from engaging a mentor who has lived the struggle of navigating intersectional disparity within their career development. Bertrandt Jones et al. (2015) affirmed that it important create an environment for mentoring and professional development.

Mentorship plays a crucial role in encouraging women to pursue leadership positions, particularly during the early career period (Chisholm-Burns et al., 2017). A search in the literature yielded a few Black mentorships. Murray (2016) highlighted that scholarship on mentorship programs that successfully minority groups has been limited. Farrow (2008) touched on the fact that much of the literature suggests that there is a lack of mentorship for minority women and subsequently lack opportunities and substantive career movement into top leadership roles.

There are several Black professional organizations—such as the Black Women Career Network, National Association of Colored Women’s Clubs, National Black Feminist Organization, and National Coalition of 100 Black Women—that provide a platform to discuss and focus on issues faced by Black women. Black women successfully advance from mid-level management and senior-level positions do so as a result of purposeful career development, positive mentoring relationships, strong sponsorship, and a diverse network (Beckwith et al., 2017). Therefore, establishing mentorships and cross-functional training to expand their scope of knowledge enhances the career advancement prospects for women.

Crawford (2005) noted that “mentoring was viewed as crucial for enhancing an individual’s skills and intellectual development; for using influence to facilitate an individual’s entry and advancement; for welcoming the individual into a new occupational and social world and acquainting the individual with its values, customs, resources, and role players; and for providing role modeling behavior” (p54). It is

through having leadership role models and interacting with leaders that one tries on leadership identities and eventually comes to adopt a leadership identity as their own. Because Black women have not had a preponderance of Black female leader models in mainstream America, women who identify as Black is likely to draw inspiration from their unique social context (Byrd, 2009; Rosser-Mims, 2010). Hill and Wheat (2017) addressed the critical need to prepare women to form leadership identities, negotiate barriers to women's advancement, seek mentoring and role models, support one another.

In their study regarding the stress process of racial discrimination on the health of Black women, Perry et al. (2013) commented that evidence suggests that Black women are more likely to be exposed to stressful events than other racial groups. They also posited that discrimination could structure economic outcomes by channeling women and minorities into lower-status positions, blocking access to mentors and social networks that provide information and support, hence hindering promotion and advancement. In their study regarding the importance of mentorship of senior-level administrators of historically Black colleges and universities (Washington et al., 2018) spoke on the importance of mentorship for Black women in science, technology, engineer, and mathematics STEM. The achievement of Black women in STEM is constrained by historical, systemic, and institutionalized sexism and racism. The article highlighted how mentorship aided historically disempowered women to succeed in STEM. The study found that interactions with senior-level administrators encouraged and contributed to motivation and success.

Yamaguchi and Burge (2019) declared Black women's participation in STEM ensures that issues of discrimination are indistinguishable due to the duality of their race and gender. The experiences of Black female executives who advanced into leadership roles in the workplace provides a good case for exploring how Black women can successfully use relationships to advance in their careers (Murray, 2016). Through an analysis of intersectionality, Morossi et al. (2018) argued that an empowered position of leadership affords Black women the opportunity and ability to serve as role models to younger Black women and influence and shape 'their own' Black communities. Miles Nash and Peters (2020) affirmed that these models are needed as they empathize with intersectional identities in unique ways. Mentoring and role models play a crucial role in women's career advancement (Hill & Wheat, 2017).

### **Experiential Leadership Development**

Experiential leadership development is the process of developing leaders using a hands-on approach (Ng et al., 2017). Leadership development programs create transformative change for participants (Leupold et al., 2020). Unlike formal training programs, inspiring leaders can develop their leadership skills by participating in different experiences that are sometimes outside their scope of comfort, knowledge base, and experience. McCall (2004) affirmed experience is at the heart of development, and the primary source of learning to lead, to the extent that leadership can be learned, is experienced.



This form of immersive learning can be a transformational experience and promote self-efficacy, the belief in one's capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to manage prospective situations (Bandura, 1997). Experiential learning combines the concepts of experience and reflection upon that experience. Each experience involves the potential for learning. However, the extent of knowledge varies depending on the individual's intellect and context of learning around a situation; the individual mindset around the learning experience and their motives represent conceptually derived and practically useful tools for enabling leaders to learn from their leadership experiences (Heslin & Keating, 2017).

Sources of learning are factors contributing to self-efficacy. Bandura (1997) postulated that self-efficacy beliefs are constructed from and modified through four experiential sources: personal performance, vicarious learning, socially persuasive communication, and affective arousal experienced while completing a task. Bandura speculated that the sources provide experiential data information for judging whether an individual can perform a task. Direct experience helps develop their critical thinking skills and enables individuals to apply their knowledge to contextualized situations while self-directing their own learning (Mayorga, 2019).

### **Leadership Style Development**

There has been significant research on the leadership style of men and women (Ibarra et al., 2013; Kaiser & Wallace, 2016). Early studies revealed that women are more democratic and participative in their leadership style. Female leaders, more often than

their male counterparts, possess the transformational leadership style (Gabow, 2017). According to Gupta (2019), female leaders often outperform their male colleagues and are generally rated as more effective leaders than by their peers, subordinates, and their bosses. Female leaders also perform very well on many of the soft skill competencies that are critical for success, such as relationship building, teamwork, developing and motivating others, and listening to others, hard skills (Gupta, 2019).

According to Sims and Carter (2019), Black women leaders in business and academia possess the socialized traits and behaviors of self-pride and self-reliance. Women have a reputation for being more sensitive, responsive, and transformational leaders than their male counterparts (Eagly, 2007; Miranda, 2019) noted that women are better at motivating and inspiring others, building relationships, and collaboration and teamwork than their male peers. Lomotey (2019) found that Black female principals who had a reputation of being effective leaders possessed traits of caring, servant leadership, and having success in combating racism and sexism.

Early research on leadership overlooked the role of gender and race due partly because it was primarily conducted by White male researchers who were not interested in such differences (Ealy & Chin, 2010; Sanchez-Hucles & Davis, 2010). Transformational, transactional, and laissez-faire leadership styles are among the most popular styles of leadership (Gipson et al., 2017). Burns (1978) noted that there is great focus and controversy regarding transactional and transformation leadership theories. Burns theorized that the two leadership styles were on two different ends of the spectrum and

are mutually exclusive. Transactional leaders promote compliance through systems of reward. These theories mainly focused on the experience and assumption of White men. When Black women have positive gender and leader identity, it results in these women having a more positive view of leadership (Karelaia & Guillen, 2014; Sims & Carter, 2019).

Davis and Maldonado (2015) proposed that the leadership style for Black women most closely aligns with the transformational leadership style. Transformational leadership is an inspiring leadership style, which is characterized by influence, motivation, support, and consideration. Transformational leaders attempt to make challenges meaningful in attempts to make so that you are successful at handling them (Avolio, 2011). There are four components to this style of leadership, idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration.

Most leaders develop their leadership style through their experiences, personality, or even the needs of their teams or organization. An individual's leadership style can also be developed through professional development experiences. Understanding the processes underlying change in leader behavior should make it possible to design more effective ways of supporting leadership development for women, especially Black female leaders. Sims and Carter (2019) postulated based on the theory that women's leadership styles are constructed upon the leadership events they experience over time and their observations of leaders with whom they share similar identities. These experiences and

observations influence how Black women internalize and project their leadership identities.

### **Summary and Conclusions**

The primary conceptual frameworks for this study are intersectionality and critical race theory. These theories contextualize the experiences of racism, discrimination, and marginalization of Black female leaders based on their racial and gendered identity.

Although scholars have researched the leadership development of Black women, little has focused on the individual's conception of leadership (Davis & Maldonado, 2015).

Understanding why the experiences of Black female leaders differ from that of other women or even that of Black men is a major aspect of the research ideology for many Black women seeking advancement in business sectors in the United States.

Khan (2016) contended that race, gender, and the social justice system cannot be studied in isolation. He noted that all these phenomena are intersectional reproducing intersectional consequences; the research conducted with a critical race theoretical lens explores this intersectional approach to assert that the critical race theory framework is a necessary tool kit, especially for social inquiry. The crucial tenant of critical race and intersectionality is for understanding racial dynamics, particularly the way that current inequalities are connected to earlier practices of racial exclusion. While these practices are more subtle and not as overt as the past, inequalities still exist. The inequalities create large disparities within the workforce, leading to a lack of advancement, cognitive invisibility, and underrepresentation in leadership (Pedavic et al., 2020).

The leadership identities of Black women are uniquely informed by their gender, race, and other aspects of their identity related to self-efficacy and belief in their ability to succeed (Dortch, 2016). Engaging in an investigation of the experience of the Black female leaders may lead to a greater understanding of barriers and complexities faced by this population of women. Rosette et al. (2018) argued that recognition of the distinctiveness of intersectional identities provides a more accurate and helpful scholarship. A significant issue for women and minorities is the idea that there is a lack of opportunities for advancement into executive leadership positions (Beckwith et al., 2016; Glass & Cook, 2016)

There is increased scholarship on the importance of the presence of women in top leadership positions success (Gipson et al., 2017; Rhode, 2017). Research also highlights multiple reasons why women and, more prevalent Black women have challenges ascending into leadership. Stereotyping and discrimination remain at the forefront of the underrepresentation of Black women in leadership positions. The literature revealed that much of the scholarly work on Black women leadership focused on the intersection of race and gender in educational leadership. (Davis, 2016; Lemoine et al., 2016; Moorosi, 2019; Oikelome, 2017; Rosette et al., 2016) addressed how stereotyping in social or cultural groups influence affects the emergence of women into leadership.

Ely and Heilman (2016) stated that discrimination is one of the chief barriers to women's underrepresentation in leadership roles. Gender bias serves as an obstacle to the advancement of women into leadership roles (Vial et al., 2016). Women have made

significant advancements in increasing their representation in the workforce. However, a considerable gap remains in the achievement of top-level leadership positions. The intersection of gender with race critically shapes the experiences of women across all racial subgroups at work (Flores, 2018; Rosette et al., 2018). Strategies, including interventions to reduce gender bias, stereotyping, and access to leadership development opportunities, are needed to overcome barriers. Leadership development opportunities can provide mechanisms for improving the emergence of competent Black female leaders (Davis, 2016; Day et al., 2014; Maldonado, 2015).

In Chapter 2, the literature showed that race and gender remain at the forefront for career advancement in Black female leaders. Black women continue to be oppressed based on their race and gender (Lomotey, 2020). The lack of professional development opportunities, succession planning, networking, mentoring is discussed as possible obstacles toward progress in leading leadership roles for Black women (Apugo, 2020; Davis & Maldonado, 2015; Glass & Cook, 2016). Race and gender are the primary tenets of intersectionality in this study. I studied the experiences of Black women within their contextual backgrounds to identify the intersecting factors that may influence their pathway to leadership.

In Chapter 3, the research method for this qualitative, transcendental phenomenology study was discussed. The procedures used for recruitment, participation, and data collection was presented. The data analysis plan was addressed, as well as issues of trustworthiness in the study and ethical research.

### Chapter 3: Research Method

The purpose of this qualitative, transcendental phenomenological study was to explore how Black female leaders describe their lived experiences with leadership development. More focus is needed on expanding opportunities for the advancement for women of color, especially Black women, in key leadership roles (Ely et al., 2011; Rhode, 2017). There is an insufficient understanding of how intersectionality influences the leadership development of Black women, and little is known about the lived experiences of Black female leaders with leadership development (Barnes, 2017; Davis & Maldonado, 2015). The participants for the study were recruited from various business sectors and professions, such as education, nonprofit, banking, marketing, technology, human services, and healthcare. I chose the transcendental phenomenology model, as suggested by Moustakas (1994), for the study's design as it aligns with the interpretivist paradigm to explore the participants' meanings of lived experiences. In this study, I sought to learn how the intersection of race and gender identities have contributed to or hindered leadership development as perceived by Black women who successfully occupy leadership roles.

This chapter provides detailed information on the research method and rationale for conducting a transcendental phenomenology study and the central research question guiding this empirical investigation. The goal in conducting this research study was to gain a more detailed understanding of how race and gender influenced the leadership development of the study's sample of Black female leaders.

## **Research Design and Rationale**

The methodology for this research was driven by the purpose of the study and the research question. Qualitative research is used to examine the meaning behind a phenomenon; qualitative researchers focus on the events that transpire and on outcomes of those events from the perspectives of those involved (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Qualitative researchers study items in their natural settings—the environment or setting where individuals experience the phenomena under study. Qualitative research is conducted to provide complex descriptions of how people experience specific issues and to provide information about behaviors, beliefs, opinions, emotions, and relationships of research subjects (Merriam & Grenier, 2019).

There are various research methods, and each has a different approach to the collection and analysis of empirical evidence (Yin, 2013). Mixed-methods research involves a purposeful mixing of methods in data collection, data analysis, and interpretation. The use of mixed methods expands the understanding of the connections and the contradictions between the qualitative and quantitative data. This methodology is useful when a researcher is trying to obtain quantitative results and qualitative conclusions. However, applying mixed methods to a smaller scale study, such as this one, can add to the complexity of conducting research and require more resources.

The quantitative research method is used by researchers examining the numerical interpretation and manipulation of observations for describing and explaining phenomena. The goal of quantitative research is to determine the relationship between an



independent variable and a dependent variable in a population. Quantitative research designs are either descriptive (determines relationships between variables) or experimental (determines causality). Quantitative researchers use empirical and descriptive statements or definite statements to explain what is occurring in real-life situations. These researchers do not focus on theory or ambiguity. In quantitative research, investigators collect numerical data; therefore, the analysis of the data transpires using mathematically based methods. I deemed this methodology unsuitable for this study. In contrast, the qualitative method provides an exploratory aspect not available with a quantitative approach.

Qualitative studies are exploratory, allowing researchers to make meaning of individual experiences (Harkiolakis, 2017) with phenomena (Landrum & Garza, 2015). The key objectives of social research are to find patterns or themes, to establish new outcomes, and to identify gaps in the existing body of knowledge and theory to explain human behavior. Qualitative studies are a uniquely suited approach to uncovering the unexpected and exploring new avenues (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). There are several widely used qualitative methods, including grounded theory, ethnography, case study, and phenomenology. Grounded theory is used to look at a large number of participants to generate a general explanation or to develop a theory. Case studies provide an in-depth look at one test subject; the aim is to provide an analysis of the context and process that illuminate the theoretical issues under investigation.

According to Yin (2013), case study research is one of the most challenging forms of social research endeavors, which aims to answer the how or why in a phenomenon. Ethnography involves observation and interaction with participants over an extended period. The phenomenological study follows the qualitative research traditions because it is used to understand participants' experiences. The goal of phenomenology is to describe the meaning of what was experienced and how it was experienced (Neubauer et al., 2019). The data for this qualitative phenomenological study were collected to answer the research question: How has the intersection of race and gender influenced the leadership development experiences of Black female leaders? In phenomenology, evidence derives from "first-person reports of life experiences" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 84). "The researcher has a personal interest in whatever he or she seeks to know; the researcher is intimately connected with the phenomenon" (p. 59). Through the exploration of the lived experience, I sought to understand the participants' experiences and the factors that influenced their perceptions, knowledge, and career trajectory.

Husserl (1970) initiated the method of phenomenological reduction to eliminate the influence of external factors; Husserl posited that scientific knowledge is founded on the unbiased description of a phenomenon. According to Moustakas (1994), Husserl believed that understanding is derived from the ideal essential structures of one's consciousness. Empirical phenomenology requires a return to experience to obtain a comprehensive description, which provides the foundation for reflective analysis that embodies the essence of a participant's experience.

A researcher is responsible for determining the underlying structures of experience by interpreting the experience based on a participant's account of the phenomenon (van Manen, 2017). The objective of this research is to determine what the experience means to individuals who had the experience and provide a detailed description of it. Through phenomenological research methodology, I endeavored to describe, understand, and interpret the meanings of lived experiences of Black female leaders. Phenomenology provides an in-depth knowledge of the individual phenomena; and data that is rich from the experiences of the study participants (Moran, 2019).

Phenomenology is a method that crosses philosophical traditions and styles and is applied to any form of philosophical inquiry (Simmons & Hackett, 2016). Van Manen (2017) described phenomenology as a science of examples. Phenomenology provides an ontology of real and ideal objects from which to situate understanding (Trace, 2017). According to van Manen (2017), the lived experience resides in the data of phenomenological research. Phenomenology involves the careful, unprejudiced description of conscious, lived experiences according to the manner they were experienced by the study participants (Moran, 2019). Van Manen believed that it is ill-served to objectify the term *data* when discussing phenomenology, as this method is concerned with the meaning and meaningfulness of the experience and not the data itself. "Phenomenology aims to attain the eidetic and original meaning of a phenomenon" (van Manen, 2017, p. 811).

Simmons and Hackett (2016) described phenomenology as being not merely a professional discourse but a spiritual exercise to sharpen the mind, invite all to clean think, and embrace the constancy of questioning. There are various research methods, and each has a different approach to the collection and analysis of empirical evidence (Yin, 2013). The key objectives of social research are to find patterns or themes, to establish new outcomes, and to identify gaps in the existing body of knowledge and theory to explain human behavior (Bhattacharjee, 2012; Singleton & Straits, 2010). In this study, I followed the qualitative research traditions because my aim was to understand the participants' lived experiences of the phenomena (Sloan & Bowe, 2014).

The appropriate research design for this research study is transcendental phenomenology, which utilizes the epoche process to dismiss judgment, biases, preconceived ideas and concepts, and discount past experiences and understandings to clearly study the phenomena (Martirano, 2016). The epoche is the first step in coming to know things as they are, free of prejudgment and preconceptions (Moustakas, 1994). Transcendental phenomenologists are interested in studying the lived experiences of research participants and the meaning they give to these experiences. A researcher utilizes phenomenological reduction to discover the essence of the meanings, principles, or structures at the center of a phenomenon as it is practiced and experienced in the present (Moustakas, 1994; Neubauer et al., 2019).

The study participants provided detailed accounts of their lived experiences of leadership development. This study involved conducting in-depth interviews of 15 Black

women who have held senior and executive-level positions from various business sectors and professions, including education, nonprofit, marketing, banking, technology, human services, and health care. The study addresses the paradigm that Black women are underrepresented in top leadership positions. Using a transcendental phenomenological research design, I explored the lived experiences of Black women who held leadership positions to ascertain a more robust understanding of the phenomenon under study.

### **Role of the Researcher**

During a phenomenological study, the researcher becomes a topic expert, and develops new knowledge on the study topic, and becomes proficient in recognizing the kinds of future research that deepen the knowledge base on their topic (Moustakas, 1994). My primary concern was to ensure the credibility, dependability, and transferability (ability to be generalized in different contexts) of this study. I conducted an in-depth review of the literature on the topic of the intersectionality of race and gender and its influence on the leadership development of Black women, and developed valid research questions, and interviewed a purposeful sample of participants for this study. Additionally, I summarized the research and acknowledged its possible limitations, adhering to the method, organization, and analysis of the data adopted from a phenomenological inquiry. My principal role is to collect, view, analyze, and report the data (Moustakas, 1994). Through the literature review, I distinguished the findings from that of prior research and described possible future projects that may advance the scholarship of the research topic.

Using transcendental phenomenology, I aimed to describe the essence of the individual's experience and gain an understanding of the experience from another person's point of view. The scientific investigation becomes valid as knowledge arrives through descriptions, which produce an understanding of the meanings and the essence of the participants' experiences. Phenomenology researchers focus on describing what common experiences all participants in the study have with the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994; Vagle, 2018). The fundamental purpose is to reduce individuals' experiences with a phenomenon to a description that has social significance. The main concern of a qualitative researcher is to understand the meaning, which individuals attribute to the events and phenomena they experience (Asper & Corte, 2019; Daher et al., 2017).

Husserl (1970) believed that knowledge begins with an unbiased description of the phenomenon. Husserl introduced two procedures, which enable researchers to achieve an unbiased understanding: epoche and bracketing. The epoche is the first step of the phenomenological reduction process. The epoche process is the postponement of judgment and focusing on the analysis of experience so that prior understandings or biases do not influence the interview. The researcher lays aside their views of the phenomenon and focuses on the views reported by the participants (Moustakas, 1994). Bracketing requires the researcher to suspend their own belief of what is already known about the phenomenon under investigation; to mitigate the potentially deleterious effects of preconceptions that may taint the research process (Tufford & Newman, 2010). I allowed my personal ideas and feelings held in epoche to merge with the observations as

an interpretative conclusion. In bracketing, the focus of the research is placed into brackets; the aim is solely on the topic and research question (Moustakas, 1994). Epoche allows for empathy and connection and does not eliminate, replace, or substitute perceived researcher bias. Likewise, bracketing advances that process by enabling recognition of the essence of the meaning of the phenomenon under investigation (Bednall, 2006).

As the researcher, I am conscious of my experiences as a Black woman, potential bias, and the need to bracket my perspectives (Moustakas, 1994). Bias can occur at any phase of a study from the design, data collection, analysis, and publication phases of research. I employed measures to minimize potential bias, such as refrainment from summarizing or elaborating on the participant's responses.

## **Methodology**

This section includes the methodology used for this research, including an explanation for the participant selection and recruitment process, the data collection instrument, data collection, and the data analysis process.

### **Participant Selection Logic**

#### ***Population***

The purpose of this qualitative, transcendental phenomenological study is to explore how Black female leaders describe their lived experiences with leadership development. This study seeks to understand the views held and experiences of a sample

of participants representing the population of Black women in leadership in Michigan. While 23% of women in the United States are represented at the C-suite level, only 4% of this group reflects women of color; furthermore, women of color are the most underrepresented group at every level in the workplace (McKinsey & Company, 2018). Women of color represent 11.9% of professional and managerial positions, and Black women make up only 5.3% of women in this population (Beckwith et al., 2016; U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2019). In the state of Michigan, women comprised only 12 percent of executive officers, and there were only four women of color executive officers in the state's largest firms (Catalyst, 2017).

### ***Sampling Strategy***

For this study, I identified and selected 25 Black female leaders. The participants include mid-level managers, senior or executive-level positions, and have held the position for more than 12 months. Stark and Trinidad (2003) declared that typical sample sizes for phenomenological studies range from 1 to 10 persons. Smaller sample sizes can yield information-rich responses to interview questions (Guest et al., 2020). Starks and Trinidad (2007) stated the complete range of constructs that make up the theory is adequately represented by the data or when the researcher has a full understanding of the participant's perspective regarding their experience (Legard et al., 2013).

Purposeful sampling was used to inform an understanding of the research problem and central phenomena. Purposeful sampling is one of the most described means of sampling in the qualitative methods literature. (Gentles et al., 2015). This sampling



approach leads to an accurate representation of the population under study and provides a more accurate generalization and a detailed description of the phenomenon under investigation. Through purposeful sampling, I selected participants that would provide the highest likelihood for achieving an understanding of the phenomenon of the underrepresentation of Black women in corporate leadership (Suri, 2011). The mentioned sampling technique was selected in an attempt to gain a rich understanding of the lived experiences of individuals that are a part of the phenomenon. Data saturation was used to determine the sufficiency of sample size, which was achieved when themes begin to repeat, and no results yield from the interview data (Saunders et al., 2018; Vasileiou et al., 2018).

### ***Sampling Criteria***

The purposeful selection of participants for this transcendental phenomenological study was incorporated (van Manen, 2016). The participants were identified using my personal and professional networks and LinkedIn contacts. LinkedIn is the most prominent social media site for fostering professional and business connections (Koch et al., 2018). Individuals met the sample criteria, which included (a) must identify as Black or African American female, (b) has held a leadership position for more than 12 months, (c) works for a corporation or organization in the state of Michigan, (d) have experience with the phenomenon being studied (Moustakas, 1994); and (e) have a willingness to take part in the study. The selected participants were sent an invitation via direct message (DM) or emailed requesting their participation in the study. Individuals were asked to

respond to the email if they are interested in participating in the study. An informed consent agreement was sent to the potential research participants to inform them about the critical elements of a research study and what their participation involved. Upon receipt of the informed consent, I contacted the participants to schedule an interview. When the initial recruitment yielded too few participants, I re-implemented the recruitment strategy to identify additional participant prospects based on the sample criteria.

### **Instrumentation**

The instrumentation for this study was developed as a result of the nature and purpose of transcendental phenomenology, a design for acquiring and collecting data to understand the essence of the human experience (Moustakas, 1994). The development of meaning is at the core of transcendental phenomenology. In phenomenology, the researcher is an instrument (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). As an instrument, the researcher can influence the research process; by bracketing their knowledge and experience. The influence on the data collection process is minimized. Through a review of the literature, I designed interview questions to elicit participants' perspectives and understanding of their experience in correlation to the intersectionality and critical race theory. The transcendental phenomenological approach was considered when choosing an interview protocol to gain a deeper understanding of Black female leaders' experience with leadership development and the implications of their racial and gender identity on their development as leaders.

I created an interview protocol (Appendix A) using recommendations from Windsong (2018) and Jacob and Furgerson (2012) for creating practical research questions, which includes (a) using a script for the interview, (b) use of open-ended wording, (c) avoiding wording that might influence answers, (d) questioning should be asked one at a time, (e) question should be clearly worded, (f) requests basic background data about the participant, and (g) uses the prompt *tell me about...* The interview questions are grounded in the two key concepts of the study's in the conceptual framework that focus on the challenges facing Black female leaders with leadership development: a) Crenshaw's (1989) concept of intersectionality and gendered racism and b) Parker's (2005) concept of intersectionality as it relates to Black female leaders. (cite the authors of your main concepts) of the study and critical research reviewed in Chapter 2. The interview protocol questions were also developed to collect the shared meaning and understanding of navigating a career pathway to senior and executive-level leadership positions.

The interview protocol consisted of recording the answers of the participants using a digital recording device and hand-written notes, which were kept in a journal. Journaling enabled me to reflect on thoughts and feelings, experiences during the interviews, along with behaviors or conditions that might evoke subjective emotions, which may influence the judgment of the data being collected (Padden-Denmead et al., 2016). Journaling addresses the traditional epistemological concerns about biases,

researchers' standpoints and privileges, and their implications on collecting, transcribing, and coding the data (Malacrida, 2007).

Video conferencing was the primary means for conducting the interviews. However, telephone communication was also be made available to maximize participant availability, preference and as a backup method to address unexpected technological challenges. Additionally, I recorded the interviews using a digital recording device to assist in data recall, transcription, and data analysis. Upon the conclusion of the interviews, participants received a transcription of their respective interviews for member checking within five days of their interview. Member checking was used to assess validity in qualitative research; it helps researchers increase the accuracy of their findings, reflect on the research topic, foster accurate knowledge, and create change (Birt et al., 2016; DeCino & Waalkes, 2019). Member checking also:

- Provided an opportunity to understand and assess what the participant intended to do through their actions.
- Provided participants with an opportunity to correct errors and challenge incorrect interpretations.
- Provided participants the opportunity to assess the adequacy of data and preliminary results as well as to confirm particular aspects of the data; and
- Provided an opportunity to summarize preliminary findings.

- Through interviews, I sought to understand the essence of the participants' lived experiences of Black female leaders.

### *Field Test*

A field test was conducted to collect data in preparation for the more extensive qualitative study. Semistructured, open-ended interviews were conducted in the field study (N = 2). The participants in the field study were not included in the main study. These interview questions were designed to address the research question. The semistructured interviews were guided by a set of questions and use of an interview protocol (Appendix A), which were administered to all participants; however, it was expected that the progression of the interviews might vary based on how the individual participants respond to the questions. According to Yeong et al. (2018), the development of a reliable interview protocol is pivotal to obtaining quality interview data.

Responses were coded, and themes were established, which were used to modify and revise the interview protocol to ensure that the validity of the interview questions. The field test enabled me to determine if questions made sense and if questions were clear and understood by others. The use of the four-step interview protocol refinement (IPR) framework was used. The steps included (a) ensuring alignment between interview questions and research questions, (b) constructing an inquiry-based conversation, (c) receiving feedback on interview protocols, and (d) pilot testing of the interview questions. (Castillo-Montoya, 2016). Interview protocols are essential features of

research projects, setting out the rationale for the study, the process the study followed, and any ethical considerations (Castillo-Montoya, 2016; Fancourt, 2017).

The participants were asked to complete an informed consent agreement for the field study and were informed of the intent and nature of the field study. I conducted the field study to identify areas of the study that need to be modified or eliminated before the commencement of the larger study. The field study participants were women who self-identify and Black or African American and who held a leadership position for 12 months. The participants were asked background related questions and eight questions that focused on their leadership development experiences. Participants were encouraged to speak honestly about their experience with leadership development and being Black female leaders.

### **Procedure for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection**

The target group consisted of individuals who had direct insight into the experience of being a Black female leader. Purposeful sampling was used to recruit participants for this study. I began the study by reaching out to 25 Black women who have held leadership positions. Participants were recruited from my social and professional networks. Purposeful sampling is one of the most commonly described means of sampling in the qualitative methods literature (Gentles et al., 2015).

The soundness of purposeful sampling rests in the selection of information-rich cases for in-depth study. The information obtained can lead to greater insight and understanding of the central issue of the study (Gentles et al., 2015). Gentles, Charles,

Ploeg, and McKibbin (2015) suggested that when researchers describe a sampling process as being purposeful, they should define what it means in their specific context, rather than strictly state that they used purposeful sampling. The sample size in qualitative analysis is smaller than that of quantitative analysis. However, there must be a large enough sample to obtain feedback for most or all points of view. Although diverse samples provide a more comprehensive range of a phenomenon, data from only a few individuals who have experienced the event and can provide a detailed account of their experience can uncover its core elements of a phenomenon. The essential criterion is that the participants have experienced the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994).

The data collection occurred in my home office using a telephone and personal computer. The data collection period was between 8-12 weeks. The primary source of data is the verbal responses from a series of in-depth interviews with the study participants. The participants in the study responded to semistructured, open-ended questions regarding their lived experiences as Black female leaders. Moustakas (1994) described the “method of reflection that occurs throughout the phenomenological approach provides a logical, systematic, and coherent resource for carrying out the analysis and synthesis needed to arrive at essential descriptions of experience” (p. 47). The semistructured interview protocol (Appendix A) ensured that I followed the same basic lines of inquiry with each participant. The protocol serves as a checklist to ensure that all relevant topics are addressed. The questions focus on each of the participants’ backgrounds, career pathways, leadership development experience relative to the

intersection of their race and gender. The interview questions are framed to answer the research question.

The study data collection process consisted of web-conferencing interviews using Zoom. According to Teherani et al. (2015), the researcher is the primary data collection instrument. The researcher examines why events occur, what happens, and what those events mean to the participants studied. Each interview was 45-90 minutes. I conducted interviews, asking each participant a series of semistructured interview questions.

The interview questions were written to keep the participants focused on their responses and are aligned with the research question (Castillo-Montonya & Milagor, 2016). The interview responses were recorded, then transcribed, and data analyzed using Moustakas' modified van Kaam method (Moustakas, 1994), which include (a) develop individual textural and structural descriptions, (b) create textual and structural descriptions, and (c) synthesis of textual structural meaning and essences of the experience. The data collection strategy for the phenomenological study is to be as non-directive as possible. Study participants were encouraged to give a comprehensive description of their lived experience; this includes their thoughts, feelings, images, sensations, and memories about the phenomena (NcNamara, 2009). The goal of the research questions is to obtain explicit data related to the participant's unique experience of leadership development and their trajectory into a leadership position relative to their race and gender. Transcribed data were reviewed and edited to eliminate extraneous information and commentaries deemed irrelevant to the research questions.



Participants were provided with expectations of the interview and provided with an opportunity to ask questions before beginning the interview. I reviewed the purpose of the study and reminded participants of the ethical guidelines of the study and their right to terminate the interview at any time. Participants were informed that they would receive a summary of their interview transcripts. If, after reviewing the written data analysis summary, the participant felt that analysis and conclusions did not sufficiently describe the meaning of their lived experiences, they were provided an opportunity to make modifications to their responses. Following the interviews, I organized and analyzed the data to facilitate the development of textural and structural descriptions, and synthesis of textural and structural meanings and essences of the phenomena (Moustakas, 1994).

Data triangulation was employed through reflective journal notes and member checking to allow participants to review the data and interpretations for appropriateness and accuracy to ensure data quality (Birt et al., 2016; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Participants were debriefed at the conclusion of their interview. Debriefing involved a verbal conversation between the study participants and me. Debriefing is essential for the validity of the research (Given, 2008). Debriefings involve a thorough, goal-oriented discussion of data immediately after it is collected (McMahon & Winch, 2018).

The participants were encouraged to ask questions. McMahon and Winch (2018) posited that the debriefing process could identify and address gaps in the data, capture nuances and other non-verbal information; triangulate data, and build theory. McMahon and Winch also suggested that debriefing sparks immediate reflection on emergent

findings; it forces data collectors to think through the data that have emerged and more appropriately position results relative to data collected. Each of the participants received a copy of their interview transcript. Participants were asked to review the transcripts for accuracy and to make changes to any text that does not adequately reflect the intent of their responses.

### **Data Analysis Plan**

The goal of data analysis is to achieve an understanding of patterns of meanings from data of lived experiences (Sundler et al., 2019). A key criterion of transcendental phenomenology is to elucidate the phenomenon through reflection as the phenomenon is perceived, described, and experienced by the study participants (Merriam & Grenier, 2019; Moustakas, 1994). To uncover descriptive themes that attain the essence and meaning of Black female leaders' lived experiences with leadership development, I applied Moustakas' (1994) modified van Kaam analysis to this transcendental phenomenological study. Since this research study is informed by phenomenology, Moustakas's van Kaam method is the most appropriate data analysis method to follow (Sullivan & Bhattacharya, 2017).

Qualitative data derives from narrative information and verbatim transcripts from in-depth interviews (Chan et al., 2013). Researchers organize themes into a meaningful wholeness, and methodological principles must remind researchers to maintain a reflective mind, as meanings are developed into themes (Sundler et al., 2018). The themes

and meanings signify textural descriptions of the participant's experiences to construct meaning and the essence of the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994).

Moustakas' (1994) modification of the van Kaam method of analyzing phenomenological data consists of seven steps. Each step of the modified van Kaam data analysis method is thoroughly applied to participant data (Sullivan & Bhattacharya, 2017). In this research study, each participant's transcript was reviewed extensively according to this method. The modification of the van Kaam method of analysis consists of the following steps: horizontalization, reduction and elimination, clustering and thematizing, validation, individual textual description, and textural-structural description (Moustakas, 1994).

The first step applied in the modified van Kaam data analysis method is horizontalization. This requires listing and preliminary grouping of all expressions pertinent to the lived experience and assigning equivalent value to each statement (Moustakas, 1994).

The next step is reduction and elimination, which requires the researcher to identify invariant rudiments to determine if the language provides an understanding of the phenomenon and if the language can be labeled as a horizon of the lived experience (Moustakas, 1994). In the third step, clustering and thematizing, invariant elements of the experience that are related are given thematic labels that become central themes of the experience (Moustakas, 1994). The fourth step is application validation, which requires a check of the central themes against the complete transcript to ensure the themes are

explicitly expressed and compatible. Non-relevant themes should be eliminated (Moustakas, 1994). The fifth step requires building an individual textural description of the experience using the validated themes and examples from the participant transcripts (Moustakas, 1994). The sixth step involves developing structural descriptions of each participant's overall experience based on the prior constructed textural description and imaginative variation (Moustakas, 1994). The final step is to create a textural-structural description of the experience for each participant's essence and meanings of the experiences, incorporating the invariant elements and themes (Moustakas, 1994). Using Moustakas' modified van Kaam's approach enabled me to capture the essence of the participant's experiences (Sullivan & Bhattacharya, 2017).

### *Software*

The interview was transcribed and coded using automated computer-based coding (NVivo). The NVivo software was used to organize, manage, and code the data for this study. An advantage of NVivo is its data management facilities. All data may be stored digitally in NVivo and quickly recalled and ensures easy, effective, and efficient coding (Maher et al., 2018; Zamawe, 2015). The interview transcriptions were uploaded and coded using NVivo automated coding capability. In NVivo, the coding process entails gathering related material into containers called nodes. The data is coded in the NVivo system through inductive coding. Zamawe (2015) wrote that NVivo is easier to reshape and reorganize coding and node structure quickly.

As the researcher, I was responsible for the analysis of the research data; and the instrument for making judgments about coding, theming, decontextualizing, and recontextualizing the data (Nowell et al., 2017). NVivo does not conduct the analysis for the researcher. I created the categories, codes, decided what to collate, identified the patterns, and drew meaning from the data. The use of the NVivo software in this qualitative analysis made the organization, reduction, and storage of data more efficient and manageable.

### ***Coding***

An integral part of the data analysis process in qualitative research is the coding. The coding process involves subdividing the huge amount of raw information or data and subsequently assigning them into categories, themes, or tags generated by the researcher to apply meaning to the data (Saldana 2013). I coded the data for this research study using the seven steps of the modified van Kaam method (Moustakas, 1994). The coding process began by a) reviewing each participant interview transcript following the modified van Kaam method of data analysis (Moustakas, 1994); b) reflecting on the research question, I identified all relevant comments about participants' experiences; c) all significant comments were then entered in Excel with participants' identification number and pseudonym, d) the data were imported to NVivo to initiate the automated coding process; e) Once the coding was completed, I thoroughly reviewed the content to ensure accuracy. Items that were incorrectly coded were corrected. I also determined at this time if any nodes should be combined or if additional coding was required.

### *Discrepant*

During the data analysis process, discrepant or deviant cases that did not align with the majority findings were categorized and listed as alternative findings. I thoroughly discussed these discrepant cases and analyzed for their conclusions to contribute to the overall findings of the research study. Alternative findings that arise from discrepant cases may alter or confirm themes that arise from data analysis (Maxwell, 2013; Suter, 2012). A negative or discrepant case is an exception in the data or a variant case that cannot be categorized into the determined themes (Hadi & Closs, 2016). The identification and analysis of discrepant is a key part of the logic of validity testing in qualitative research (Maxwell, 2013).

Throughout the research process and particularly the analysis, researchers must deal with the natural attitude and previous assumptions when analyzing and understanding the data (Sundler et al., 2019). I bracketed her own experience as a Black female seeking to advance into leadership. Bracketing is a technique of demonstrating the validity of the data collection and analysis (Chan et al., 2013). Bracketing provides a methodological device to demonstrate validity in a phenomenology. It requires the researcher to put aside personal beliefs about the phenomenon under investigation or already known about the subject before and throughout the phenomenological investigation. I refrained from influencing the participant's understanding of the phenomenon (Chan et al., 2013). The reflection that occurs throughout the phenomenological methodology provides a systematic, logical, and reliable resource to

arrive at the essential description of the participant's experience (Sundler et al., 2019). Rigor in the qualitative analysis corresponds with its process and its trustworthiness. It is essential for researchers to immerse themselves in data, explore all possible nuances, to view data from a variety of perspectives (Maher et al., 2018). Immersion in the data involves the repeated reading of the data in an active way, searching for meanings and patterns (Nowell et al., 2017).

### **Issues of Trustworthiness**

#### **Credibility**

Credibility refers to the “confidence in the truth of the findings, including an accurate understanding of the context” (Ulin et al., 2005, p. 25). Member checking was conducted by sharing the data and findings with each of the participants to ensure credibility (Birt et al., 2016). The conformability and credibility of the data lie with the study participants. The participants were asked to confirm the information and their account of the phenomena. Hadi and Closs (2016) affirmed that rigor, transparency, justification of data collection, and analysis methods being used, and the integrity of findings is essential in qualitative research.

Saturation is an important aspect of quality in research (Hennik & Kaiser, 2019). It is used to determine data adequacy. Given (2016) operationalized saturation as collecting data until no new information is obtained. Guest et al. (2020) described data saturation as the conceptual yardstick for estimating and assessing qualitative sample sizes. I used probing questions to establish epoche in an attempt to reach data saturation.

The correlation between data saturation and sample size occurs as the participant's information is collected and analyzed, and no additional insight is gained about the phenomena from the study participants. For data saturation, I reviewed and analyzed the data to identify if any new concepts or issues emerged from the collected data. Guest et al. (2020) operationalize saturation as the number of identified themes at a given point in analysis divided by the total number of themes identified in the entire sample. Saturation occurs at the point in which incoming data yield little or no new useful information relative to the study objectives. Hennik et al. (2017) examined 25 in-depth interviews, and code saturation was reached at nine interviews, whereby the range of thematic issues was identified. However, they noted that 16 to 24 interviews were needed to reach meaning saturation were to develop a richly textured understanding of the research subject.

### **Dependability**

Ulin et al. (2005, p.26) stated that dependability refers to whether the research process is consistent and carried out with careful attention to the rules and conventions of qualitative methodology. Dependability is the stability of the data over time and conditions. It is an evaluation of the data collection and data analysis process. The study protocol is outlined, and the data collection process is detailed to ensure dependability (Forero et al., 2018; Guest et al., 2012). The instrumentation for this study includes a review of the literature and data retrieved through the semistructured interviews of Black female leaders. To ensure dependability, I documented the processes used in the study,



allowing a future investigator to repeat my work. Dependability in research refers to the ability of a study finding to be duplicated by another researcher. The use of the interview protocol aided me in ensuring consistency in documenting information in the study.

### **Transferability**

Transferability refers to the results of the study being transferable to Black women in different contexts or settings and to the degree that this study is applicable or useful to theory, practice, and future research (Korsten & Moser, 2018; Lincoln and Guba 1985; Nicole & Smith, 2015). This phenomenological study consists of a sample size of 15 Black women and is limited geographically to Michigan; however, connections may be made relevant to a broader population of Black female leaders. To ensure transferability, I comprehensively described the research context and the assumptions central to her study and provided contextual information to enable the reader to transfer the work through the richness of the information supplied in the research.

I developed an interview protocol consistent with semistructured interview techniques to guide the interviews. The development of the interview protocol ensured that the key points were not missed in the interview. As the premise of phenomenology is to understand the participant's experience rather than how they judge the experience, I sought to know what led participants to pass judgment or construct specific meaning to the experience.

## **Confirmability**

Confirmability relates to the ability of the study to be corroborated and verified by other researchers. Korstjen and Moser (2018) wrote that confirmability is concerned with establishing that data and interpretations of the findings are clearly derived from the data. The triangulation method was used to ensure the confirmability of the study outcomes. Triangulation included the application of multiple information sources to gather information about the same phenomenon to confirm the data collection and reduce the potential of researcher bias (Hadi & Closs, 2016; Korstjen & Moser, 2018; Renz et al., 2018).

The data sources (literature review, interview protocol, reflective journal notes, and semistructured interviews) were reviewed and crosschecked to ensure the information provided information is consistent. Confirmability concerns the aspect of neutrality; the interpretation should be absent from the researcher's preferences and viewpoints but grounded in the data. Confirmability dictates that the researcher accounts for any biases by being transparent about them and use of the appropriate qualitative methodological practices to respond to those biases (Given, 2008; Krostjen & Moser, 2018). Epoche was applied to remove researcher bias through bracketing and set aside all preconceived notions, ideas, thoughts, and biases regarding the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994).

## **Ethical Procedures**

The three fundamental principles of human ethical research are respect, beneficence, and justice. “Human research scientists are guided by the ethical principles on research on human participants” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 109). Researchers must protect research participants by avoiding harm to them; and should always consider how they are going to ensure the privacy and confidentiality of their study participants (Dooly et al., 2017; Resnik, 2019). The role of the researcher is to ensure that participants experience no harm due to their involvement in this study. Participants in this study were treated ethically and allowed to react to the recorded data. I adequately informed participants of the intent and purpose of the study, and clear agreements were established. The following ethical procedures were followed for this research study to ensure the confidentiality and privacy of all participants in the study.

- The proper protocol for submitting for and receiving approval from the institutional review board (IRB) to conduct this study was followed according to research standards.
- Participants were made aware of the purpose of this research study. Each participant completed an informed consent explaining the research study, expectations, and their rights. Participants were also informed of their right to decline to participate in this study.
- Participants were informed that any time during the interview process, they could elect to stop an interview and discontinue participation in the study.

- I did not foresee harm to participants in this study. However, during the process of member checking, there was potential, during the participant's review of the transcripts or synthesized data, to trigger feelings of distress or anxiety (Birt et al., 2016). I provided an opportunity to discuss the results if the participants wanted to have further discussion about the results.
- Data collected during this research study was electronically stored in NVivo, a reflective journal was maintained in Microsoft Word, and on a physical recording device used to record interviews.
- Data collected for this research study is both private and confidential. Each participant was given a pseudonym in place of their real name to protect their identity and ensure privacy.

A consent agreement was developed to gain informed consent from the participants. The agreement informed participants about: the purpose of the research without stating the central research question; the procedures of the study; the risk and benefits of the research; the voluntary nature of their participation; their right to opt out of the research at any time; and the process used to ensure confidentiality and privacy (Moustakas, 1994)

Researchers must ensure that the identities of the study participants remain anonymous and that their privacy and confidentiality are not compromised, even after the conclusion of the study (Resnik, 2019). It is the responsibility of the researcher to remain

ethical when interpreting the results of the study. Researchers should not over-interpret or misinterpret the data and represent the possible conclusions as closely as possible (Dooly et al., 2017). It is equally important for a researcher to refrain from coercion and undue influence, which interferes with the participant's ability to make a properly informed choice. (Geldenhuys, 2019), wrote that the quality of informed consent in humanistic and transpersonal research brings into focus the trust involved in the intimate interaction between researcher and participant. Documentation also provides a monitoring tool to demonstrate to external reviewers, colleagues, and the IRB, that the correct steps in informed consent are appropriately handled (Geldenhuys, 2019).

### **Summary**

The research method selected for this study is transcendental phenomenology. Qualitative research methodologies provide mechanisms to study complex phenomena. The key objectives of the study were to arrive at patterns or themes, to establish new outcomes, and identify gaps in the existing body of knowledge and theory to explain the experience of being a Black female leader. As the researcher, I set aside biases and preconceived assumptions about experiences, feelings, and responses to situations. The goal was to determine what the experience meant for the participants' who had the experience and to provide a comprehensive description of the experience (Moustakas, 1994). The phenomenal experience becomes more clarified and expanded in meaning as the phenomena are considered and reconsidered during the reflective process (Moustakas, 1994). I engaged 15 participants to respond to in-depth interview questions

relative to their experiences as Black female leaders. It was my intent to obtain rich data from the selected participant until data saturation was achieved. I identified themes or patterns regarding how the study participants experience the phenomena. I also ensured that the privacy and confidentiality of the study participants were maintained and protected the rights of the study participants. Chapter 4 is a discussion of the results of the study.

## Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of this qualitative, transcendental phenomenological study was to explore how Black women leaders described their lived experiences with leadership development. Leadership development, for this study's purpose, is the path that Black women took to obtain their leadership positions. The critical question that guided this study was: How do Black female leaders describe their lived experiences with leadership development? I developed the research question as a result of a review of the literature of Black women in leadership, wherein I identified a gap in the development opportunities for Black women (Davis & Maldonado, 2015). There is also a gap in understanding of how Black women's racial and gendered identities influence their development as leaders (Davis, 2016). The literature also indicated an underrepresentation of this group of women in top leadership roles (Carter & Peters, 2016).

To address the gaps, I used a transcendental phenomenological design to collect personal narratives from 15 Black women leaders. I obtained a deeper understanding of the lived experiences of these women through their shared stories. The women provided valuable insight into their professional experiences as Black women leaders and the implications of how their racial and gendered identities influenced how they navigated their careers and developed as leaders. Moustakas' (1994) modified van Kaam data analysis approach was applied in this transcendental phenomenological study to provide meaning to the leadership development experiences of Black women leaders, thus addressing the purpose and research question for the study. The study results presented in

this chapter involve the lived experiences of 15 Black female leaders from the southwestern and southeastern regions of Michigan. I also present the research setting, demographic data, data collection and analysis procedures, evidence of the qualitative data's trustworthiness, and a composite of the study results.

### **Pilot Study**

I conducted a field study to collect data in preparation for the more extensive qualitative study. I conducted semistructured, open-ended interviews with two participants. The semistructured interviews were guided by an interview protocol (Appendix A), which was administered to both participants. The participants completed an informed consent agreement for the field study, which informed them of the field study's intent and nature. The field study participants were women who self-identified as Black or African American and held a leadership position for 12 months. I conducted the field study to identify areas of the study that needed to be modified or eliminated before the commencement of the more extensive study. The field study enabled me to determine if the questions were clear and easily understood by others using the four-step interview protocol refinement framework. The steps included (a) ensuring alignment between interview questions and research questions, (b) constructing an inquiry-based conversation, (c) receiving feedback on interview protocols, and (d) pilot testing the interview questions (Castillo-Montoya, 2016). The interviews occurred through video conferencing via Zoom and yielded valuable information (Archibald et al., 2019). The semistructured interviews lasted approximately 45 minutes. The interviews were



transcribed, and member checking was conducted. Five main themes emerged from the coding of the transcripts: (a) lack of respect from White peers, (b) limitations of advancement, (c) value of experience and education, (d) importance mentoring and networking, and (e) importance of having confidence and integrity as a leader.

### **Research Setting**

The data for this study were collected through semistructured interviews of 15 Black women leaders via Zoom web conferencing. Archibald et al. (2019) noted that Zoom is a secure, cost-effective, and easy-to-use tool for data collection. One participant interview was conducted in person, per the participant's request. The duration of the interviews ranged from 45–90 minutes. Participant recruitment occurred using my personal and professional contacts and the networking site LinkedIn. I sent potential participants recruitment messages via direct messaging and the InMail features within the LinkedIn platform. I also emailed the recruitment letter (Appendix B) to my personal and professional contacts, requesting that they respond to my Walden email address if they were interested in participating in the study. Upon receiving notification from the potential participants of their willingness to participate in the study, I emailed them the informed consent. Participants were directed to thoroughly read the contents of the document and reply to the email with the words *I consent* if they wished to participate in the research study. Upon receipt of the informed consent, I worked with the participants to schedule an interview time. The interviews occurred over a 4-week period and were scheduled to meet the participants' availability. The interviews were recorded using

Zoom recording and a portable Olympus digital recorder as a backup. The participants all appeared comfortable and relaxed during the interviews and did not show signs of physical or emotional distress. Participants expressed themselves in an open and free manner as they shared their lived experiences. A few of the participants reflected as far back as their adolescence to share what they believed to be their inspiration and influence for becoming a leader. I employed the epoche process to bracketing and mitigate my own bias, preconceived notions, and prejudices as a Black woman. This process enabled me to approach the phenomenon from a fresh and unobstructed standpoint (Moustakas, 1994).

### **Demographics**

The participants in this study were selected via purposeful sampling. Participants were acquired through my personal and professional networks. All the participants met the requirements of identifying as a Black woman who held a position in leadership in the state of Michigan for more than 12 months. Participants were asked six demographical questions, which provided additional insight into their lived experiences. The demographical questions included age, years in leadership, racial identification, industry sector, relationship status, children, and the highest level of education. Thirteen of the participants reported having children. Most of the participants are married; four reported being single, and one participant was divorced. Table 1 outlines the demographic details for the participants in this study. Each participant was given a unique identifier, which includes a pseudonym and a numeric participant ID.

**Table 1***Participant Demographics and Characteristics*

ID	Pseudonym	Age	Identify as Black	Years in leadership	Industry sector	Relationship status	Children	Highest level of education
001	Angel	41–50	Yes	15	Human resources	Married	yes	Postgraduate coursework
002	Bailee	41–50	Yes	16	Political	Married	yes	Bachelor's degree
003	Carmen	41–50	Yes	17	Education	Married	yes	Master's degree
004	Denise	41–50	Yes	12	Banking & education	Married	yes	Master's degree
005	Elaine	51–60	Yes	7	Communications	Married	yes	Master's degree
006	Faith	51–60	Yes	18	Education	Married	yes	Master's degree

007	Gayle	51– 60	Yes	25	Human resources & operations	Married	yes	Master's degree
008	Hattie	41– 50	Yes	9	Information technology automotive	Single	yes	Master's degree
009	India	51– 60	Yes	3	Nonprofit & banking	Divorced	No	Master's degree
010	Jasmine	60+	Yes	35	Insurance	Married	yes	Bachelor's degree
011	Kate	41– 50	Yes	15	Banking	Married	yes	Master's degree
012	Lana	41– 50	Yes	10	Public relations & marketing	Married	yes	Master's degree
013	Maria	41– 50	Yes	8	Computer information technology	Single	yes	Doctoral candidate
014	Nicole	31– 40	Yes	12	Nonprofit/politics	Single	No	PhD
015	Olivia	41– 50	Yes	6	Nonprofit	Single	yes	Master's degree

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The participants derived from varied industry sectors, including human resources, education, politics, banking, public relations and marketing, information technology, insurance, and nonprofit. All participants were college-educated; three held bachelor's degrees, one held a doctorate, one was a PhD candidate, and 10 participants held master's degrees. The majority of the participants in this study were midcareer and had been in leadership for 10–20 years. Two participants had been in leadership for over 21 years, and five participants have been leaders for under ten years. The majority of the women who participated in this study were between the ages of 41 and 50. The next largest group fell in the 51–60 age range. One participant was in her early thirties, and one participant was over 60 years of age. As required for the selection criteria, all the women held positions in middle and senior leadership. The women held diverse positions within organizations in Michigan.

**Table 2**

*Participants by Positions*

Vice president	4
Director/regional director	3
Associate vice president	1
Executive director	3
Senior political leadership	1
Insurance executive	1
Educational leadership	1

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Lead information technology engineer	1
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### **Data Collection**

The data collection for the study began on September 28, 2020, after receiving Walden University IRB approval (# 09-14-20-0147095). Participants were recruited using my personal and professional contacts as well as my connections in the LinkedIn online professional networking platform. I sent a total of 36 invitations to personal and professional contacts who I believed fit the study requirements. Participants who were contacted via LinkedIn were sent a direct message or InMail via the platform. To identify potential participants, I searched through my LinkedIn contacts and reviewed the profiles and pictures of my connections. A total of 23 individuals responded that they were interested in participating in the study. Individuals who showed interest in participating in the study were sent the informed consent. One participant dropped out of the study due to a personal emergency. Two individuals did not respond to the request for interviews, and the remaining five potential participants were no longer required for the study as data saturation was achieved from 15 study participants. The data collection concluded on October 22, 2020.

### **Semistructured Interviews**

A total of 15 Black women leaders were interviewed for this study. The semistructured interviews lasted between 45 and 90 minutes. At the start of each interview, participants were read an introductory script that explained the process and

expectation of the interview. I informed the participants that the interviews were confidential and there were no right or wrong responses to the interview questions. Participants were encouraged to give their true feelings and responses to each of the interview questions. I used an interview protocol (Appendix A) and bracketed my own knowledge and experience regarding the phenomenon to gain a deeper understanding of Black women leaders' experiences with leadership development and the implications of how their racial and gender identity influenced their development as leaders.

At the conclusion of each interview, I debriefed the participants by reiterating the purpose of the study as well as the member checking process. Each participant was assigned a participant identification number and a pseudonym. The pseudonyms were created by following an alphabetical naming sequence. During the interviews, I kept journal notes of the participant's nonverbal communication as well as any observations made during the interview. Participants freely shared details and vivid descriptions of their lived experiences. Participants seemed comfortable and expressive in their responses. A few of the participants shared negative experiences but did not show signs of distress when telling their stories. Upon completion of 9 interviews, common themes began forming among the participant responses. After conducting interview Number 10, evidence of data saturation appeared as no new themes emerged from the data. However, to obtain rich data, I decided to conduct five more interviews to ensure no new themes would emerge. Data saturation was confirmed upon reviewing the participant data from all 15 participants and verification that no themes were being repeated and no new

knowledge was emerging in the interview responses (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015; Saunders et al., 2018).

### **Member Checking**

I reviewed the verbatim transcripts and created transcription summaries for each of the participant interviews. Each participant received an emailed copy of their transcript summary for member checking to ensure accuracy and validity and to ensure that I accurately captured the essence of their responses to the interview. According to Moser and Korstjens (2018), the member checking process further ensures rigorous qualitative study results. Participants were given 7–10 days to respond if there were any edits needed or if they wanted to expound their comments to be respectful of time and schedules. Four participants requested minor edits and provided additional context to their responses during member checking. The requested modifications were made and verified with the participants. Data collection concluded on October 30 at the completion of the member checking process. The information from member checking and verbatim transcripts were used during the coding process and data analysis process.

### **Debriefing**

At the close of each of the interviews, the participants were debriefed. The debriefing process took between 15–20 minutes for each participant. The participants were reminded of the purpose of the study and the process of member checking. Participants were also reminded that their information is confidential. During this time, the participants were provided an opportunity to obtain additional information about the



study's nature and provide any further context regarding the information they shared during the interview. A few of the participants offered additional feedback during this time. All data collected for this study is electronically stored in NVivo, and interview transcripts and audio recordings are electronically saved on a password-protected external drive. The process for the confidentiality of participant data was managed as indicated in Chapter 3.

### **Data Analysis**

The 15 participant transcripts were reviewed multiple times to ensure that I obtained a full understanding of the contents of the documents and to conduct cursory manual coding of the data. The initial coding from the thorough review of the data was generated as a starting point for the data coding process. Additional codes were created as I re-examined the data from the verbatim transcripts. Using NVivo 12 software, a line-by-line review of each transcript was conducted. The coding structure included single words (Vivo codes) based on the participant's own words as well as short phrases (Saldana, 2013). The identified codes were re-examined for duplications. Duplicate codes and codes with similar meanings were merged to create themes. The themes were formed based on common ideas, words, and reoccurring language from the participant data. Moustakas' modified seven-step van Kaam process was used to analyze the data, which requires the use of bracketing and imaginative variation to view the data in a unique way, unobstructed by preconceived ideas notions regarding the phenomenon. Imaginative

variation was used to identify and synthesize the structural details and essence of the experience and transforming them into a structural description (Moustakas, 1994).

The structural meanings of the individual textural descriptions developed during the transcendental-phenomenological reduction process. The purpose of a transcendental phenomenological study is to provide meaning regarding the study participant's experience with the phenomenon. Moustakas (1994) described the noema and noesis. The noesis is the "act of perceiving, feeling, thinking, remembering, or judging... which is embedded with meaning that is concealed and hidden from consciousness" (p. 69). In essence, it is the manner in which the phenomenon is experienced. According to Moustakas, the meaning of the experience must be drawn out. The noema is perceptual meaning as it is viewed by the participant. The noesis and noema work collectively to bring meaning or intentional collectiveness to the phenomenon.

### **Epoche**

The data analysis process began by engaging in the epoche process (Moustakas, 1994) in an attempt to understand the data from the participant's experiences free from personal bias and prejudgments and removing all the assumptive detritus that attached me to the phenomenon. Through epoche, it becomes apparent that one's own experiences are barriers to pure objectivity. According to Butler (2016), the ability of the researcher to look past their own experiences is fundamentally important to the phenomenological process. Through epoche, I reflected on my experience and perceptions with the phenomenon and consciously set aside suppositions, perceptions, bias, "a clearing of the

mind” to disconnect from any application of memories of the phenomenon being studied (Moustakas, 1994.) I then bracketed my own preconceptions to gather the participant’s experiences, feelings, and perceptions through the data collected.

### **Coding and Horizontalization**

Each of the participant’s interviews provided rich and detailed data regarding the lived experiences of leadership development of Black women leaders. All data collected was valuable in providing descriptive themes and providing meaning to the phenomenon. The first step in the transcendental phenomenological data analysis, using the modified van Kaam method, is to identify and list every expression relative to the experience (Moustakas, 1994). As part of the initial phase of the data analysis, I coded the collected data and identified participant statements relevant to the research question, significant statements from participants were highlighted from participant transcript responses and equal value to all the participants’ statements. Each horizon of the participant’s interview added meaning and provided a clear depiction of the phenomenon under study.

### **Reduction and Elimination**

The process of reduction and elimination involved identifying and eliminating statements that did not provide elements for understanding the lived experience. Moustakas (1994) provided the following two strategies for determining invariant constituents: (a) Does the statement contain a moment of the experience necessary for understanding the phenomenon? (b) Is it possible to abstract or label it? Any items that do not meet the mentioned requirements were eliminated? The horizons that met these

requirements then became known as the invariant constituents of the experience for each of the participants. The reduction process ensured that invariant participant statements that speak to the horizon of the lived experience remained (Moustakas, 1994). The reduction and elimination help separate the invariant constituents of the experience from redundant and supplementary information. During the data analysis process, cases that did not align with the majority findings were categorized and listed as discrepant cases. These discrepant cases were discussed thoroughly and analyzed for conclusions to contribute to the overall findings of the research study.

### **Theme Development**

As part of the theme development process, I explored the statements from the verbatim transcripts of all 15 participants and data that made it through the reduction process to explore the meanings of the participant's lived experience. Based on the results of the coding, the participants' responses were categorized into themes. I aimed to extract and understand the complexity of the meanings in the data rather than measure the frequency of its occurrence. The analysis begins with data that is textual and aims to organize meanings in the data into patterns and, finally, themes to understand the phenomenon in a new light to make invisible aspects of the experience visible (Sundler et al., 2019). As the themes began to form, I verified the themes against the participant data to ensure that themes gave a true representative of the participant's experience. The invariant constituents were clustered into sixteen themes. The themes were further delineated into two categories: success factor and barriers and challenges. I examined the

list of participant statements to elicit the essence of its meaning within the holistic context. From the invariant constituents, phenomenological reflection and imaginative variation were used as described by Moustakas (1994) to construct a thematic portrayal of the participant's experience and the factors that influenced the leadership journey for these women.

**Table 3***Themes*

Themes	P001	P002	P003	P004	P005	P006	P007	P008	P009	P010	P011	P012	P013	P014	P015
<i>Success Factors</i>															
Capacity to lead	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Influence & Mobility		x	x				x		x			x	x	x	x
Resilience & Adaptability	x	x	x			x							x		x
Confidence & Authenticity	x	x	x			x				x			x		
Supportive Networks			x			x	x			x				x	
Ownership of Professional Development	x		x			x	x		x	x				x	x
Spirituality	x						x	x							
Risk Taking	x					x		x	x				x	x	x
<i>Barriers and Challenges</i>															
Challenge of Authority	x	x		x		x	x		x		x			x	x
Changing the Rules	x			x			x		x		x				
Lack of Sponsorship	x		x												x
Sexism & Racism	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Microaggression	x	x		x	x	x			x		x		x	x	x
Scrutiny & Doublestandards	x	x		x	x	x	x		x		x				x
Opposition from within		x			x	x	x			x					x
Work-life Balance				x			x					x			

### **Individual Textual and Structural Descriptions**

The textual description is constructed from the themes and delimited horizons of each participant's experience (Moustakas, 1994). The textural description is a narrative that explains participants' perceptions of a phenomenon using verbatim excerpts from their interview. Moustakas (1994) recommended using the participant's own words to convey their unique perceptions of the phenomenon investigated. The textural descriptions provide the "what" of the experience in a transcendental phenomenological study. Moustakas (1994) defined individual structural descriptions as the process of revealing the hidden meanings and dynamics of the individual participant's experiences. The textural-structural description that emerges represents the meaning and essence of the participant's lived experience (Moustakas, 1994).

Textural and structural descriptions are joined to create a greater description, understanding, and perception of the experience of developing as Black women leaders and uncovers the essence of the participant's lived experience. The relationship between the texture and the structure is the appearance of the hidden coming together to create the fullness in the understanding of the phenomenon or experience (Moustakas, 1994). From the themes and horizons from each participant interviews, the individual textural description was formed. I applied imaginative variation to support the identification of meanings and to uncover the hidden and underlying aspects of the participant's individual experiences. The individual structural descriptions (Appendix C) reveal the hidden meanings and dynamics of the individual participant's experiences (Moustakas, 1994).

The excerpts from individual participant interviews highlight the essence of the participant's lived experience on the goal of becoming a leader. The excerpts evoked a clear depiction of the individual participant experiences of being a Black women leader.

### **Synthesis of Individual and Structural Descriptions**

Being a successful Black women leader means being able to develop strategies to adapt to and navigate external and internal obstacles that may stifle one's professional development. For the participants in this study, leadership development often included self-directed learning, persistence to acquire new knowledge and skills, and mentorship for several of the women aspiration for seeking a leadership position as a means to effect social change and to achieve upward mobility and economic opportunity. Despite being qualified and exceeding expectations in management positions, these Black women experienced institutional and social challenges in their career development as leaders. These challenges include dealing with a feeling of being misunderstood or misinterpreted due to racial bias and stereotyping, lack of mentorship and sponsorship opportunities, and dealing with misogyny and biases due to gender discrimination and being overlooked for advancement and promotions.

Many of the participants navigated White male-dominated industries and became the only Black and woman in a leadership position. Participants overwhelmingly have a desire to help people and create changes in their community or among their peers. Participants were often motivated or aspired to seek leadership opportunities to right a wrong or to influence change and to be part of the decision-making process. Many of the



participants did not aspire to go into leadership as the role of leadership was viewed as being unobtainable. The motivation to lead for many of the Black women leaders was sparked by the desire to have their voice represented as the leadership pool in their organization did not have minority representation at the highest level.

The majority of the participants were among the only women or persons of color in their organization or in a leadership position. As Black women advance into leadership roles, they are faced with added pressures to perform at a higher rate than their White counterparts. They dealt with fighting against imposter syndrome to build confidence regarding their decision-making, execution of duties, and overall capacity to lead effectively. Their sense of self-worth and self-efficacy are critical qualities for these women to excel in the face of challenges and obstacles in their journey to succeed as leaders.

All the women in this study experienced some form of discrimination during their leadership journey. Participants also dealt with stereotyping; the most prevalent stereotype assigned was the “angry Black women”. Participants indicated that they had to temper their communication style in attempts to mitigate being singled-out or labeled. One participant shared that as the only Black agent in her area, she dealt with individuals not wanting to give her business because of her race and having to hide her identity in her marketing to ensure that she would get business. Participants spoke of having to be confident in their communication, especially when dealing with their White male

counterparts. The women were often challenged by White men and had to assert their authority.

The participants shared that they dealt with microaggression in the form of subtle comments, the assumption that they hold the same views as all Black women, and acknowledgment or insinuation that they were lucky to obtain their leadership positions. They also experienced microaggression of environment. For example, one participant in banking shared that Black leaders were sent to work in Black dominated communities. Black women leaders deal with lower pay despite often being more qualified and educated than their White counterparts. The enhanced barriers include a lack of sponsorship and mentorship that would provide connections and professional guidance. Mentorship is viewed as an important aspect of leadership development.

These women faced scrutiny in their abilities to lead, which makes it harder for these women to succeed. Additionally, these Black women were faced with additional obstacles placed in their path, such as the need to acquire additional education, not previously required, in order to obtain positions. Black women draw on their ability to communicate effectively, build relationships, connect with supportive networks and mentorships to succeed. The ability to garner support from organizational leadership was identified as a hindrance to professional progress for these women. The women addressed the lack of supportive guidance or the sense of opposition from other Black female leaders as a major challenge in their leadership journey.

Although not as prevailing among all the leaders, work-life balance is noted as a challenge for Black female leaders. These women showed their ability to operate as leaders while managing their familial obligations successfully. Despite the many challenges faced by Black women leaders, the participants were able to overcome adversity to become successful leaders. Their success factors included supportive networks, hard work, self-confidence, dedication to achieve their goals, attainment of knowledge and skills, resilience, adaptability, risk-taking, and the ability to endure hardship and challenges throughout their leadership journey.

### **Results**

The purpose of this qualitative transcendental phenomenological study was to gain a deeper understanding of how Black women leaders described their lived experiences with leadership development. The study sought to explore the challenges and success factors experienced by participants during their path to leadership. The research question for this phenomenological research study was: How do Black female leaders describe their lived experiences with leadership development? The interview questions were reflective of the various challenges and obstacles faced by Black women in leadership. The questions also focused on success factors that inspired and influenced their leadership journey. Based on the coding and analysis results, the participant's responses were categorized into the following themes.

**Category 1: Success Factors**

Black women leaders in this study possess the agility to effectively confront obstacles and challenges in their paths to transform them into opportunities throughout their career development. The following are identified success factors:

***Capacity and Desire to Lead***

Participants have leadership capabilities and the desire to lead. These women are driven and take advantage of opportunities to advance their careers. They possess leadership qualities, commitment, knowledge, and relationship building acumen needed to be effective leaders. Their leadership abilities were also recognized by others, as described by the following participants.

Participant 001:

I think my natural tendency toward strong administrative abilities, an authoritative personality, and [the] ability to get different people to work together toward a common goal are all specific circumstances that led me to become a leader. I have found that I have a natural ability to help people remove obstacles to reaching goals and to become very vision focused, operating in intentional purpose. These are some key things that have caused me to naturally evolve into a leader.

Participant 009:

I was doing my annual review with my manager. And he asked me where do you want to be in five years? ...And I told him then I said, I really want to be the executive director of a small nonprofit...And I had not forgotten my desire to be

the executive director of a small nonprofit. And I was using my position with {the company} as my steppingstone to get me the skillset; I needed to get to that next level.

Participant 013:

My upbringing was the main motivation to become a leader. I was raised by my parents to never follow. So, I always lead, and that was my major motivation. And so, when I got into my field, although I didn't begin in a leadership role, I knew that just through growth and development, that a leadership role is what I wanted to be in. I've never been, you know, to follow. I follow in terms of like, guidance, and knowledge, and things like that. But as far as the end goal, and my motivation is always to lead. And so that's just always been me, always wanting to lead and be a leader.

### ***Influence and Mobility***

Participants in this study are ambitious and determined. Many sought the mantle of leadership to be in a position of influence and have a seat at the table as a decision-maker, for upward mobility or passion for being a change agent.

Participant 003:

It was important for me to be in a position of influence, to be able to help people around me, so what I realized is that it was those people who were in positions of leadership or power who were able to affect change in their communities or in their circles and they had they had a broader circle of influence. I felt like in a position of leadership; you would be able to affect positive change on other people, but then

also, you could potentially affect positive change in your family and become more upwardly mobile, get more money, get better things for your family, you know, provide a way for your kids and that kind of thing.

Participant 012: “I think my motivation was to see me represented at the table, not only doing the work but also being the boss.”

Participant 014: “I think my main influence was recognizing educational inequity as a student. So, seeing those things made me want to pursue leadership and figure out how we change some of the circumstances that I currently see.”

### ***Resilience and Adaptability***

Participants spoke of their ability and requisite to be resilient and adaptable in order to navigate as Black women in leadership in a system that is not designed for them to succeed. The participants also spoke of the importance of being strong and confident in how they are as leaders and, more importantly, Black women.

Participant 001:

I think my ability to compartmentalize and be resilient, persistent, and not easily discouraged; I think all of those things have helped me even knowing that I have to be, you know, ten times better than the next person.

Participant 004:

To be an African American leader, you have to have tough skin. And you have to understand that everything's not going to be fair, and everything's not going to be right. So, you either have to be intentional about playing the game in corporate America, or you have to be intentional about doing your own thing.

Participant 005: "... as African Americans, we know that adaptability is extremely important for our survival."

Participant 006: "Institutional racism is what we live with; we live with it every day. So, it's something that we have to adapt to, to actually function in a system that is not really made for us to be successful."

### ***Confidence and Authenticity***

Black women leaders' sense of authenticity is tied to their values, identity, emotional well-being, personal satisfaction, and effectiveness. Participants shared a sense of personal value, self-worth, knowledge of self, and confidence in their abilities.

Participant 002:

Belief in self, being comfortable in my own skin...would be my most significant asset. Because many times I was challenged, and just the various personality types, the more I understand or understood myself, and the more, the better I was, the more I could operate in any situation, whether it was going to be a confrontation or whatever the environment was, just the better I understood me, the better outcome I had.

Participant 003:

It's been important to be genuine, true to myself in the roles that I'm taking, and not compromising myself or my full self. Understanding the place that you have, or the influence that you have, whether you are, you know, whether...it's part of your role, or...whether you've been, what do you call it, ordained, you know, as influential, or whether you just in the things that you do or the work that you're

doing, there's influence, but understanding that it's significant, whatever you're doing is significant. And you should operate in that way. It's not minor.

Participant 008:

To be true to myself, to be my authentic self, to show up whole, full and complete, and within my power. And to not take others' perspective is my own perspective, to allow myself to feel the experience, rather than think the experience...I own my own career, I own whether or not I am a leader, I lead myself, I don't lead by the previous examples, I lead by what feels good to me, I acknowledge my feelings towards things, and I identify from that, right, I don't change my own perspective, in order to fit into some mold. I keep with my perspective until I decide to change that perspective.

Participant 013:

It's my personal opinion that you know, we come from a strong people, and we come from a strong tribe. And so, with that being said, um, I think just, you know, acknowledge, and embrace your strength. And, and that will take you such a long way. You know, like I said, don't let anybody tell you that you're inferior. Don't let anyone make you feel inferior. And you walk into any obstacle, any challenge, with your head held high and with confidence.

### ***Supportive Networks***

Participants spoke of the need to have a network of support. Their support network includes family, mentors, sponsors, and other women leaders who act as a source of encouragement and guidance. Mentoring is the key factor contributing to skills



development, emotional support, provision of information needed for an individual to recognize and achieve milestones required for success and career advancement (Montgomery, 2017).

Participant 001: “You have to have a cheerleader so that when you start moving people into leadership, somebody has, you know, been saying your name. So, like, building your credibility, know with the higher up.”

Participant 005:

My best leader has been a male African American, actually, three times. So those individuals, the three individuals that come to mind they serve as a role model. They help guide my career. Those are the individual leaders that I think about when I think of individuals who helped shape me.

Participant 015:

Surround yourself with people who will uplift you...I don't care what they look like, what gender they are, they can be friends, they could be colleagues, they could even be your family. But people who will uplift you and celebrate and celebrate you...provide you critical feedback...they will uplift you and believe in you and give you hope, and those doses of encouragement when you need it.

Participant 014: “Connection to community that is uplifting and supportive, that you can share these experiences with, who understand those experiences, is really important...”

Participant:003:

A community of other women, so, making my own, you know what I mean, forming my own personal board of directors, with trusted advisors...I'm realizing that it goes without sponsors, you know, and advocates to a certain extent, I guess, but I'm really leaning on my peers and kind of sharing resources and putting it out there when I needed help—and being more willing to say that I needed help. You know, I've joined groups on Facebook and just been explicit, like, Hey, I'm looking for jobs if you see anything, that kind of thing.

### ***Ownership of Professional Development***

Participants took ownership of their own career development. They sought out mentorships, professional development training, referenced books, and other resources to help them increase their knowledge and hone the skills needed to help them develop professionally. They are assured of the skills and qualities that they bring to their organizations and positions. They expressed the importance of continually seeking knowledge, staying relevant, reading, and gaining exposure to diverse views and ideas.

Participant 001: “I went and looked for certification opportunities, other ways to hone my skills like organizations to get involved in, you know, seminars and things like that, where I can do pursue my own professional development.”

Participant 003:

I sought out, at least in my own mind, examples of leaders, people who I had taken as mentors without them, even knowing just me watching them, like taking notes on their leadership, particularly, particularly Black women in positions of

power, because I realized, that upward mobility in terms of economic advancement, and influence would come out of leadership.

Participant 009:

I have read books over the years by African American leaders, female leaders that have given me the inspiration and some new information about leading and surviving in Corporate America. So, I would encourage them to read, to talk to their mentors, and ask them what they're reading.

Participant 012:

Read a variety of things. Many times, we don't do it because we don't enjoy it. I mean, I don't particularly enjoy baseball, or you know, I can understand baseball, I can understand basketball and football, but baseball, but you know, boxing, but you need to know a little bit about everything, you need to know a little bit about government, you need to know a little bit about politics, you need to know a little bit about sports. Because when you're in that boardroom, and you're just sitting there talking, [it] is going to be awkward if you're just looking at each other and having no clue what to talk about.

Participant 013:

My most significant asset, it's just my knowledge, my knowledge in it, and the number of years that I've actually did in it. So, my experience, that that's my big,

biggest asset, I will incorporate the fact that I'm educated, that does play into it also. But my biggest asset is just the knowledge that I have.

### *Spirituality*

Black women leaders turn to their spirituality for guidance, to inform coping practices, understanding, and being in touch with self. Black women leaders hold their spirituality as a significant role in the development of their leadership identity by helping to develop a sense of purpose, confidence and to help shape how they are as leaders.

Participant 001:

Most importantly, I mean, you know, just from a faith standpoint, I learned that you know, what, I need, [is] to just be sure that I'm settled in my faith and that I'm at peace with myself and peace with God. And trust Him for the outcomes. And that has actually been the way that I've been able to elevate. Every job I have had has been in an organization that had no other person of color in any leadership capacity.

Participant 007:

I've always said this is to my creator, how I treat the lives that are interested in my care I'm responsible for, and God will hold me accountable. That's a huge thing, that if all leaders did that and felt accountable to God, we would have little systemic racism because these things will be corrected.

Participant 008:

So, I just think that we should strengthen ourselves our own competence. And know that, you know, there is a higher source that right, that exists and protects us

and takes care of us. That disconnection, honestly, is where we stay in the mindset of everything being unjust if it's not our way. You know, sometimes we think that we should be in a leadership position. But we're not really ready for it. We're ready for the money. We're ready for the benefits, but we're not truly ready to lead other people,[and] have their best interests at heart.

### ***Risk-Taking***

Participants discussed the importance of taking risks and not being afraid to pursue their goals. These women understand the need to take risks despite the possibilities of failure. They also view failure as a learning opportunity.

Participant 001: "I was able to climb the corporate ladder and find new opportunities. Do not be afraid to take a risk or fail. Nothing beats a failure but a try. Do it afraid."

Participant 015: "...don't be afraid to take risks. Failure is not a bad word. I think that the failure recovery for Black women is more challenging, but we will we do recover."

Participant 009: "I think that we can't be afraid to take on the mantle of leadership... You got to go for it."

Participant 013:

Never think that there's a mountain that I can't climb. So, there's no obstacle too high. And so that, that helps me to pursue any, any advanced positions or any

growth opportunities in front of me. So just to never quit, and, you know, to keep working and to stay motivated, and to always, always apply 110%.

## **Category 2: Barriers and Challenges**

Each of the study participants identified experiences, challenges, and obstacles to overcome in their leadership development journey. These challenges include gender bias, stereotyping, having their authority challenged, and being viewed in a subservient manner or lacking in strength and independence to perform their roles as leaders.

### *Challenge of Authority*

Participants spoke of often having their authority challenged by their White male counterparts and having to prove that they deserve a seat at the table. Due to the frequency of this occurrence, I have listed this theme as the primary obstacle experienced by these Black women leaders.

Participant 005: “I’ve had a White male leader...at least from my perspective, was the questioning of my abilities, even though I brought all of this experience to the table.”

Participant 006: “ Having people understand my role as a leader. I’ve had folks to challenge, especially White men trying to challenge my authority.”

Participant 009: “When I would walk into bank meetings...And I will be the only African American woman in the room. And even in my role now, I still have to sometimes remind people, you know, I am the director.”

Participant 015:

There have been experiences where I have, serving as a leader, where my authority was undermined. And while that same authority for the person who was in the seat before me, who was a White male, um, they were like, he was granted this leeway, that once I was in the position that I wasn't granted the same. There were more restraints that will put on me and the authority and influence that they were willing to give me in the position.

### ***Changing the Rules***

Participants expressed having the rules changed on them, which include being told that they required a master's degree for positions that were posted requiring only a bachelor's degree and experience in the field. Participants also reported having limitations put on them in their positions that are not put-on White male leaders. Participants perceived a "rule change" as meeting the requirement to receive a promotion or for being considered for beneficial career-changing incentives but having a change in the requirement needed to attain their goal.

Participant 001:

I applied for the position. I had the credentials for the position, but he told me...I'm going to tell you now, we're not even going to interview you. And I asked him why he said you need to get a master's degree when that was not even the educational requirement for the position.

Participant 004:

It's like every time you get to the door, they change the rules. And every time they change the rules, you meet the new rules, and so they have to change them again. And so, it's a constant, like constantly chasing.

Participant 009:

I can remember interviewing for positions in banking, where all you needed was a bachelor's in business or accounting or something and the experience...I would always be going up against White males because that's just what the banking industry...they would tell me that I was articulate, and I was a great candidate, except that Bob already had his MBA or Bob was working on his MBA...but an MBA is not even on the list of prerequisites or preferred items... So that's why I earned an MBA, so that could no longer be an excuse that I didn't have enough education.

### ***Lack of Support and Sponsors***

Black women often lack the kind of meaningful mentoring and critical sponsorship needed to advance their careers. Black women executives have to work harder to outperform their counterparts and have a harder time obtaining sponsors (Beckwith et al., 2016). Several of the participants shared that they lacked access to sponsors and other support networks to help them as they navigated and developed as leaders.

Participant 001:

I have not had any person say, hey, let me mentor you. So, I see some of your, you know, skills abilities, you know, your ability to catch on, your ability to, you



know, get things done. Now, let me take you under my arm, and you know, under my wing and show you the path. It has been none of that. And most of my gaining knowledge in that way has been a lot of self-directed study, a lot of self-help.

Participant 007:

I've encountered a few instances in my leadership journey, where, where there have been women in positions of power, but not an explicit like interest in bringing me along, you know, and not an explicit interest in making sure that if there was a position that it that they would help we get it. And so, I think just that that advocate, and sponsorship, advocacy and sponsorship has been lacking.

Participant 015:

I think part of that is a gender thing. But I think it's also part of a race, in that if you haven't been afforded the opportunity to coaching, the mentoring, to develop or cultivate those skills and haven't been poured into...leadership development, then it is no surprise that you might have some of those gaps, or just don't know, um, I would say, like, I've seen throughout my career before I became a quote-unquote, leader, saying, I'm just noticing and being a part of women in the workplace being treated very differently than men.

### ***Sexism and Racism***

Participants experienced challenges with sexism and racism from White male counterparts. Some of the participants expressed experiences of having their ideas discounted, overlooked, or even highjacked by White male peers as well as institutional

racism. Three of the participants experienced having opposition from Black male colleagues.

Participant 009:

It's men and their perception and their automatic entitlement that what they say is golden. And, of course, there's the racial bias that when someone walks in the room, and they see a Black woman sitting there, they make some assumptions about who we are, how we speak, how we carry ourselves, and it's being able to dispel those assumptions.

Participant 013:

I know that there's institutional racism there the fact that I'm a leader in my field, um, you know, I kind of overcame some obstacles, you know, to do that, but the fact that they're so very few I know that there's institutional racism, and that equates to very few Black women in the field.

Participant 015: “ As a Black woman often being the only one in a room and being perceived as there to serve in an administrative capacity and like to make the coffee and clean up.”

### ***Stereotyping and Generalizations***

Stereotyping was articulated by several of the study participants; this was in line with the research by (McGee 2018; Williams, 2020). Study participants shared their experiences with being pegged as “angry “ or “too aggressive” in their communication style. The majority of the women interviewed spoke about having to temper the way that they speak. They deal with being misinterpreted, and having their tone was viewed as

being aggressive or angry. The following excerpts for participants provide examples of the sentiments expressed regarding their experience with stereotyping.

Participant 004:

Barrier as a Black woman, most of the leadership, not only were they men, they were White men, and so, like if I had an opinion, or I asked too many questions, then I was considered combative... if I cross my arms or did certain things, that I was coming off as an angry Black woman, which I'm sure he did not have that same conversation with, with other people that didn't look like me.

Participant 001:

Constantly trying to temper what I'm saying. Considering you know, how is this going to come across? Am I being too aggressive? Am I being, you know, too cutthroat? How is this being perceived? When people do not go through all that thinking I'm certain. At the end of the day, I'm trying not to be that angry Black woman.

Participant 007:

You always have to; you have to soften your words. So, you can't speak with the boldness that you come with, whether it's men or women. Yeah, the biggest obstacle is being smart and saying it, and being confident.

Participant 009:" From the moment I open my mouth. I can't be a walking stereotypical Black woman ever. I'm not even really allowed to get angry. It's really sad.

### *Microaggressions*

Participants reported experiencing microaggression from White male leaders and peers through subtle comments in the form of a compliment but are often making insulting comments. Although these women when have advanced their careers into executive leadership, they still must combat persistent racial microaggressions.

Participant 006:

Being more challenged from a White male peer, you know? Um, yeah, that was it. But it's always in a mask, you know, what I'm saying? It's, it's all you know, it's it said in a real sweet way, but you know, underlying what they're really trying to say, they trying to come at you all kind of crazy. So, you know, again, those, like those microaggressions, that you know, that you kind of have to feel out.

Participant 012:

I was the only Black person in an office...but there was a lot of microaggressions there was a lot of, you know, nitpicking that I don't think at that time I fully understood but then as I got older, I understood that to be really the intersection of race, gender, and also ageism, right being so young people underestimate that you're capable of leading because of your age, right? So, you always have to I have to cover up my age or, you know, all this different type of stuff.

### *Scrutiny and Different Standards*

Participants spoke of having to prove themselves continually. The participants believed that they are subject to more scrutiny than their White counterparts and expressed feelings of not being empowered.

Participant 006: “My White counterpart doesn’t have the same hoops to jump through that I do. And I recognize that, but I already understand that, because I have been doing this for so long, I don’t even think about it.”

Participant 007:

As a Black leader in human resources, you’re caught in this place where White people still protect White people, period, and that the Black person will get terminated for the same thing that the other person is protected for...As a Black leader, I cannot come in there and change it. I know that I’m powerless.

Participant 011:

So, it’s like everything we do as Black women was always scrutinized. And it’s like; we always had to walk on eggshells in order ... [to] defend the decisions we make or the things that we’re doing...at the end of the day, they really expect for us to do so much more than what they expect for the White boys to do, they’re going to always accommodate them, and make life easier for them, where they continuously give us hurdles and obstacles that we have to overcome ...”

### ***Opposition From Within***

A few of the participants spoke of challenges with other Black colleagues or leaders. The women were either viewed as a competition or had contentious relationships with other Black leaders. One participant shared that she believed that feelings of lack of power contributed to the lack of commemorative, especially among Black women leaders. Another participant addressed the issue and highlighted that many Black women

leaders emulate the leadership style and behaviors that they have experienced, which has been harmful to people of color. She expressed a need for Black women leaders to identify and develop a style of leadership of their own, which can be role modeled to create positive change in the workplace.

Participant 007:

When Black women feel that they lack power, they will also, some of them, will be afraid to speak up on your behalf. And there are also some Black women who retaliate for the racism that was shown to them with Black people and others, period. I had a Black female leader tell me because I asked her why she was doing something to a particular person. And she said I like to go after people and pull their string and pull their string until they totally unravel. I was like, you are evil. ... And that's because, again, when they feel like they lack power or afraid, it's like that slavery group, we're going to tell you if you run away.

Participant 015:

What I have found is that, for some of us, who have not been mentored, coached, invested in, we, we repeat, and show up and lead the way that we've seen other leaders lead. And often those leaders are White folks who have not led in a way that has been good for the whole of the team, like for Black women and for people of color. So, I want us to begin to think about redefining what leadership looks like for us as Black women and not emulating what we see other, particularly White men and women, do. Because it doesn't work for us, I've seen a number of Black women, I'm kind of, you know, you do what you've seen, you

do what you know, and then impose harm on other Black folks, on other Black women. And I want us to just stop doing that because if we didn't enjoy it, as a recipient when we weren't in a leadership position, why would we treat our sisters and others that way? Like, leadership is not about it's not about your ego and having the authority to tell somebody what to do or demeaning and belittling someone is it's about getting the work done as a collective, and being inspirational and caring for your people, and giving them what they need so that they can do the work that they need to do. There's just a better way, and I want Black women to be open to that and figure out the way that works for us.

### ***Work-Life Balance***

Work-life balance was also identified as a challenge for these Black women leaders; three participants noted that they had the added duties of running their households while still trying to manage their responsibilities of being leaders in corporate America. The participants mentioned having to navigate being an involved mother and an effective leader. The following two excerpt highlight experience shared by participant added intersection of motherhood and leadership.

Participant 004:

I want to say I believe that my ability was always noticed. But I worked at a company that had old leadership. Meaning, they expected most of the men expected you to work, like into the wee hours of the evening and weekends, and so there. So, in the industry that I was in, it was hard to have a work-life balance because they expected you if you want to be a leader, you had to look like them,

which obviously, most of them had wives at home that didn't work that cared for the home. But as a woman, I was the mother, okay, still taking care of my home, and still trying to be a leader in corporate America.

Participant 012:

I would say, motherhood, one of the companies that I'm no longer at, um, you know, all of their executives came in early, left late. And I was a new mom; my daughter was in daycare, so I couldn't come in as early as the other men because, you know, they could come in whenever because they didn't have any responsibilities...I think it's very hard for a woman to have both to have a career and to be an involved mom.

Similar to the study findings of Davis (2016), the study participants were motivated to advance into leadership positions. These women had the tenacity to push forward despite experiencing obstacles and challenges to become successful. As commented by Robert et al. (2018), many of the participants were able to successfully navigate through their career development as a result of developing relationships with people who recognized their talent, gave them a safe space in which to make and learn from their mistakes, provided feedback and guidance, and help to support them and create opportunities for them to succeed. Many of the women pointed to managers and mentors who had helped them develop and actualize their best version of themselves.



### **Discrepant Cases**

During the data collection process, there two discrepant cases emerged.

Participant 012 believed that her gender helped her in her career advancement. She believed that she attained the majority of the position due to the fact that she was both a woman and Black, “I don’t think I can think of anything right off the top of my head that I was definitely, um, discriminated against, because of my gender. If anything, like I mentioned earlier if anything, it has helped me.” This belief ran counter to the lived experiences of how the other participants in this study described their lived experiences with gender discrimination.

Participant 008 spoke of not connecting to discrimination and having the power to change her circumstances. She spoke of having to take accountability for injustice continuing.

I don’t want to put my name on discrimination. That’s the past. It still exists. But I don’t connect to it. I don’t connect to it because I don’t want to continue to live that cycle. So, I separate myself from it’s them against us. And I literally just change that there are individuals that are not aware of who they are. And that’s why discrimination continues. They are still holding beliefs based on ancestral beliefs, societal beliefs, parental beliefs that are not serving them. So why would I take on their energy and their perspective? Right, so to me, discrimination ended in me. We’ve got to change the way we look at it and be accountable for it

continuing. We, too, have to have some accountability in it because of the way we're looking at it if we're still looking at it, as them against us.

This sentiment differed from the beliefs shared by other participants regarding changing how they viewed discriminatory practices they experienced.

Most of the women in this study took an informal or unconventional path to leadership. Many of these women had the drive to succeed and sought-after opportunities to advance their own careers. They pursued formal education or and professional development opportunities to increase their skillset initiative and authority of ensuring their own advancement. Several women were inspired by phenomenal mentors and support systems, which both encouraged and provided them with a sense of confidence that they could achieve their goals. They have the self-efficacy and confidence to be who they are but encounter prejudgment or assumptions.

### **Evidence of Trustworthiness**

#### **Credibility**

Moustakas (1994) modified van Kaam method of analysis of phenomenological data was used to explore the participant experience in this study. The methodology is a proven viable, rigorous, and integral method for qualitative analysis. I also employed member checking as a means to establish credibility. Participants were informed during informed consent and the debriefing process that they would be receiving a copy of their transcript summaries for their review and validation. Four participants provided additional context and clarification to their interview data. The additional information was used in conjunction with the verbatim transcript to ensure accuracy during the

analysis of the participant experience. The data analysis process commenced after completing member checking of all 15 participants.

### **Transferability**

Transferability ensures that the study findings can be generalized or transferred to other contexts or settings (Korsten & Moser, 2018). I provided rich and detailed descriptions regarding the meaning and context of the participants' experiences to enable the future researcher to assess whether the findings are transferable to their study setting. The theoretical lens for this study is Crenshaw's (1989) concept of intersectionality and gendered racism; and which includes Crenshaw's original interpretation of intersectionality and gendered racism grounded in critical race theory (Bell, 1995) and Parker's (2005) concept of intersectionality as it relates to Black female leaders is also transferrable to other studies regarding the leadership development experiences of Black women.

### **Dependability**

Dependability ensures that, if replicated, similar findings would arise with different participants in the same context and setting (Suter, 2012). Dependability involves participants' evaluation of the findings, interpretation, and recommendations of the study such that all are supported by the data as received from participants of the study (Korjsten & Moser, 2018). An interview protocol was used to ensure the quality of data obtained from research interviews (Castillo-Montoya, 2016). I provided a detailed description of the data collection and analysis process using (Moustakas, 1994) Van

Kaam modified method to support replication and transferability to future studies with different study participants and while using similar selection criteria.

### **Confirmability**

Confirmability refers to the degree to which the findings of the research study could be confirmed by other researchers and enable transparency of the research path. It is concerned with establishing that data and interpretations of the findings is clearly defined in the data. (Korjsten & Moser, 2018). Records of the path of the study were kept throughout the process in the form of a journal to record my thoughts and observed themes shared by the study participants to ensure transparency of the research development. The interpretation is not based on my feelings and viewpoints but is grounded in the data (Korjsten & Moser, 2018). Epoche was used to bracket my existing knowledge and biases regarding the phenomenon. Additionally, to ensure confirmability, I reviewed the participant interview data and supporting information via triangulation to gain additional insight regarding participant experiences with leadership development.

### **Summary**

The data collection for this qualitative transcendental study was developed by the research question: How do Black female leaders describe their lived experiences with leadership development? The modified van Kaam method (Moustakas, 1994) was used to analyze the participant interview data. The data analysis yielded thematic categories, individual textual, and structural descriptions, which represented the study participants' lived experiences relative to the research question. The identified themes suggest the

meaning and the essence of the phenomenon of leadership development. I identified sixteen themes and segmented them into two categories: barriers and challenges and success factors. Black women leaders in Michigan face obstacles and challenges to career development and advancement opportunities. These women use their resilience and determination to navigate perceived challenges to reach leadership status and to be successful in their leadership roles.

Black women leaders are proud of their racial identities and believe in being their authentic selves. However, Black women face the unique challenge of being stereotypically seen as aggressive. A major challenge for Black women leaders is trying to find a balance to temper perceptions of being angry or too assertive and being viewed as to be lacking in strength and authority. These leaders desire to be treated with respect and with fairness based on their knowledge and abilities, rather than assumptions based on racial and gender stereotypes. These women must overcome White male-dominant perceptions of their inferiority to be seen as competent and confident leaders.

Black women are under increased pressure to conform to the social norms of the dominant White male culture (Cheeks, 2018). They are under pressure to change how they speak and change how they present themselves to be more acceptable in predominately White organizations. The women in this study experienced challenges and barriers in their career development, and they persevered to reach their leadership goals while preserving their sense of authenticity and self-worth. Chapter 5 provides a discussion of the study findings as revealed through the context of the information

outlined through the Chapter 4 analysis. Additionally, Chapter 5 provides several recommendations for future research.

## Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

### **Introduction**

Chapter 5 contains the thematic data interpretations through literature, which supports the phenomena explored in this study. The data gathered on leadership development experiences of Black women leaders (Roberts et al., 2018) affirmed that ongoing commitment to developing one's self is vital to establishing an identity that is both grounded and centered. Black women must gain access to support, enabling them to grow as they seek to advance their careers and obtain leadership positions within their organizations. In this study, I examined the leadership development of 15 Black women leaders. The results show that these women overcame many challenges and obstacles in their leadership journey but had a high resilience and adaptability to overcome their challenges and be successful as leaders. The narratives shared by the study participants illustrate how Black women can overcome discrimination and other external obstacles to develop and grow as leaders. This final chapter emphasizes key emergent themes in relation to the research question: How do Black female leaders describe their lived experience with leadership development?

### **Black Women's Leadership Development**

Black women leaders describe their leadership development experience as being filled with challenges and obstacles (Roberts et al., 2018). Leadership development for these women is influenced by the lived experiences of navigating through their challenges and obstacles and honing skills by actively seeking professional development

opportunities (Davis, 2016; Davis & Maldonado, 2015). For Black women, leadership development often includes self-directed learning and persistence to acquire new knowledge and skills. Many Black women do not receive formal leadership training and are not afforded the same levels of professional development or coaching opportunities as their White counterparts (Davis, 2016). Black women's leadership acumen is often developed through experiential learning. Despite their leadership abilities, Black women face gender and racial bias as they develop as leaders. There have been more studies on the intersectionality of gender and race and its influence on Black women leaders' experiences. Additionally, there has been an acknowledgment that Black women endure increased racism and gender discrimination. However, more research is needed on how their experiences affect how they develop and how they operate as leaders.

Parker and Ogilvie (1996) contended that leadership should be viewed from an intersectional lens of gender and race. The researchers argued that any theory about leadership and the role of gender in leadership without consideration of race and ethnic background and the effects of racism and racial relations is incomplete. Parker and Ogilvie (1996) also noted that Black women are often devalued for their leadership experience; they are not honored for their adaptability, courage, and resilience in the face of grim odds. Intersectionality highlights aspects of the individual experience that may not be noticed overtly as different groups experience the intersections of their intersecting identities differently and shape how perceived bias is experienced (Collins & Blige, 2016).



The participants in this study described the challenges, obstacles, and successes of their leadership journey. The majority of the participants did not have any formal leadership training; only two women mentioned participating in company-led leadership training that prepared them to advance into their leadership roles. The remainder of the women either sought professional development opportunities or learned through on-the-job experience. Disproportionately, the women stated that their White male counterparts received development opportunities they did not. White men had more access to senior leaders, sponsors, or mentors. Four out of the 15 Black women leaders interviewed reported their managers helped them navigate organizational systems and hierarchy.

Black women find it challenging to find sponsors who understand their specific challenges climbing the corporate ladder and who are also willing to be cheerleaders to help them progress into leadership roles. Participants also reported dealing with systems of institutional racism, which they perceive as being designed to impede the success of minorities. Frequently, Black women's leadership experience involves resistance, devaluation, and a sense of resilience that enable them to overcome challenging circumstances in their quest for career advancement. The participants experienced racial and gender discrimination, but they fought against the social and systemic restraints to become successful leaders through their strength and determination. Davis and Maldonado (2015) noted that Black women who demonstrate resilience, integrity, intrapersonal characteristics, and social skills are more likely to climb the career ladder within their respective organizations, with a mentor or sponsor's support.

### **Interpretation of the Study Findings**

Researchers have explored gendered racism through an intersectionality lens, arguing that Black women experience a unique form of oppression specific to their race-gender subgroup. Black women generally experience discrimination due to their race and gender collectively (Beckwith et al., 2016; Davis & Maldonado, 2015), which influences their drive to succeed and contributes to their challenges during their ascension to leadership. Several of the participants in this study perceived that the intersectionality of their race and gender had a significant influence on their leadership development experience. Although Black women share the same intersections, their experiences cannot be essentialized as they do not all ascribe to the same shared experiences (Aaron, 2020). Likewise, they do not all assign the same meanings and understanding of their lived experiences. A clear understanding must be developed to break barriers by changing the face, shape, and fluidity of leadership and recognizing the significance that different women give to obtaining successful executive positions (Curtis, 2017). Each of the participants in this study provided great insight into the individual struggles and motivational factors that have influenced their ascension to leadership. The participants possessed a sense of strength and self-pride and embraced their intersecting race, gender, and leadership identities.

The Black female experience and how these women make meaning of their experiences are not the same based on their racial identity. Black women leaders construct success and successful leadership based on their particular context. Moorosi

(2018) commented that, for Black women, the construction of success is grounded and shaped by overcoming their individual racial and gendered histories and culture. Rosette et al. (2018) reinforced the need to investigate the dominant and stereotypical traits assigned to Black women, which they assert can only be observed through an intersectional lens. According to Aaron (2020), race and gender subjugate Black women to two devalued groups in the United States, which has caused them to be recipients of prejudice and discrimination based on aspects of their identities.

Each of the women in this study endured some form of challenge in their leadership journey based on their identities as Black, female, or both. A few women experienced gender-specific challenges, such as managing responsibilities of motherhood and leadership. Others faced the challenge of being the only woman in male-dominant professions. However, most of the participants' experiences were due to perceived gendered racism. A small percentage of the participants shared that they felt the negative experiences were limited to only one aspect of their identity: race or gender. Participants expressed dealing with misogynistic attitudes from male counterparts, including Black men who treated them as rivals rather than equals. Participants also shared that they dealt with expectations to perform subservient tasks by their male counterparts or were viewed as support staff even though they held prominent leadership positions within their respective organizations.

Participants in the study maintained that they had faced added scrutiny and expectations as Black women leaders. In line with this finding, Barnes (2015), Beckwith

et al. (2016), and Hoyt and Murphy (2016) posited that Black women face negative stereotypical beliefs about who they are as individuals; they face identity challenges that can become barriers to their success. Often, those who have progressed into leadership roles face increased scrutiny and double standards. DeSante (2013) and Holder et al. (2015) support the axiom that Black women must work twice as hard to be seen as half as good as White people. Many of the participants perceived that their superiors held them to higher standards than their White counterparts. They faced increased scrutiny and significantly greater performance demands than their White counterparts. Participants mentioned being treated differently and having more demanding workloads and expectations than their White male colleagues. In particular, four participants spoke of needing to be sure they had data to back up what they were saying to prove their credibility and validity.

Black female leaders also deal with feelings of not being empowered and having their authority challenged. Participants mentioned having their ideas dismissed or hijacked in meetings by their White male counterparts. One participant in human resources discussed feelings of being undermined. She proposed a cost-saving process, which was shot down by her superior, but later implemented without giving her any credit. The participant's experience supports Allen and Lewis (2016), Allen and Carter (2019), Holder et al. (2015) assessment that societies implicit negative stereotypical images and representation of Black women are visible in the treatment of Black women in leadership, who face exclusion, lack credibility, often dismissed, and have progressive

ideas often attributed to others. Black women also experience not being recognized for having leadership potential (Burton, 2020).

The majority of women in the study shared their struggles of having their authority challenged by White men. While many of the men were their peers, several women experienced opposition from White male subordinates not respecting their leadership positions. The discourse regarding discrimination of Black women leaders is often limited to those in a position of power above them in the organizational hierarchy. Much of the conversation does not include the subordinates to leader dynamic, which places the Black women in a double bind where their competence, professionalism, and authority are questioned by both those who would hire, evaluate, and promote them and by those who report to them in their leadership roles (Allen & Lewis, 2019; DeSante, 2013).

Participants commented about dealing with negative assumptions regarding their knowledge, abilities, and capacity to be in leadership. Rosette et al. (2016) concepts of agentic deficiencies describe the challenges that shape Black women's leadership experiences, which forges in the perceptions that Black women have minimal leadership potential. Three participants commented on the importance of asserting their authority and not backing down. The women believed that they must show their strength to be treated as equals by their male colleagues. Participants actively ensured that they fought against stereotyping and falling into the perceived label assigned to Black women. Sims and Carter (2019) noted that the intersection of race, gender, and leadership for Black

women often leads to stereotyping and inaccurate assessment of their abilities, unrealistic expectations placed upon them, which mitigates against them advancing into higher levels positions.

According to Rosette et al. (2018), stereotypes for Black women include strength, assertiveness, and aggression and are perceived as incompetent, signaling them as angry Black women. Black women leaders struggle with having their voices heard and fight assumptions of sounding like a stereotypical angry Black woman. The participants shared their challenge of having to temper their passion and voice tone and find a balance to convey assertiveness to combat the angry Black woman stereotype. These women frequently deal with gendered racism, often in subtle forms. Participants spoke of coping with microaggressions or dealing with assumptions made about them due to their race and gender and their capacity to lead.

Maldonado and Davis (2015) study of Black women in leadership development found that these women experience a profusion of race and gender stereotypes, which negatively affected their careers. The intersection of race and gender shape Black women's experiences in significant ways. Women of color, especially Black women, face a steeper path to leadership, from receiving less support from managers to getting promoted more slowly, affecting how they view the workplace and their advancement opportunities (Krivkovich et al., 2017). In their study, Smith et al. (2019) found that a common experience among Black women is a subjectivity to stereotypical ascriptions of

multiple subordinate categories, limiting opportunities and barriers to advancement stemming from stereotypical expectations and perceptions of their race and their gender.

Williams (2020) noted that the internalization of race, gender, and class oppression that Black women experience may result in the abuse of power toward other women, especially other Black women. This abusive behavior is an effort to feel powerful in the face of the powerlessness felt from a demoralizing intersection of patriarchy and racism. Black women leaders are likely to hurt others in the same ways they were hurt, which defies the sisterhood. Williams (2020) asserts that this reveals the societal forces that impact much broader than an individual, relational choices. The statement is also in line with the study findings that showed that Black female leaders deal with oppression and challenges from other Black women in their ascension to leadership. These relationships are competitive or in the form of a show of power. In particular, one participant noted that this is often due in a sense to a perceived power struggle or lack of power. Burton (2020) maintained that the experiences of gendered racism could cause health and psychological distress. A participant in banking shared that she felt increased stress and pressure due to her lack of support as a Black woman leader in a White male-dominated industry. The literature showed that Black women traditionally employ strategies to cope with and overcome the challenges that disproportionality affects them (Beckwith, 2016; Davis & Maldonado, 2015; Moorosi, 2018; Roberts et al., 2018).

Black women leaders are likely to use coping strategies to protect themselves against the humiliation, marginalization, and frustration experienced with racial microaggressions, a common aversive form of racism (Holder et al., 2015). These coping strategies include using their voices as power, using supportive networks, and other self-protection forms to become desensitized. The participants mentioned dealing with the adverse effects of their gendered discrimination; these women developed adaptability strategies and built resilience, which enabled them to persevere in their hostile environments. One participant in information technology leadership expressed conducting a self-check to ensure that she maintains a state consciousness that is projecting confidence and worthiness and does not take on others' perspectives. Similar to behaviors described in Williams' (2020) narrative, Black women leaders engage in self-check to help minimize the impact of racial microaggressions' strain and effect.

Black women leaders experience racial microaggressions, which can negatively impact their career development and views of their abilities to develop into leaders. To succeed Black women, draw on their strengths to communicate effectively, exceed performance expectations, build relationships, connect with supportive networks and mentorships (Beckwith et al., 2016). Developing professional support, received guidance, role-modeling, developmental advice, and instrumental career advocacy from mentors and sponsors was pivotal for Black women's achievement (Smith et al., 2019). Spirituality is among the essential tenets of coping strategies, leadership behavior, and successful navigation of challenges for Black women leaders. Aaron (2020) highlighted



that some Black women viewed their leadership as a calling from God and that spiritual integrity and moral leadership are pivotal for Black female leadership. This statement supports the comments made by two of the study participants who stated they viewed leadership as serving others. Women in this study also seemed to asset a transformational leadership style. Several of the participants discussed having a desire to promote or influence positive change and the development of others. Sims and Cater (2019), in agreement with (Byrd, 2009) suggest a further evaluation of the leadership theories on how they address the dynamics of race, gender, and social class enable Black women to be authentic and reach effective and successful outcomes.

In line with sentiments shared by study participants regarding mentoring, Stewart (2016) wrote that advice and support from individuals who have already walked the leadership path greatly help those aspiring to learn how to maneuver and climb the corporate ladder. Fear, lack of confidence, and imposter syndrome are often obstacles to why Black women do not actively seek to secure senior leadership roles (Stewart, 2016). Black women create their own support structures and are less likely to receive formal support, such as networking and mentoring, than their White male colleagues (Burton, 2020). Participants addressed the need for sponsors at the highest level of the organization who can aggressively communicate their abilities and successes and support their career advancement. These influential senior persons can open doors and are more likely to be aware of opportunities and advocate for aspiring leaders.

Participants in the study spoke of the importance of being their authentic selves as they maneuver as leaders. Neal-Jackson (2020) study identified that some Black women intentionally present themselves in a manner that was the least reminiscent of negative stereotypes. Black women also enact their identities in a way that felt authentic to them (Neal-Jackson, 2020). Authenticity occurred most often in relationship with the participant's intersectionality. Being authentic is essential because, in this context, it means that one is representing one's community of people (Smith et al., 2019). Strong racial identity mitigates the effects or threats of stereotyping (Sims & Cater, 2019). Authenticity is a positive experience that involves showing all aspects of oneself when one chooses to do so.

Roberts et al. (2018) found that Black women developed three critical skills to their resilience, i.e., emotional intelligence, authenticity, and agility. Black women practice authentic leadership through deep self-awareness and an ability to shape their own identity. For the participants in this study, authenticity is among the most discussed concerning Black women's intersectionality. Being authentic is essential because, in this context, it means that one is representing one's community of people (Smith et al., 2019). Strong emotional capacity and empowerment are also essential to sustaining a sense of worth and efficacy in the face of Black women's insidious discrimination experienced in the workplace (Holder et al., 2015). One of the most prevalent obstacles that marginalized leaders face is stigmatization as not suitable for leadership (Rast et al., 2018).

Black women frequently have to prove their competence and have forethought in their planning. Aaron (2020) noted that age has also become an intersecting power structure for Black women leaders, as can be perceived as a form of incompetence. One participant in the study addressed the intersectionality of age; the participant experienced challenges based on the perception of her ability based on her youth. The narrative of the study participants is in line with the literature. Black women are vulnerable to stereotypes and workplace biases that pose challenges for them in their career progression. The intersection of race and gender of the participants created a sense of pride and resiliency that contributed to their career trajectory and success as leaders. The following are conclusions derived from the study findings, describe Black women's leadership experiences, and highlight how they overcame their limitations to advance to power and influence positions. Resilience and adaptability are essential assets needed for Black women to succeed in leadership. The majority of the Black women leaders spoke of their ability to be adaptive and resilient to navigate the challenges due to their race and gender.

Lack of mentoring and sponsorship opportunities is a significant challenge and a hindrance to Black women leaders' professional development. The majority of the women voiced that lack of mentors and sponsors was a substantial challenge during their leadership journey. All participants mentioned the importance of having a support system. Okilome (2017) research found that for Black women, their race is an imposed externally salient factor, even when an individual selects not to confer prominence to her racial identity. The lack of other minorities to inspire or serve as role models for

information or guidance leads to feelings of isolation and marginalization. A few of the women in the study attributed their success to mirroring other prominent Black women leaders' behaviors. Participants also shared that they perceived a great need for more women of color, especially Black women, to help aspiring women leaders. Murray (2016) affirmed great value in having women who share similar race and gender backgrounds who understand the struggles and share similar experiences.

Black women require access to powerful sponsors and social networks demanding and ensuring that they can gain top leadership positions. Black women leaders are transformative leaders. The participant perceived themselves as having the heart to serve people and to influence positive change. Participant's also expressed the importance of mentoring and being an example to others, especially other Black women aspiring to become leaders. The large majority of participants either aspired to leadership or fell into leadership positions due to wanting to and advocate for change or help their community. They believed in the importance of mentoring, coaching, and developing their employees. Coaching helps aspiring leaders create open career development plans to set out what they require to obtain senior leadership positions. Black women leaders practice behaviors and practices to ensure successful leadership. All the Black women leaders discussed the importance of having a character to service and caring for others. The women spoke of the importance of knowing why they desire to be leaders and being their authentic selves. Authenticity is a critical aspect of Black female leadership identity.

The women possess a drive to succeed and a motivation for continual development. The study also revealed that Black women's professional investment extends beyond educational achievements and their desire to build a professional track record of strong performance history. The women in this study viewed that their consistent track record and ability to deliver are among the key attributes to their successful ascension into their leadership positions. The study findings also identified that Black women develop strategies that enable them to operate and navigate the bureaucracies of their organizations to get their goals accomplished. Participants acknowledged that the playing field for them is not equitable. However, they understand the importance of ensuring that they have a seat at the table and have an influence on the decision-making process. These women used their resilience and adaptability to learn how to play the corporate game skillfully. Understanding that everything is no fair, these women learned how to be intentional about playing the game in corporate America to navigate obstacles and boundaries successfully.

### **Limitation of the Study**

The first limitation was that the research is not generalizable to Black women who hold leadership positions in specific industries or professions. The study focused on Black women in mid-level and executive-level administrative positions in various industry sectors. Second, while the participant of this study included women in executive leadership positions, it was difficult for me to identify and gain access to Black women CEOs and a larger pool of Black women leaders from Fortune 500 companies. Another

limitation of the study's design is researcher bias or tendency to see in the anticipated data (Pigott & Valentine, 2017). As a Black woman aspiring to advance into a senior leadership role, I made every effort to protect the data from undue influence inherent in my own bias, assumptions, motivations, and influences based on her racial and gendered lens.

This study focused on Black women as one racial identity and did not look at the experiences of the cultural differences among the subset of women, i.e., where they were born, socioeconomics, religious affiliations, that may influence their perceptions and understanding of their lived experiences. The final limitation of theory, the study is viewed through the intersectionality lens. Although a widely used theoretical praxis, critics of the theory argue that meanings or truths are based on subjective experiences and oversimplification of assumptions based on individuals' experience at a particular intersection, which may be contradictory to experiences of others who share individual aspects of their identity. Haslanger (2014) asserted that if *experience* is understood in phenomenal terms in the context of how we perceive, feel, and understand, then it is plausible that experience cannot be disaggregated into separate elements that everyone in the relevant social group shares. Haslanger also argued that empirical investigation into work structures in a particular context is required to understand the intersectionality of experience and oppression. Downing (2018) considered the theory too vague and relies on group identities, which ignore people's individuality, which results in a simplistic analysis and inaccurate assumptions about how a person's values and attitudes are

determined. These critiques may elicit opposition to the analysis and understanding of Black women's leadership development experience across different business sectors.

Intersectionality enabled me to holistically examine the phenomenon by uncovering hidden aspects of the experiences based on the participants intersecting gender and racial identities. Transcendental phenomenology allowed me to extract the voices and meaning that the participant applied to their lived experience of developing as leaders. Through transcendental phenomenology, I explored the descriptions of the participant's experiences to obtain the perceptions and meaning they applied to their experiences. While the women's experience occurred in different work environments and contexts, they shared similarities based on gender, race, and their experience with the phenomena of developing as a leader in Michigan. Through phenomenology, I examined how the participants perceived the phenomena and the ascribed meaning to their subjective experiences to evolve an understanding of the phenomenon (Neubauer et al., 2019).

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

The study findings have revealed several areas for future research.

Recommendations for future research include:

1. An expansion of the study population to include Black women nationally to identify if there are themes consistent with the racial sub-group based on region.

2. An exploration of Black women's lived experiences in specific industries such as banking, automotive, or politics and in particular professions such as accounting or engineering to compare the similarities and differences based on their industry, business sector, or professional discipline.

3. The women in the study are all educated; most women hold advanced degrees; another recommendation is to investigate the perceived education requirements for Black women seeking to go into leadership.

4. A concept that emerged during the participant interviews is the construct of the "fitting image of a leader." Another recommendation is to study how Black women conceptualize and make meaning of and view the concept of fitting a leader's image.

5. Spirituality is identified as an effective coping strategy and influences success for Black women leaders; I recommend a study on spirituality and its effect on Black women's leadership behavior.

6. Lack of exposure, which includes inequities that prevent opportunities, was revealed; these inequities have socioeconomic, educational, and other systematic or racial disparities that limit access to resources that aid in personal and professional development. A final study recommendation is to study the effects of the lack of exposure on Black women's leadership development.



### **Implications**

This qualitative, transcendental phenomenological study used semistructured interview questions to explore how Black women developed as leaders. These questions aided in highlighting the challenges and success factors of a small subset of Black women leaders. This research shows that Black women are motivated to attain top leadership positions. Black women often endure challenges to their success, yet they continue to achieve despite the barriers set before them. Understanding the leadership development experiences of Black women is essential for improving leadership development opportunities for those aspiring to emerge as leaders. The study finding indicates that organizations must provide professional development opportunities to bridge the gap of Black women's underrepresentation in top leadership roles. According to Davis (2016), Black women's underrepresentation in leadership positions can be attributed to social barriers and organizational structures.

Many organizations remain very homogenous and heavily White male-dominated. As found in this study, the banking industry is among the business sectors that are heavily White male-dominated, especially in executive and top leadership positions. These entities need to provide diversity programs to create a more inclusive culture and embrace diversity in leadership. Empowerment in leadership begins with more formal mentorship and sponsorship programs and better-individualized development programs to help Black women and other marginalized groups find their paths to success. The study highlighted the importance of support systems, including mentorship and sponsorship, to

enrich professional development and is key to Black women's career trajectory.

Oikelome (2017) noted that mentorship, seizing opportunities, leadership development, and understanding institutional fit are essential approaches for women aspiring to a leadership role. Mentorship, both formal and informal, is the most common strategy for navigating the pipeline. Oikelome (2017) affirmed that mentors are essential in providing encouragement, advice, insight, guidance, and, in some instances, sponsorship.

The research question yielded significant insight into understanding the gaps in development opportunities for Black women. The study found that unlike their White male counterparts, Black women do not readily have access to vital influential persons in their organization who can aid them in attaining the knowledge and skills needed to ascend into top-ranking leadership roles. Black women are often isolated or excluded from critical social networks due to the duality of their race and their gender.

The following recommendations aim to enable professional progression for Black women and underrepresented subgroups in leadership.

- Development policies for cultural competence with precise measurements and deliverable outcomes, such as increased diversity in leadership recruitment
- Implementation of system-wide diversity and inclusion program that is committed to addressing the specific barriers that are hindering Black women

- Provision of opportunities for Black women leaders to share their experiences with other women as part of a women-centered professional development program
- Mentorship programs that include peer mentoring and teaming aspiring leaders with senior organization leaders
- Succession planning in the human resource planning process and providing an integrated, systematic approach for identifying, developing, and retaining capable and talented Black female employees

This study explored the intersection of race and gender for Black women in leadership and how their experiences influenced their leadership development. Identification of the challenges and success factors may offer strategies to help Black women attain leadership success and propose strategies to promote succession and sustainability for women currently holding executive leadership positions. There needs to be a change in the culture within organizations to be more inclusive and culturally competent. This change must occur from the top down, which is predominantly represented by White men. As commented by Participant 007, “people follow leadership.... If you live diversity and make choices, where people see those choices, then people follow”; organizations must become more culturally competent in their leadership behaviors.

Organizational leadership must also adopt a change in policy and practices that are more inclusive and provide opportunities for growth and development and reject the dual and systematic discriminations of racism and sexism that continue to be pervasively experienced by Black women in many organizational sectors (Davis & Maldonado, 2015). Cultural diversity and inclusion programming promote equity and fight against bias in hiring and promotion among senior leadership. Organizations must focus on developing and retaining Black women, qualifying them to be promoted to leadership ranks, and influencing the decision-making process. Lastly, the implications from this study are that to be successful Black women must take ownership of the personal and professional development and seek after resources and opportunities to aid them in their career trajectory. Black women must also be willing to take the necessary risks to go after their goals and fight against imposter syndrome. Confidence, authenticity, and determination are essential characteristics needed to navigate the complexities of being a Black women leader successfully.

### **Conclusion**

This transcendental phenomenological study aimed to explore and describe the leadership development experiences of Black women leaders in Michigan. I interviewed 15 Black women leaders regarding their individual experiences with the intersectionality of race and gender and its influence on their leadership development. The intersectional analysis allowed me to explore deep biases based on race and gender that are still pervasive in our society (Oikelome, 2017). Further evaluation of the leadership theories

on how they address the dynamics of race, gender, and social class enable Black women to be authentic and reach effective and successful outcomes (Carter & Sims, 2019). Black women's intersectional identity as members of two marginalized groups shapes their experiences and informs their understanding of power and the structures that reinforce social and political inequities. Identity and its intersecting axes produce a unique positionality for individuals whose identities intersect multiple axes (Aaron, 2020).

The research analysis suggests that success occurs when Black women take ownership of professional development, take actions to build skills and knowledge, create opportunities to prove their abilities and capacity to lead, and seek networking and resource to help them in their career ascension. In their paper, Davis and Maldonado (2015) also affirmed that Black women who aspire to become leaders must step outside their comfort zones to establish a network of people who are different from them and hold higher ranks or positions. These individual sponsors provide authority and credibility and take risks to help advance these women's careers. Several of the participants spoke of the importance of taking risks to reach their goals. Lastly, these women succeeded when they sought out positions and environments that enabled them to develop and flourish as leaders. This study also suggests that Black women desire to be defined by their repertoire of skills, expertise, and proficiency they acquired with each advancement level rather than their various identities (Oikelome, 2017).

This study's participants represented a pool of successful and motivated leaders from varied business sectors and professions. Their dedication to influencing positive

change and their determination to their career development and obtaining their ultimate leadership goal was a common characteristic. The women in this study openly acknowledged and discussed the challenges they encountered along their journey to leadership. Overwhelmingly, these women did not allow others' perceptions and biases to define them or hinder their progression to becoming talented and successful leaders. The participants represent a unification of Black women's voices from different backgrounds and represent a diversity that transcends beyond their race and gender. The exploration of how Black women leaders express and narrate their lived experiences helps to foster an appreciation of the diversity and strengths of this subset of women, which is often overlooked.

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## Appendix A: Interview Protocol

**Introduction**

Thank you for taking the time to talk with me today. The purpose of this interview is to learn about your path to leadership and to understand how race and gender influenced your leadership experience. Please give your honest responses. There are no right or wrong answers or desirable or undesirable answers. I want you to feel comfortable saying what you think and how you feel. If I have your permission, I will be recording our conversation to ensure that I have captured your words. Everything you say will remain confidential. I will transcribe our discussion and follow-up with you to ensure that I have accurately captured your responses to the interview questions.

**Participant Identifier Number:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Age:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Do you identify as a Black woman?** \_\_\_\_\_

**Years in the position of leadership at your job:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Industry sector:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Relational status:**

Single \_\_\_\_\_

Married \_\_\_\_\_

Divorced \_\_\_\_\_

Widowed \_\_\_\_\_

Cohabiting \_\_\_\_\_

Children: Yes: \_\_\_\_\_ No: \_\_\_\_\_

**Educational level:**

Bachelor's degree \_\_\_\_\_

Master's degree \_\_\_\_\_

PhD or JD \_\_\_\_\_

Associate degree \_\_\_\_\_

1. Please tell me your story by reflecting on the meaning of your lived experiences on the goal of becoming a leader. Your experiences may be specific circumstances or life events.
2. As a woman what have you experienced as the most significant obstacle in your leadership journey?
3. As a Black woman what have you experienced as the most significant asset in getting to where you want to be?
4. As a Black woman, can you please share with me your lived experiences with gender discrimination in your leadership journey?
5. As a Black woman, can you please share with me your lived experiences with institutional racism in your leadership journey?
6. As a Black woman leader, can you please share with me your lived experiences with gendered racism emanating from professional peers?
7. Through your lived experiences as a Black woman leader what have been your most important life lessons?
8. Are there any lived experiences you wish to share for young Black women aspiring to follow in your footsteps of becoming a Black woman leader?

### Appendix B: Introduction and Recruitment Email

Dear (Name), I am a doctoral student at Walden University inviting you to participate in my research about Black women in leadership. The purpose of this qualitative, transcendental phenomenological study is to explore how Black female leaders describe their lived experiences with leadership development. I believe that your experience would be a great contribution to the study.

This study is important as the findings may provide future Black female leaders with insight, tools, and strategies needed to address the inequalities that exist for minority women, seeking to advance into leadership positions. Additionally, research often focuses heavily on studies conducted from the White, masculine perspective and this contribution would add to the female, body of knowledge pertaining to Black women. Finally, the social change impact of this study may serve as a catalyst for social change by challenging the status quo and existing racial and gender barriers that hinder Black women from being successful in reaching leadership status in public and private sector industries. The findings of this study have the potential to encourage policymakers to create more accessible leadership development opportunities for women of color, especially Black women.

If you have interest in participating in this study, please review and return the signed consent form which is attached to this email. If you would like to request additional information, you may reply to this email.

Thank you in advance for your consideration.

## Appendix C: Individual Textural and Structural Descriptions

***Participant 001 Angel:***

*Angel is a natural leader whose strong leadership skill caused natural progression to leadership. "I think it has to do with just strong administrative, authoritative personality and ability to get different people to work together toward a common goal. And just the natural ability to help people remove obstacles." And, um, you know and be very vision focused. So, all of those things are natural, you know, for me to evolve."* She has often been the only Black woman in leadership in predominately White organizations. *"Every job I have had has been in an organization that had no other person of color in any leadership capacity."* She experienced obstacles with a lack of support and mentorship; most of her leadership knowledge has been gained through self-directed learning. *"I have not had any person say, hey, let me mentor you. So, I see some of your, you know, skills abilities know, your ability to catch on your ability to know, get things done. Now, let me take you under my wing, and you know, and show you the path has been none of that."...And most of my gaining knowledge in that way has been a lot of self-directed study, a lot of self-help."* She took ownership of her own professional development *"I went and looked for certification opportunities, other ways to hone my skills like organizations to get involved in, you know, seminars and things like that, where I can pursue my own professional development."* She dealt with being misunderstood and misinterpreted because of her communication style. *"My direct bottom line communication style and that has been a negative, it has come across negative and*



*misunderstood as aggression or perceived as you know, some layer of disrespect or even arrogance.” Faced challenges of not being listened to and overlooked. “it’s been a challenge to get people to know actually hear what I have to say, I have felt so disregarded.” I struggled to be taken seriously, my recommendations were frequently overlooked, although they were ultimately adopted, and the organization benefited from them without granting me credit for my ideas.” She has the resilience and persistence to succeed: “I think my ability to compartmentalize and be resilient, persistent, not easily discouraged. I think all of those things have helped me.” Understands the importance of relationship building towards attaining her goals “learning how to still get your goal met without resorting to, you know, just falling into the angry syndrome, you know how I mean, it’s true, we do get angry because we’re just over it...learn how to use your soft skills, relationship building and always treat others. No matter how other people are treating you, you always treat them with dignity and respect.” Her faith is a large part of who she is and influences who she is as a leader. “Most importantly, you know, just from the faith standpoint, I need to just be sure that I’m settled in my faith, that I’m at peace with myself and peace of God. And trust Him for the outcomes. And that has actually been the way that I’ve been able to elevate.”*

***Structural Description Angel:***

Angel’s lived experience is that of a Black female leader who has and natural tendency towards leadership. Her strong administrative abilities, authoritativeness, and vision focused personality are among her major assets as a leader. These attributes have

enabled her to evolve as a leader naturally. She sought after professional development opportunities and developed her knowledge through self-directed study. She took control of her career by obtaining professional SHRM that gave her credibility in her field. As a Black women leader, she dealt with not being taken seriously by her White counterparts and feelings of having her authority undermined by male colleagues. She realized that she had been given great opportunities, as she has often been the only Black woman or person of color in leadership at White dominant organizations, in predominately White communities. She has dealt with being overlooked for promotions and having White male counterparts with less knowledge and experience being groomed to take her job. She often deals with fighting against the racial stereotype of the “*Angry Black Woman*” due to her direct communication style. She has dealt with not being listened to and experienced her ideas being implemented without receiving credit. Angel draws from her faith to help her navigate the obstacles and challenges that she has faced as a Black woman in leadership. She has confidence in who she is and understands the importance of taking ownership and control of her own career development, which includes taking risks to obtain her leadership goal.

***Participant 002 Bailee:***

Bailee’s path to political leadership was a result of wanting to be a representative for her community. *“I’ve always had more of a heart to help and serve people. I kind of was tossed into it because I wanted to put a park in the neighborhood on some abandoned lots. And the leadership at the time would not allow it without a fight;*

*because of that, I need to run so that we could get a true representation of the people's voice. So that's actually what kind of put me into politics and into the leadership of the community.*" She has a heart to serve. *"I have a heart and a desire to see people live better lives."* As the only woman, she often dealt with assumptions from male colleagues regarding her lack of knowledge and abilities. *"I'm seen as not coming with all the information. "People feel they need to bring me up to speed or stop to make sure I understand, almost demeaning in a sense."* She experienced the challenges of having to navigate in a male-dominated sector. *"I had to earn my right to be amongst them." I wasn't included in a lot of the conversations.*" Had to hold the mantle of leadership and represent her race and gender. *"I was the only Black... and I was the only female, I was the representation for both demographics."* Experienced unexpected challenges with gender discrimination from Black male colleagues. *"Some of the hardest obstacles for me that I had to face were actually with my Black men. My Black counterparts. Black male colleagues up on the council almost behaved as if I was a threat more than a colleague. It was quite contentious in many aspects."* She faced the challenge of not being listened to. *"I found myself many times, having to make sure that my speech was very kind, concise, and concrete, very short, not a whole lot of words. Because it was almost like, the more I spoke, the more I lost people, or they would drift off."* She recognized her strengths and abilities and the need to delegate. *"I can't do it all...I need to be good at what I'm good at. And use the assets of the rest of the team to get the job done....to be able to delegate and effectively utilize my team.* She understands that one of her significant assets is being comfortable with who she is has enabled her to navigate as a leader. *"belief in self, being*

*comfortable in my own skin, the more I understand or understood myself, and the more, the better I was, the more I could operate in any situation, whether it was going to be [a]confrontation or whatever the environment was, just the better I understand myself, the better outcome I had.”*

***Structural description Bailee:***

Bailee entered into political leadership as a result of wanting to be a representative of the voice of people in her community. Her development as a leader was forged by navigating through the often-White male-dominated political sector. She has been met with contention from Black male colleagues, who she believes viewed her as a threat rather than a colleague. She has dealt with discrimination and microaggressions due to her race and gender identity. Bailee’s experiences and her passion for her community motivated her to work hard to overcome the challenges and obstacles of navigating the intersectionality of her race and gender in an often sexist and misogynistic environment. As a Black woman, she understands the need for preparing herself to be able to interact with male leaders. She also understands the importance of knowing herself and being comfortable in who she is as a Black woman in her ability to be successful as a political leader. She has a strong sense of identity and self-confidence in her knowledge and abilities as a leader.

**Participant 003 Carmen:**

Carmen had early aspirations of leadership; believed that for her to be in a position to influence change required the power which comes with being in leadership. *“I think from a very early age; it was important for me to be in a position of influence, to be able to help people around me, so what I realized is that it was those people who were in positions of leadership or power who were able to affect change in their communities or in their circles and they had they had a broader circle of influence.”* She sought to learn from influential leaders, particularly Black women, whom she could learn from as unofficial mentors. *“I sought out, at least in my own mind, examples of leaders, people who I had taken as mentors without them even knowing, just me watching them, like taking notes on their leadership, particularly, particularly Black women in positions of power.”* Dealt with a lack of sponsors and advocates to aid in her leadership journey. *“I’ve encountered a few instances in my leadership journey, where there have been women in positions of power, but not an explicit like interest in bringing me along, you know, and not an explicit interest in making sure that if there was a position that it that they would help we get it.”* Views leadership as an opportunity to affect changes and as a means to become more upwardly mobile. *“I realized that upward mobility in terms of economic advancement and influence would come out of leadership.”* She developed a sense of resiliency as a result of her experience based on her gender. *“I was a woman; there were some assumptions about my abilities and even being placed even in the department. And they were older, you know, older men, so it was a little bit harder there.”*

*But I kind of ended up being very thick-skinned and resilient. I was down there pretty much an operation's professional with a master's degree, but I was [being viewed as] a secretary." A major tenet of her leadership is to navigate like she is being. "As I travel through my leadership journey, I operate like some is watching and taking notes." As a Black woman leader, she understands that she is in a place of influence. "Understanding the place that you have, or the influence that you have, whether you are, you know, whether it's in, it's in, it's part of your role.... or whether you just in the things that you do or the work that you're doing, there's influence, but understanding that it's significant, whatever you're doing is significant. And you should operate in that way. It's not minor." Built a network of women to provide her with resources and support. "Really leaning on my peers, and kind of sharing resources and putting it out there when I needed help." Recognizes the privilege that men have in the workplace. "I recognize that it is easier for men explicitly, sponsorship or advocacy, you know, handpick jobs, guidance, mentoring, hand-holding." Understands and values the importance of being her authentic self. "it's been important to be genuine, true to myself in in the roles that I'm taking, and not compromising myself, and compromising myself or my full self, what you see is what you get..." Has an awareness of the institutional inequity of advancement opportunities for women of color "I realized I think the bigger issue there was their inability, or just like, being at a loss for how to manage, work with, promote, advance, you know, women of color in that in that space. She believes in the importance of inspiring and developing others along the journey. "there is always someone to inspire or*

*encourage or help on their journey. And I think that's very important, to reach back to give back and to... put yourself in a position to do that or reach over too."*

***Structural description Carmen:***

For Carmen, being in a position to influence and to affect positive change was a major motivator for her goal of leadership. She aspired to advance into leadership at a young age and sought to align herself with influential leaders from who she believed she could glean knowledge. As a Black woman, she viewed a lack of advocacy and sponsorship opportunities as a major challenge in her leadership journey. She recognized that it is easier for men explicitly to obtain sponsorship or advocacy, guidance, mentoring, or handpick jobs. Due to her experiences, she believes in the importance of networking and asking for help to enable her to obtain resources to help in her professional development and career progression. Carmen's development was a leader as a result of her taking ownership of her professional development. She sought out networking opportunities and reached out to other influential women to help her in her career development. It is important that she represent her authentic self and not comprise who she is as an individual and professional. She has a fundamental belief in developing and coaching other women, especially Black women, in their professional development.

***Participant 004 Denise:***

Denise's goal of leadership was intentional; she pursued a formal education specifically to go into corporate leadership. *"... the path that I took was, I mean, I went to*

*college specifically to get my bachelor's and master's degree, specifically so that I could go into management and become a leader in corporate America.*" She was greatly influenced by her parents, who were formally educated. *"Both of my parents were formally educated. So that's always been my route. "work life-balance was a challenge. "the men expected you to work, like into the wee hours of the evening and weekends... it was hard to have a work-life balance, because they expected you, if you want it to be a leader, you had to look like them, which obviously, most of them had wives at home that didn't work that cared for the home. But as a woman, I was the mother, okay, still taking care of my home, and still trying to be a leader in corporate America."* She dealt with the feeling of having to prove herself constantly. *" you constantly had to prove yourself, so even if I worked on a project, and I proved myself, and it was outstanding, like the next project, I would have to prove myself all over again."* Felt discriminated against and stereotyped *"if I had an opinion, or I asked too many questions, then I was considered combative. I actually had one of my bosses say, even though he knew who I was, as a person, like in meetings, if I cross my arms or did certain things, that I was coming off as an angry Black woman."* Did not fit the corporate image of leadership, *"So one of the biggest obstacles is how you carry yourself as a woman, being misunderstood, and walking the fine line, you don't want to be combative, there are labels put on you if you don't fit into what their image of what a leader looks like."* Has the perception of always chasing and dealing with a change of rules, *"it's like every time you get to the door, they change the rules. And every time they change the rules, you meet the new rules, they change them again. And so, it is a constant, like constantly chasing."* Made sure that she



is always doing the right thing. *“I was always taught that you had to be on your game, that you had to do everything better, smarter, and so I always paid attention to make sure I was doing the right thing.”* Her temperament has enabled her to overcome barriers in her career. *“I always managed my temperament and my emotions; to just let other people’s opinions and everything just slide off. Do what you’re supposed to do, do the best that you have, and keep it moving.”* She understands the need to be intentional in how she operates to be successful. *“To be an African American leader, you have to have tough skin, and you have to understand that everything is not going to be fair and everything is not going to be right, so you have to be intentional about playing the game in corporate America, or you have to be intentional about doing your own thing.”*

### **Structural Description Denise :**

Denise always aspired to go into leadership. She was greatly influenced by her parents, who were both formally educated. Denise attended college specifically to obtain a bachelor’s and a master’s degree to be a leader in Corporate America. She started her career as a leader in Banking, which is a White male-dominated industry. She faced challenges with discrimination, stereotyping, and being misunderstood or misinterpreted because of her communication style. She also fought against the “angry Black woman” stereotype. She believes that her abilities were always noticed but found it hard to have a work-life balance as a leader and a working mother. She was looked over for professional development opportunities, and she perceived that the rules were constantly being changed as it related to Black leaders. The concept is known as “changing the rules.” She

learned the importance of being on her game, the need to work hard and make sure that she is doing the right thing to be successful as a Black woman in corporate America. She believes that her ability to catch on fast and her critical thinking skills have helped her stand out and have her abilities notice as a leader.

**Participant 005 Elaine:**

Elaine initially had no aspirations to go into leadership but knew her career path, *“I never aspired to become a leader. I only aspired to be the best that I could and whatever role that I secured. Early on, I knew I was going to be in communication.”* Her education enabled her to advance in her field and to continue to do the work that she loves. *“My degree from Howard served me well because throughout my career, I’ve remained in the communications industry, and I love it....it about loving what I do and being the best at it.”* The support of her professor steered her to a career behind the scenes. *“It was my professor ...who took [an]interest in my studies and one day share with me that the true power was behind the camera and that there were not enough African American decision-makers in the newsroom.”* She strives to be the best at her craft. *“I believe the most significant aspect of getting me where I am today as a Black has been my consistent track record in the industry...”* Her experience and abilities enabled her to progress into a leadership position. *“ My career trajectory has pretty much been chronological; I started as an intern, writer, and producer in Tv, then transitioned into business where I served as a coordinator, manager, communications manager now Director of Communications, managing as staff of 8...My experience has definitely led*

*me unto leadership.*” She experienced being overlooked in her career and her ideas hijacked by male colleagues. “*There have been times throughout my career where I have experienced feelings of being overlooked or not heard or a male taking credit for an idea I voiced, repeating what I said just moments earlier, and him taking credit for it.*” Experienced challenges with other women in her career development, many of them African American women. “*As an African American woman, unfortunately, many of the obstacles I’ve faced were experienced with other women, including African American women.*” She experienced sexism and racism and the questioning of her abilities from White male peers, “*... I’ve had a White male leader, the challenges that that brought, at least from my perspective, was the questioning of my abilities, even though I brought all of this experience to the table. So, second-guessing, me, and my leadership, or not even my leadership, my skill set... I’ve always been in communication. So clearly, it’s not a matter of skill set. And this person, ironically, if we ask, they never will think of themselves as a racist, feel very liberal. But it was, you know, microaggressions absolutely were experienced.*” Had great support in her career development, especially from African American male leaders. “*My best leader has been a male African American, actually, three times. So those individuals, the three individuals that come to mind they serve as a role model. They help guide my career. Those are three individual leaders that I think about when I think of individuals who helped shape me.*” She steers toward working for organizations that are led by leaders of color or in predominately Black communities. “*.. I tend to like smaller companies even though I’ve had a large company now... And so, I have found that those spaces have allowed a level of comfort*

*for me, and where I've been able to thrive in those environments. The idea of applying for a job in a predominately White company ... does not appeal to me.”* Views leadership as the ability to operate in the space that one is in and not specifically tied to a title.

*“Leadership is how you operate within the space that you are. So, you can lead from wherever so-called title that is given to you and to leaders. Even though you may not be a president, individuals recognize that leadership because you're operating in the way in a space that asserts your strength, your abilities, your character.”* She operates with integrity”...*it's most important that I operate, no matter the title, in a way such that my knowledge, abilities, and character are displayed in the best possible light so much leadership come through.”*

### **Structural Description Elaine:**

Elaine's professional goal was not to advance into a leadership position. Her goal was to be the best at whatever position she obtained. However, at a young age, she knew that she wanted to enter into television communications. She attended Howard University to hone her craft and obtain a degree in Communications. Her degree from Howard and the support of a professor is what lead her to a career behind the scenes. Elaine believes that there is more power behind the lens and that there are not enough African American decision-makers in the newsroom. Her education has served her well as it has enabled her to remain in the field of communications, in a career that she loves. Her career has gone through a natural progression from internship to now being a director of communications for a major metropolitan health department. Her experience and reputation have led her to

a position of leadership. She experienced sexism and racism in her career. She has dealt with having ideas stolen and not receiving credit and being overlooked by male counterparts. She has also experienced opposition from other women, especially from Black women leaders, who did not champion her growth. She has been fortunate to have had great leaders and mentors throughout her career. She credits three Black male leaders as being pivotal figures in shaping her into the professional she is today. She strongly believes that a significant aspect of getting her where she is a Black woman has been her consistent track record in the industry and her being great at what she does. For the majority of her career, she has worked for organizations that are led by people of color; she believes that she is able to thrive in those situations as there are fewer racial discriminations in those environments. Elaine believes in striving for her best and that one should never stop learning and not being afraid to fail.

**Participant 006 Faith:**

Faith did not initially seek to become a leader; she started her career as a teacher. *“I decided I was going to go into education.” I was teaching, and I had to work on getting my certificate. I had to move from a provisional certificate to a permanent certificate.*” She served as a teacher leader. *“I had been doing a lot of work as a teacher, working with preservice teachers in the building. I was really a teacher leader.”* She decided to obtain a master’s degree in Educational Leadership. *“So, the master’s program that was available at Western Michigan University just had educational leadership which tends to move you in the direction of an administrator, not that I was*

*interested in that, I was more interested in how to help teachers do a better job teaching children, especially children of color.” Sought out an opportunity to fill in temporarily as administrator. “I asked her for opportunities to substitute for an administrator when they’re gone. And so, she gave me that opportunity. And at the end of that year, one of our administrators, [the] assistant principal, had a health issue...And then I was able to do the job. And I felt like, wow, this is something I guess I can move into...” She found meaning in the work she was doing. “I wanted the work that I did to be meaningful, to the place that you know, what it, it touches people, or I’ve made an impact on somebody else’s life..., but this is what I was called to do.” Father was her support system and source of encouragement. “My dad was an educator. And when I told him I was taking classes for leadership, one of the things that he marked in me, he said, well, you have the right temperament in terms of working with people. And so that gave me some confidence...And I thought that that was a good way for me to kind of gauge am I going in the right direction, besides my own feelings when I was actually doing the work...so that was my pathway to leadership.” Being in leadership provided her with financial mobility. “ I guess the biggest asset is that I get to do what I want. It has afforded me a lifestyle that I really do not want for anything.” Dealt with systemic racism. “ Working with systemic racism, I think it’s really difficult. You have to play to so many different sides as a building principal, or as an assistant principal...” Learned to be adaptable. “ Institution racism is what we live with; we live with that every day. So, it is something that we have to adapt to, to actually function in a system that is not really made for us to be successful.” Faced challenges from White male peers. “I’ve had folks try to challenge,*

*especially White men trying to challenge my authority, I check it at [the] first jump, I am always professional about it, but I check it” Dealt with assumptions of her abilities “ Most White males that I’ve come in contact with think that they’re smart than you. And so, when you can demonstrate to them that, yeah, I do actually know something, then their whole perspective, [their] view is a little different, they still continue to challenge you on little things, you know for the most part.” Deals with microaggressions “ But it’s always in a mask, you know, what I’m saying? it’s all you know, it’s it said in a real sweet way, but you know, underlying what they’re really trying to say, they trying to come at you all kind of crazy. So, you know, again, those, like those microaggressions, that you know, that you kind of have to feel out... but when you’re the person of authority, you know, as long as you assert your authority, you don’t give it up to them.”*

*She maneuvers differently than White peers to get things accomplished. “I have to do things totally different than my White counterpart. My White counterpart doesn’t have the same hoops to jump through that I have to. And I recognize that but that’s part of the, you know, I already understand that. Because I’ve been doing this for so long. I don’t even think about it.” Beliefs in the importance of supportive networks “ it’s really great when you have a network of people, you know... to support you, mentor you, but also to, you know, network because so many times, you know, we know, for White folk is a lot easier to have a network, and it’s who, you know, we can have that same thing... it’s who you know, we have to broaden our horizons, you know, past... small circles, you know, if that one person knows somebody else, then hey, I can connect you to someone over here, and they can help you. You know, and I think that’s really important that you know, they*

*use those resources available.” She does not allow obstacles to be a deterrence. “So, don’t let certain obstacles pursue you from your dreams... And don’t let anyone discourage you.”*

### ***Structural Description Faith***

Faith did not initially aspire to become a leader. Her path to leadership began when she was a teacher. She was required to obtain her permanent teaching certification; instead, she decided to obtain a master’s degree in Educational Leadership. While attending university, she sought the opportunity to gain experience as a leader. She was given the opportunity to fill in as an assistant principal. Through this experience, Elaine determined that she equipped to be in a position of leadership. Elaine was greatly influenced by her father; his support, along with her own feelings regarding her abilities, provided her the gauge to confirm that she was going in the right direction. She actively pursued a career as an administrator. Elaine dealt with systemic racism, and a system she believes is not designed for minorities to succeed. She also dealt with White males trying to challenge her authority. Elaine is strong and confident and asserts her authority. As a Black educational leader, she deals with having to maneuver differently than her White colleagues in order to get things achieved. As a Black leader, she adapted to her environment of institutional racism in order to be successful, which is something she has to deal with daily. She has found meaning in her work and feels that she can make a positive impact and touch people’s lives. She believes in the importance of transparency and being confident in her abilities and in who she is as a leader. Most importantly, as a



Black woman leader, she believes in the importance of having a support system and networking of resources. She believes that there are more opportunities for women in education and views the path to educational leadership as being paved, especially for Black women.

***Participant 007 Gayle:***

Gayle became a leader to stand up for things that were wrong. *“I became a leader, by happenstance, just for standing up for things that were not right.”* She was greatly influenced by strong Black people working to correct wrongs and phenomenal Black female educators. *“Initially, my upbringing was on African American people. So, we had Harriet Tubman .... And her desire to correct a wrong, first of all, to be free. And then to help others that played a great, you know, that started my mind to thinking, I had phenomenal African American teachers. And they also put a pressure on my shoulder... in order for you to even be inside the game with White people, you have to be smarter, you have to be faster, smarter, which means you have to study hard.”* Views leadership as an opportunity to serve. *“one of the things that I learned ... is that a leader is a servant. You’re a servant, your serving people, and I wholeheartedly believe in that.”* Her faith, which guides how she operates as a leader. *“ religion, and how the creator feels about how we treat people, and that we are accountable to how we treat others. That was probably the baseline, and my parents raised me that way. And that you cannot say that you love your Creator, and you don’t love your neighbor. That’s not acceptable. And it’s hypocrisy. So, I have to say, that was my foundation, along with all*

*of those other things. So, justice and equality were very important to me. And it didn't matter what color you are; it mattered that you treated people."* Participated in a formal leadership program. *"And after this program, you weren't guaranteed a supervisory role, but you will certainly be prepared because they gave you workshops on process improvement, how to conduct meetings, all of these things..."* Experienced challenges with work-life balance in her career development. *"...when I was when I had my first ...we had this attendance policy, that, you know, if you were absent so many times, you were terminated..."* Her female supervisor taught her how to circumvent the system *"...a White woman who taught me the importance of looking out for women... I ended up getting three months off. An additional three months off, so I could spend time with my son."* Lost position due to having her second child, *"with my daughter, for example, when I came back from my six-week pregnancy with her, my job had been, they told me it was eliminated. But they literally gave it to a young White lady who had less experience than I did. And that really crushed me because then they wanted me to train her how to do my job."* Change in educational requirement change motivated her to complete her degree, *"And I started back to school to finish my bachelor's degree, because I also noticed that my job description, two weeks after I became a supervisor, the new job description that was posted now said, in order for you to do this job, you had to have a degree. By that time, there had there were now four Black supervisors. But before that, when you were White, you didn't have to have a degree. All of a sudden, now you have to have a degree to do the same job."* She was required to have a master's degree to advance into leadership. *"they had told me that in order to get a job in*

*management...*” Had leader committed to advancing Black staff. “*It was actually a plan to make Black people in any of his staff. competitive, that’s very different. And he showed that because of all the training programs that we have at the company, that people could take advantage of for free as well. So, he meant a lot to me.*” Believes that diversity is embraced when leaders are exposed to different types of people. “*I found is that when people engage with people who are different and people of color in their personal life, they’re naturally comfortable in their work-life....people follow leadership. If you act racist, you embrace it; you pay for it. That’s the type of organization you will get. If you live diversity and make choices, where people see those choices, then people follow that.*” She experienced issues with gender discrimination from Black men. “*I’ve had more men of color discriminate against me because of gender than White men.*” *I find some of them to be very insecure and lack the smarts to use a Black woman to her full potential where a White man will call me... and pay me a bonus and say thank you. She proved ability and effectiveness through her data .” as a Black leader; your numbers have to speak for you. You can come back talking this data does? Well, you know... I couldn’t do that because I didn’t know those numbers that data have to tell everything.*” Had the support of powerful White women who cleared the path for her. “*It was a good White friend who cleared the path for me. A female leader exposed her to networking opportunities. She exposed me to external networking events that I had never been to before. Experience inequity in pay from White male counterparts. I had been paid \$10,000 less than every man with the best stats and data. And I had a I really did have a legitimate complaint. They had to give me a \$9,999 raise*

*and 99 cents. So, bring me on equity with everyone else.” Dealt with institutional racism*

*“I was the only Black manager in the room of like 40. I [have] never seen that before. They were blatantly racist and had no problems telling you. Also, my office was on the 24th floor. And above me was a judge who had to approve every hire in every termination because that’s how bad the racism was there. And they had lost several lawsuits, probably against every color and ethnicity and women that you could name.”*

As a Black HR leader, she witnessed double standards regarding the treatment of minority employees. *“As a Black leader in human resources, you’re caught in this place where White people still protect White people, period, and that the Black person will get terminated for the same thing that the other person is protected for...”* She alters her communication style to not come across to bold *“You know, the other thing is, you always have to, you have to soften your words. So, you can’t speak with the boldness that you come with, whether it’s men or women. Yeah, the biggest obstacle is being smart, and saying it and being confident.”* She believes that one never stops learning to lead. *“... never stop learning on how to truly lead. I’m not talking about being a supervisor. I’m not talking about filling out paperwork and administrator. I’m talking about leading. That’s it. Very, very different. I’m never stopped learning that. Never stop asking for feedback. Also, be okay because you’re not perfect; you are going to make mistake...And in the Bible, the Book of Proverbs is a great book, and the leadership of Jesus, I’m not trying to preach, I’m truly just trying to tell you the best leadership style ever.”* Believe that one must know why they want to be in leadership and be in it for the right motives. *“Understand why you want to do it? Is it for power? position? social*

*economic status? Why? Do you believe that a leader is a servant? And if you're doing it for your own self-gratification, it's the wrong motive. And you will harm more people than you will help. And you're also end up with a lot of stress and pain, and all of those other physical elements that come with being a leader for the wrong reason, because you will have to live with the nightmares that you that you heap upon people. I mean, you think about it in human resources. You can wipe out a whole group of people just by making up something. You can say, for example, in this job category, everyone has to have their masters, and anyone who doesn't, who's most likely they're going to be minority, your way up off that whole group. And can you live with that? Some people can. I can't."*

#### **Structural Description Gayle:**

Gayle was influenced early on by strong Black women and phenomenal Black female educators regarding the importance of being resilient and confident and fighting to right wrongs. Gayle experienced challenges during her early career as well as during her development as a leader. Gayle was given an opportunity early in her career to attend a leadership training program where she was able to develop her supervisory skills. She was also fortunate to have great sponsors in her career in the form of great male and female leaders who helped guide her through her professional development. She experienced discriminatory practices regarding educational requirements being changed for Black supervisor, which were not required for White supervisors. She was required to obtain her master's degree to advance into upper management, while her

White counterpart only required a Bachelors. She also dealt with pay inequity in her career as a leader. She understood the importance of having data to support her actions as a Black female leader. She recognized, as a Black HR leader, the disparity in treatment between minority workers and White employees. Gayle experienced institutional racism and gendered racism, but it has not deterred her from her passion for helping people. She also dealt with her authority being challenged and gender discrimination from Black male peers. She believes that you must understand your motive for wanting to be a leader and that being a leader for the wrong reasons can cause harm to others. Gayle draws on her spirituality and faith to guide her as leaders. She believes in servant leadership and using Jesus as an example of how to lead people. She believes a good leader is in a constant state of learning and asking for feedback and has accountability to the people they lead. She views leadership as being from the heart and about serving people.

***Participant 008 Hattie:***

Hattie aspired to provide for her children “ *Well, I’ll be honest, initially in my career; I didn’t have an aspiration to become a leader. I had an aspiration to provide for my children to survive and live in a comfortable environment.*” She sought opportunities to use her skill set. “*I just started looking in areas where my skill set would fit because I didn’t know exactly where I fit. I obtained my bachelor’s degree in computer science and my master’s degree in operations with a focus or concentration in project management.*” Developed two different skill sets that worked together. “*So, I had two very different skill*

*sets that work together, right. But they were literally two different skill sets. And I recognized that that was actually a benefit.” Her skillset was in great demand. “ I got a lot of hits from different headhunters because I had a skill set in SharePoint development that I just acquired two years prior....they were looking for people with that skillset, and there weren’t many of us in Michigan.” Her leadership capabilities were recognized.*

*“They recognized what I know within myself, that I had leadership capabilities. So, within two months of starting...I became [a] SharePoint resource manager, where I hired 26 individuals to expand the department. A year later, I was a level, eight [a]leader.”*

*She experienced having her team and department given to a White male. “I managed resources for a year, and they put a White male for me to provide insight, all the background because he already a leadership position...I thought that was quite unfair. He had seniority, and I trained him.” She developed anxiety because of what she viewed as an unfair treatment “And that caused such anxiety and discomfort in me in my time at (the company) during that time, that literally, you know, I didn’t even want to get up and go to work. I didn’t put in all that I had been putting in either, because I felt like, Well, why would I do that when it’s not going to be fair.” Her passion and disposition also changed “ It changed my disposition of being passionate about helping others, being passionate about the tool...being passionate in my career leveraging.” She decided to change how she viewed her situation. “... when I evaluate how it had changed me. I didn’t want to stay there... I made the choice to own what I [have] seen, not putting a spin on what our ancestors had gone through, other people’s perspectives, and only own my perspective, it changed. It changed quick.” She believes that individuals can change*

their circumstance by changing their perspectives. *“changing our perspectives of how we look at it still because what has happened in the past was based on, you know, our survivor mentality, especially as Blacks, right, or African Americans. But that’s because of what they went through. It doesn’t have to continue that cycle. If we take on our own perspective and what we desire, it changes. That’s how it changes. It’s not based on the unjust and focusing and blaming and staying and that energy.”* Has become an inspiration for other women in IT. *“ I am a level eight, a Black woman in IT, amongst all these other White males. And other women, not just Black women, are inspired by me.”* She does not allow others to determine her worth. *“...I decided that this is not their job, to fulfill my confidence, fulfill my purpose, fulfill my worthiness, I made the conscious decision to stay in that.”* Takes ownership and does not play the blame game. *“ I don’t put anything on the other people. What comes to me is a direct connection to what I set out. So, it’s not me looking at leadership and saying, you did this, or you shouldn’t have done that. It’s me saying, what was I radiating within me that warranted some of those things, I don’t put blame on myself. Don’t get that that twisted, it’s not a blame thing. It’s just a recognition, acknowledging that when your energy is solid, confident, powerful.”* Is confident and a positive thinker. *“My positive thinking, my conscious thinking, I’m changing my perspective of who I was, who I am, to a more positive perspective. I’m also building my own confidence that I could be, do, and have anything I want. If I set my mind to it, if I believe in it, if I trust it, that’s the most significant asset. Is confidence.”* She does not own discrimination, believes it stops with her. *“I don’t want to put my name on discrimination. That’s the past. It still exists, but I don’t connect to it. I don’t connect*



*to it... I don't want to continue to live that cycle. So, I separate myself from its them against us. And I literally just change that there are individuals that are not aware of who they are. And that's why discrimination continues. They are still holding beliefs based on ancestral beliefs, societal beliefs, parental beliefs that are not serving them. So why would I take on their energy and their perspective? Right, so to me, discrimination ended in me." Believes in the importance of focusing on inner strength. "I'm not saying that it's not; there isn't an injustice in the world. I'm saying we've got to change the way we look at it and be accountable for it continuing. We, too, have to have some accountability in it because of the way we're looking at it if we're still looking at it, as them against us. And we're keeping our focus on them against us. We'll never get out of the demigods against us." She owns her own career. "I own my own career; I own whether or not I am a leader. I do not lead by previous examples; I lead by what feels good to me."*

*Draws strength from her faith "we should strengthen ourselves our own competence. And know that, you know, there is a higher source [God] that right, that exists and protects us and takes care of us." Believes that you have to be ready to lead "sometimes, we think that we should be in a leadership position. But we're not really ready for it. We're ready for the money. We're ready for the benefits, but we're not truly ready to lead other people [to]have their best interests at heart." She is true to her authentic self. "To be true to myself, to be my authentic self, to show up whole, full and complete and within my power... To really be your true authentic self. As Black people, we've shaved off our hair,*

*we shunned off our colorful, you know, disposition and our clothing. We've done a lot of changes in order to be accepted into a White society. And being your authentic self and showing up within your power, your confidence, it doesn't matter what your hair looks like. And again, if we keep changing our own perspectives to fit someone else's, we will never be whole, we will never be confident."* Encourages others to stay true to themselves  
*" I encouraged people to just stay true to themselves be authentically themselves colorful, you know, hair, whatever. The way you speak, the way you carry yourself, it's yours until you decide to change it to whatever you decide to change it to."*

***Structural Description Hattie:***

Hattie's leadership journey began as a single mother who only wanted to provide for her children. She did not have a desire initially to go into leadership but knew she had leadership abilities. Hattie obtained her bachelor's in computer science and a master's in project management. She also acquired a skill in SharePoint development, which was an in-demand skillset. Hattie was recruited by a large company in Michigan and obtain a leadership position after two months of employment. Although she had no prior leadership experience, she hired and led a team of 26 new resources and expanded a department. One year later, she was promoted to level eight-team leader. She experienced having her department and team taken away and given to a White male leader White seniority. Hattie felt that the decision was unfair, which caused anxiety and caused her to change her disposition on being passionate about helping others, being passionate about leveraging her career. She felt that she had been discriminated against as a Black woman,

and she carried the burden of her negative experience until she made a conscious decision to change her views about her situation. She credits her ability to change her perspective as the catalyst for change in her circumstances. She believes that once she changed her viewpoint, her situation changed instantly. She is now a vice president in IT, where she is the only woman and the only Black person in a leadership role in IT. Hattie believes that through positive thinking and building of her confidence that she has the power to do whatever she sets her mind to do. She does not blame others and takes ownership of her own actions. She leads by how she feels and not based on how others have led in the past. She grew into the understanding that other people do not fulfill her worthiness or her purpose; she believes that this conscious decision has enabled her to elevate in her career. Hattie acknowledges that there is unjust in the world but has made the decision to no longer focus on discrimination and unfairness. She believes everyone has to be accountable and take responsibility for discrimination continuing. Therefore, she no longer has a “them against us” mindset, and she believes that until perspectives are changed, Black people will never get out of the demigods against us mentality. Hattie’s education, experience, and specialized skillset help her in her leadership development. Her change of perspective and being intentional about changing her energy has greatly benefited her in her career progression. She also believes in being one’s authentic self, operating in wholeness, and staying focus on knowing your path.

***Participant 009 India:***

India started her professional career in banking but desired to be in leadership, a goal to be an executive director. *“I was doing my annual review with my manager. And he asked me where I wanted to be in five years...I said, I really wanted to be executive director of a small nonprofit.”* Influence by Black female mentor *“ My mentor is probably one of the highest-ranking Black women in banking...very well known. I watched how she made it.”* Believes mentorship is important *“ Seek out mentors in leadership positions, be they White, male, female, whatever. But having a mentor who is on the path or has been on the path that you’re trying to go on is much more helpful than you trying to build a path of your own. Because once you’re on once, once you’re on the track to becoming a leader, yeah, you can be versatile you can be, you can think out the box and be innovative. But there’s some basic tenets to leadership that never change, relationship building integrity, honesty, understanding chain of command, it’s not and I tell people get those experiences as early as you can...”* Found resources, books to aid her in her development”... *I can say that I have read books over the years by African American leaders, female leaders that have given me the inspiration and some new information about leading and surviving in corporate America. So, I would encourage people to read to talk to their mentors or would-be mentors and ask them what they’re reading.”* She experienced challenges navigating as a Black woman in banking *“And as a woman, and a Black woman, figuring out how to navigate those waters. And banking, it*

*was difficult, there were just certain areas of commercial banking that there just weren't very many African American in."*

Had difficulties advancing in banking in certain areas of banking, "I had a difficult time getting a position. And that's how I ended up in international because I couldn't get into any of the other areas that would have been suitable for my education and my skill set.

And where I finished in my class, they just didn't have any spots for African Americans."

Major challenge dealing with men and their biases "*men, men and their bias, and it's at all levels...when I would walk into bank meetings, first off, there wouldn't be very many Americans in the (name removed) Group anyway. And if there were four women in the room, only two of them might have really been bankers; the rest were assistances or whatever. And I will be the only African American woman in the room. And even in my role now, I still have to sometimes remind people, you know, I am the director... So, it's, it's men and their perception, and their automatic entitlement that what they say is golden.*" Dealt with biases and assumptions because of race. "*And, of course, there's the racial bias that when someone walks in the room, and they see a Black woman sitting there, they make some assumptions about who we are, how we speak, how we carry ourselves, and it's being able to dispel those assumptions. From the moment I open my mouth. I can't be a walking stereotypical Black woman ever. I'm not even really allowed to get angry. It's really sad.*" Experienced being overlooked for promotions "*I can remember interviewing for positions in banking, where all you needed was a Bachelor's in business or accounting or something and the experience this is before I earned my*

*MBA, and I would always be going against White males...they would tell me that I was articulate, and I was a great candidate except that Bob already had his MBA or Bob was working on his MBA, and I would look at them and go, but an MBA is not even on the list of prerequisites or preferred items, and they will say, but he has it. “*

*Earned her MBA to increase her competitiveness “ So that’s why I earned an MBA, so that could no longer be an excuse that I didn’t have enough education.” Currently the only Black female in leadership,” I have 13 counterparts in the Midwest. And I think a couple of them while it’s predominantly White women, I’m the only African American female. I’m the first African American female in the Midwest. I was one of two hired at the same time,” She is more experienced and is among the most educated in her organization. “... I’m probably the most educated of the crew, the people with more education have JDs. But for the most part there, none of them have a Master’s in business or my background.” Need to prove abilities to lead, “it’s just the whole notion that you are a high producer. Here’s the person that’s supposed to make your life easy by coming up with ideas and materials and working with corporate to make it easy, but because I’m a Black woman, you can’t listen to me. You need you need either a White woman or a White male, for you to feel confident that they really are trying to help you make money. “ She is of the only minority “And each time that I got a position and one of them I was coming in as one of the few African Americans that were allowed, and early in my career in the late 80s, the 90s, if you are African American and female, you were golden, because you were a double my minority.” Dealt with biases and assumption*

based on her race and gender. *“it’s men and their perception, and their automatic entitlement that what they say is golden. And, of course, there’s the racial bias that when someone walks in the room, and they see a Black woman sitting there, they make some assumptions about who we are, how we speak, how we carry ourselves, and it’s being able to dispel those assumptions.”* People skills and problem-solving are her major assets, *“really being able to walk into a room of strangers and create a comfort level that encourages people to open up and work with you. And that that could be the combination of my people skills, my communication style, my voice...it’s finding out what’s necessary to connect with people. And that is a skill that I worked on my whole life and, and I forgot my other chief asset.”* *“I am a problem solver...”* I learned not to look to other people for answers, but to go to people with potential solutions, to figure out how to collaborate to solve whatever the issue or problem is at hand... *I am a collaborator, solution solver. I like to use my creative skills. So, my assets, I think in terms of solutions...I look at people as opportunities to build bridges, and to collaborate, to get business done...’* Leveraged her banking experience to reach her goal, *“And I had not forgotten my desire to be the executive director of a small nonprofit. And I was using my position ...as my steppingstone to get me the skill set I needed to get to that next level, because you’ll find that a lot that many nonprofit execs are either former bank officers or, or former officers in a corporation.”* *“best day ever, was when they called me and told me that I was going to be their new executive director, and everything that I told him I would do, I’ve done and more.”*

***Structural Description India:***

India started her career in banking but always had a goal to be an executive director of a small nonprofit. India experienced challenges navigating as a Black woman in the banking industry. Even though she finished at the top of her banking class, she found it difficult to advance in certain areas of banking. She was often look over for positions because she was not viewed as having the capability to motivate White males to follow her leadership. She also had to deal with racial bias and assumptions and fought hard to dispel racial stereotypes. India was greatly influenced by her mentor, who is one of the highest-ranking Black women in banking who she admired and emulated. India believes that seeking a mentor is more helpful in building a path to leadership than attempting to forge on one's own. India leveraged her banking experience to build the skills to become a nonprofit leader. India's people skills, problem-solving capabilities, knowledge, and experience have helped her to elevate into leadership and navigate to reach her goal of executive director. She is currently one of only two Black female leaders in her membership organization.

***Participant 010 Jasmine:***

Jasmine's father was a great influence on her motivation and aspiration to leadership. *"I would have to say, my father. Because he was a businessman, he owned several businesses. And he allowed me to own my own business very early. And I was very successful at that. And he had that belief in me, and he let me do it."* She had an eagerness to obtain knowledge on how to be successful. *"I was just looking at all the*



*businesses. And I said, how do people get businesses? Like everybody can't be born rich. So, they must know something? I don't know. And to get what you don't have; you have to find out what you don't know. So, I had to find out what I didn't know."* She faced opposition from people not wanting her to succeed. "I would say people not wanting me to have this opportunity...*There were no Black agents in this area, let alone Black females. And agents would say that they didn't want me in {city names omitted}. because nobody's going to buy any insurance from me. And I'm going to steal their business. So, I have no business over here."* Her female mentor taught her how to navigate and stand up to opposition from male counterparts. "*Male agents thought they could run over you because you were female... I had a mentor... She was a White female agent, but she taught me some lessons. She even gave me a set, I still have them, beautifully glass blown balls. And she said, this is your set of balls. You don't need them. Because these men think they can just run over you, but you have one bigger, balls bigger than theirs because they will try you, and you remember you stand up to them. And I have had them to try me. And I always remember what she said, and I didn't back down, they will try to take your team members, they will try to take your customers, and they will try to talk to you as if you were beneath them."* I always remember what she said I didn't back down." Her supervisor saw her potential as an agent. "*Then one day, my supervisor, you know how you have the yearly evaluations. She said to me, that have you ever thought about being an agent? ... I just know an agent when I see one. She said you talk to people. But they don't talk to anybody, period. But I see them talking to you. And you just have a way about you."* Focused on doing her best " so I always focused on beating my last record,

you know, trying to do better than I've ever done before being my best me." *Faced opposition from other Black women " when Black female started to come on. Not all, but most of them targeted me as their competition. And I thought that, Oh, that's cool. We have more Black females. We could be friends. But they looked at me like the enemy... I would think you would want to be friends with me, versus looking at me like, we're in competition. I'm not trying to compete with anybody, period. I don't have that kind of time."* Followed her heart, *"follow your heart, do what you desire to do. And make a plan. Make it plain; write it down. And try not to procrastinate. If it's something that you want to do, do it. Write down a plan of how you're going to do it step by step. She sought out the knowledge needed to reach her goal " What you don't know, find it out. Because what you have and what you don't have has everything to do with what you know and what you don't know. So, if you want to have what you don't have, find out what you don't know because it's out there. You don't have to reinvent the wheel. Somebody has done it before...I always go back to when I was a little girl riding down Gratiot seeing all those businesses; everybody wasn't born rich. So, they know something that I don't know. I just have to find out what it is."*

***Structural Description Jasmine:***

Jasmine had a natural accrument to leadership. She was greatly influenced by her father, a business owner, who allowed her to have her own business at a young age. She had an eagerness to be a business owner and sought to understand how others made it to become successful. She began working for a major insurance company and was noticed

by her supervisor, who encouraged her to enter a program to become an agent. She became the only Black agent in her area, and she faced oppositions from people, mostly White men, not wanting her to have the opportunity. Many people did not want to give her their business because she was Black, which caused her to refrain from using her likeness in marketing material. Jasmine dealt with male agents trying to run over her and steal her clients. She came to the realization that she had to stand up to them and demand to be treated as an equal. She dealt with racial discrimination and unfairness growing up, which she believes helped her to deal with situations of unfairness. Jasmine encountered challenges with other Black female agents who targeted her as their competition. Jasmine had two sponsors, a White male and female leader, who were influential in helping her progress in her career in the insurance industry. Jasmine's success in leadership is due to her belief in the importance of following her heart, planning, and not procrastinating on taking the steps necessary to make her plan a reality.

***Participant 011 Kate:***

Kate considers herself a natural leader *"I've always had to kind of like take on the leadership role, even in my family... It's like naturally, it came natural to me because I'm a people person, and I kind of like just to take on a role and just run with it."* She aspired to go into leader early on *" I was in the business program ... And I really enjoyed like the leadership and business aspect of things, so that's kind of what made me go into more of a managerial position or to actually go for a degree within leadership and business."* As a Black woman she feels that she fights for everything. *"as a Black woman, what I have*

*found that has been the most difficult is the fact that it really is like a White boy world. So, everything that we do we have to fight for, and we have to justify like promotions and whatever it is that we are trying to do, they expect us to do so much more and to accomplish so much more than what the White men have to do.”* She worked hard to advance in her career, “...with me being a hard worker and always having to work so hard my whole life, I’ve really had to, to like work my way up the ladder. So even within banking, in order for me to be so successful and work my way up the ladder.” She believes multitasking is a strength for Black women “with us having to work ten times harder, we’re always we always know more, we always can accomplish more. So, we’re always multitasking and doing things because we’re so used to having to do so much at once. That it comes naturally to us.” Able to relate to with her employees, “I was always a successful manager, and always did really well with my employees, because I know how I feel to be the employee, or I know how it feels to have to like work for something or to be like a mom and have to go get it because most of the people...our employees, they were a lot of Black women.” Dealt with systemic racist practices “... when we would go to like the staff meetings, they always sent the Black people to the inner city and sent the White people to like the suburban branches. “

Constantly having to prove herself, “But it was just like the way they treated you, and they want you to work and work and work, you had to keep proving yourself.” Dealt with gendered racism from White male peers, “they automatically think of Black women were angry all the time. So, you have an opinion outside of theirs. It’s like they’re questioning

*why you're so angry or why you're so mad."* Dealt with more stringent expectations than White managers. *"So, like, at the end of the day, they really expect for us to do so much more than what they expect for the White boys to do, they're going to always accommodate them, and make life easier for them, where they continuously give us hurdles and obstacles that we have to overcome to justify our position or why we're in the position that we're in. Or to justify us asking for promotions or raises ..."* Witnessed different treatment for people of color, *"they will change the goals ..., for example, would be typically written up for taking a loss for \$10,000. And it's a Black woman or a person of color; they will write you up, they will try to get rid of you. But let it be like one of their little White boys or whatever, oh, it's okay, they'll try to write it off."* Believe in the importance of caring about the work the people she works with *"... make sure that you're following your heart and doing what you want to do. And make sure that we continue to stick together because, at the end of the day, we're the ones who we're gonna have to, like, build our people up. So, we got to have each other's back work together and never lose sight of who we are and the people that we're working with."*

***Structural Description Kate:***

Kate is a natural leader; she took on the leadership role in her family early on. She worked hard to accomplish things in life and believes that her personality naturally enables her to take on the leadership role. As a Black woman, she views her most significant obstacle is navigating in a system designed for White men. She perceives that Black women have to work ten times harder and fight for promotions and opportunities.

Her work ethics, and experience of moving up the ladder from a teller, enabled her to be a successful leader. She experienced discrimination and institutional racism in her career and believed that the system is stacked more favorably for White men, especially in the banking sector. The effects of the racial imbalances endured as a Black leader in banking are evident in sentiments she emotes when speaking about her experiences. She believes in the importance of following your heart, building people up, and never losing sight of who she is and with the people she engage with professionally.

**Participant 012 Lana:**

Lana was motivated to become a leader to be represented at the table. *“ I think my motivation was to see me represented at the table, not only doing the work but also being the boss.”* Work-life and motherhood is a challenge. *“I couldn’t come in as early as the other men because, you know, they could come in whenever because they didn’t have any responsibilities. Well, I had to drop off and pick up my daughter from daycare before certain hours. So, you know, it was the looks coming in, rushing in, at nine o’clock thinking, you know, this is the earliest that I can be here, but yet some of the some of my other counterparts have been there since seven or 6:30. And then leaving at five, I mean, making a point to leave at five o’clock and not being there all night. I think it’s very hard for a woman to have both to have a career and to be an involved mom. Believe the intersectionality of her race and gender benefited her. “You know, I think, when companies want to check the box, for a minority, they would rather it be a female, because, you know, I think that unfairly Black men are judged, you know, and I think that*

*a lot of people may think that women, are you no less assertive or less powerful. So, I'm pretty sure that, you know, I've had a lot of positions over the last 20 years. And I know that I probably got some of them, not because I was the best candidate. But honestly because I was a Black female. "Dealt with subtle racism and microaggressions. "I think it is so subtle that our White counterparts think that they're not racism; they're not racists. Um, you know, many times, I get compliments of, you know, a great presentation, you talk so well, did you have formal training? like, No, I didn't. What am I supposed to sound like? I mean, you know, just because I'm Black. Am I supposed to have broken English? You know, no, I didn't get formal training. I just went to a school that taught proper English." Reading and building a knowledge base on diverse top is essential as a female leader " ... read a variety of things. Many times, we don't do it because we don't enjoy it. I mean, I don't particularly enjoy baseball, or you know, I can understand baseball, I can understand basketball and football, but baseball, but you know, boxing, but you need to know a little bit about everything, you need to know a little bit about government, you need to know a little bit about politics, you need to know a little bit about sports...Because when you're in that boardroom, and you're just sitting there talking is going to be awkward if you're just looking at each other and having no clue what to talk about." Her gender helped her in her career "I don't think I can think of anything right off the top of my head that I was definitely, um, discriminated against, because of my gender... if anything, it has helped me... when companies want to check the box for a minority, they would rather it be a female." Gender influenced leadership Style "It has helped me in the world of PR just to calm over to go in some very tough situations*

*and kind of be compassionate. Because I think women, you know, we have the ability to be stern, but yet compassionate, be caring, be nurturing. So, I think I've diffused a lot of situations because I was a female."* She had to learn to make tough decisions. *"So, in the world of being a leader, you know, sometimes you have to make this the tough decisions, and it's not about color is just about You're the boss, and you have to make the decision. So, I've had to learn how to not let everything be so personal. So that's number one."* She learned the importance of delegation. *"I had to learn to delegate for so long, you know, I think not just Black woman, but I think as a race, you know, we want to do everything we want to be in charge, we want to make sure that, you know, we get the credit, that, you know, everything has to be done..., I've had to learn to delegate. I mean, a good boss is better if they have a great team..."* Coaches and develops others. *"I think that's one of the best things about being a leader is helping to see other people grow. I tell all of my people that I hire that I'm not the kind of boss that says you have to stay here for the rest of your life. If I'm not pouring into you, if you don't feel like you can go to the next step with the skills and the and the teachings that I'm teaching you, then I'm not being a good leader... if you're going on to bigger and better, that means that I've helped you in that development."* Believes that Black women need more Black female mentors. *"I think we, as Black women, need to do more of that, not hooking anybody up, I'm not talking about that. I'm talking about taking someone under their wing and saying, this is who you need to see, this is who you need. To me, this is who you know, what, this is what you need to, to read, this is how you need to act. I mean, cuz nobody tells us that it's not in a book, it's not, you know, in a course somewhere. Um, you know, a lot of us a*



*lot of the skills and a lot of the techniques that I picked up was just watching someone else do it watching a mentor, do it, and say, that's the bomb. And the next time I'm in a situation like that, I think back to all when I was with so and so, this is what she did. And you know, that's how you mentor... I think we need to do a better job at just mentorship..."* Her leadership developed was through experience, " *For my 20 years, I've been around a lot of organizations, and they all have been steppingstones.*"

### **Structural Description Lana:**

Lana was motivated to seek the role of leadership to ensure that she was represented at the table and not just doing the work. She wanted to be a decision-maker. As a leader, she found motherhood and work-life balance to be a challenge. She felt a sense of judgment from her male counterparts when she had to come in later or leave early to pick up her child. She also dealt with discomfort in the choice between being an involved mom and a good leader. Lana's strength is her ability to communicate and adapt to a diverse audience and situations. She believed that she has had many opportunities and roles because of the duality of her race and gender. Although she has experienced challenges as a Black woman in leadership, it has not been a hindrance for her. Lana overcame her challenges to become a successful leader. She credits many of her leadership skills and techniques from watching her mentor. She believes in the importance and needs for increased opportunities for mentorship among Black women. Lana's ability to communicate among diverse people and about diverse topics has helped her immensely in the board room and has also opened a lot of opportunities for her

professionally. Lana learned the importance of delegating to her team. She believes that as a race, Black people overextend themselves wanting to make sure that they get credit and prove their ability to get things done. She understands that a good boss is better if they have a great team. Lana believes in building her team and providing opportunities for skill development. Lana's developed as a leader through the experience and the knowledge she obtained as she progressed in her career. She developed an understanding of the skills and behaviors required to be a successful leader. Lana believes that her gender, ability to adapt and communicate in diverse situations have helped her in her career progression and development as a Black woman in PR and Marketing.

***Participant 013 Maria:***

Maria was motivated to be a leader by parental influence, *“ my upbringing was the main motivation to become a leader. I was raised by my parents to never follow.”* Sought out leadership opportunities *“I knew that just through growth and development, that a leadership role is what I wanted to be in, because I've never, I've never been keen to, you know, to follow. I follow in terms of like, guidance, and, and, and knowledge and things like that. But as far as the end goal, and my motivation is always to lead.”* Experienced challenge as Black women in IT leadership. *“biggest obstacle is just the fact that you know, I am a woman. Not my experience not, you know, my knowledge, not any of that is just, you know, the fact that I'm Black and a woman.”* Her experience and education are her greatest asset as a leader. *“my experience, that that's my big, biggest asset, I will incorporate the fact that I'm educated, that does play into it also. But my*

*biggest asset is just the knowledge that I have.*” Experienced gender and racial discrimination from White males early in her career. “*they made comments saying things like, I see that it has added some color to the department ...you know, the fact that I was a Black woman probably didn’t sit well with them, you know, aside from other reasons that they may have had that work, you know, pretty biased against me, but that was on the job experience that I had as far as discrimination.*” She has an awareness of institutional racism and inequity regarding the underrepresentation of Black women in leadership. “*So, I know that there’s institutional racism there the fact that I’m a leader in my field, um, you know, I kind of overcame some obstacles, you know, to do that, but the fact that they’re so very few I know that there is institutional racism, and that equates to very few Black women in the field.*” She has the mindset that there is no obstacle that she is not able to overcome. “*...always put my best foot forward ...never think that there’s a mountain that I can’t climb. So, there’s no obstacle too high. And so that, that helps me to pursue any, any advanced positions or any growth opportunities in front of me. So just to never quit, and, you know, to keep working and to stay motivated, and to always, always apply 110%.*” She acknowledges and embraces her strength as a Black woman. “*we come from a strong people, and we come from a strong tribe. And so, with that being said, um, I think just, you know, acknowledge, and embrace your strength. And, and that will take you such a long way. You know, like I said, don’t let anybody tell you that you’re inferior. Don’t let anyone make you feel inferior. And you walk into any obstacle, any challenge with your head held high and with confidence.*” Asserts her race is not a handicap or reason to not be successful. “*Don’t look as you know, don’t look to*

*your attributes, meaning your skin color, your gender, or any of that don't look at any of that as a handicap; all of that is beautiful. And some of your biggest assets lie within those characteristics. And I would say just, you know, keep that in mind, as you into corporate America, and you will be successful."*

***Structural Description Maria:***

Maria was motivated to become a leader at a young age; her parental influence shaped her leadership process and perceptions. Maria sought after personal development and educational opportunities to build the skills required to reach her end goal of advancing into a leadership position. Maria dealt with obstacles as a Black woman in a male-dominated field. She also experienced racial and gender discrimination from White males who were not pleased with her ascension as a Black woman in IT. She views her greatest asset is her years of experience and knowledge in the field as well as her education; she is currently a doctoral candidate. She has a strong sense of pride and believes that she comes from a strong race of people, which enables her to preserve any obstacle and challenge. She does not allow other's perception of her to be a hindrance. She is grounded in the fact that her race and gender are not a handicap for her and views it as a motivator as she sought to be successful in corporate America.

***Participant 014 Nicole:***

Nicole was motivated to advance into leadership because of educational inequities *"my main influence was recognizing particularly educational inequity as a student. So,*

*seeing those things around me made me want to pursue leadership and figure out what how do we change some of the circumstances that I currently see.” Dealt with racism and misogyny early in career “I was the only Black person in an office...but there was a lot of microaggressions there was a lot of you know, nitpicking that I don’t think at that time I fully understood but then as I got older, I understood that to be really the intersection of race, gender, and also ageism, right being so young people underestimate that you’re capable of leading.” Experienced emotional distress due to experience with discrimination “But the issue I think, early on was because that the intersection of those issues, they emotionally scarred me. So, for a long time, I did not want to work with White men because of my experience with one White man. Um, thankfully, I, you know, I kind of grew out of that space.” She had strong mentors to help her develop “...I have a mentor who is also a Black executive. And she watching her trajectory was inspiration for me and she was very willing enough to share her experiences; I had that experience with both as an executive leader, but also as a politician.” Dealt disparity in pay “ I had an experience with just being paid different from my predecessor saying work and better skilled, more qualified, but about a \$20,000-\$30,000 difference. And then when you when you have the guts to say, Hey, I recognize this, still having to prove that, that it was sometimes unconscious bias that you would pay the man more than you paid me .” Dealt male bias regarding her abilities to lead, “ And then there was I mean, just the I think the unconscious bias of what other men how other men view your leadership, right versus a man’s leadership, you know, you have, you got to work twice as hard to prove you belong in the space. Because you are a woman, particularly because you are a Black woman.”*

*As a woman, viewed in a subservient manner, “ I used to hate being in a collaborative space, and the men in the room would always say, are you going to take the notes? ..., I think men in various spaces, Black or White, will put women in the subservient position, even in that small instance, hey, we’re all here together. But oh, you take the notes, right. And so that type of, oh, you can do that, you know, I’m saying, like, but its putting menial tasks on the woman ...” Importance of a supportive community “ Connection to community that is uplifting and supportive, that you can share these experiences with, who understand those experiences, is really important. ... having a healthy self-worth because you will run into imposter syndrome.*

Believes in the importance of mentorship “ I think mentoring is important as well like I have a mentor, but I also have a mentee.” *Experienced effects of Institution racism, “I think the long-term impact of early institutional racism in the educational system definitely has an impact on your ability to, you know, experience certain things at a high level... But then even more, so I’m recently buying a house and looking at, you know, trying to elevate not only as a leader, but just as a human being and build wealth, like the taxes in predominantly Black communities, the insurance in predominantly Black communities is skyrockets and that of White neighboring communities... that affects your leadership...” Perceives that White males have more access to create wealth, “White males who make more and have access to create wealth at just rates that are they don’t have to worry about that...” Leads with added trauma “ when they go to work, and they lead, their leadership is not coupled with trauma. You know, I’m saying like, I’m sure a*

*White man goes to work and doesn't think about Breanna Taylor, right? a White man goes to work and doesn't think about, I got to take care of me, and I need to make a plan for everybody else in my family, right? Like, they're set up differently. So not you, it's just you have two blocks that you stand up on that I need four to get where , you know, I'm saying, where you're at."* Dealing with the double duality of gender and race “ *For Black women having to battle that you know that double-edged sword really makes them dynamic leaders that, you know, we know how to bob and weave, we better than anybody, and tackle those issues and have the fortitude to, to navigate. Again, these issues of social injustice and inequity, that allows us to speak to those issues and to also help transform those spaces. So, you know, and in addition to just being skilled.*” Believes that Black women make great leaders. “*I think Black women make the greatest leaders, and here's why. Black women make the strongest leaders because they have to navigate the intersection between race and gender. Whereas White women only have to struggle with gender. They can align with Whiteness to open up doors for themselves, Black men can attribute to the aspect of being men, and they do, and Black men do have their own historic issues, and I get that. She strives to be a change agent as a Black women leader* “*For Black women having to battle that you know that double-edged sword really makes them dynamic leaders that, you know, we know how to bob and weave, we better than anybody, and tackle those issues and have the fortitude to, to navigate. Again, these issues of social injustice and inequity, that allows us to speak to those issues and to also help transform those spaces.*”

**Structural Description Nicole:**

Nicole's leadership experience started early. She was motivated to seek a leadership position as a result of noticing educational disparities. Nicole experienced a tri-fold experience with discrimination based on her age, gender, and race. She dealt with being subjugated by White males even though she has a PhD. She was viewed as being in a subservient role to complete menial tasks. She dealt with being paid less than her male predecessor despite being more qualified and better skilled. She also had to navigate the biases of how men viewed her leadership abilities compared to other men. Nicole believes that institutional racism affects the capacity of Black people to advance and the same rate as Whites. She believes that Black leaders have to deal with added social traumas and navigate in ways that White leaders, especially White men, do not have to operate. She views that the system is set up differently for them to be able to succeed. Nicole is grounded in who she is, a Black female leader. She understands the complexities of how the intersection of gender and race influence her leadership experience and fights against the patriarchal systems that she perceives may oppress her success. She also believes in the importance of having self-worth and having a supportive connection with others in a community of other women who understand and that can share in the experiences. She fights against imposter syndrome in dealing with self-doubt and feelings of inadequacy. She believes that Black women make the greatest leaders because of their ability to navigate through social injustice and inequity to be successful. She also believes that Black women leaders are able to be change agents by speaking to



the issues of inequity in the workplace and help create transformation. Nicole's leadership development occurred through seeking guidance from mentors and attainment of an advanced degree to assist her in her professional development and career progression as one of the youngest executive directors of a Nonprofit agency.

***Participant 015 Olivia:***

Olivia was a reluctant leader who did not see herself initially as a leader." *I actually am a reluctant leader. I did not seek, set out to become a leader. It was not something that I aspired to ... my perception of what, and maybe more influentially, who a leader was, and what they look like, was not me.*" She had negative experiences with male leaders. " *My perception of what, and more influentially, who a leader was, and what they looked like was older White men, and my experience with them in the workplace were not positive.*" She was inspired to seek a leadership role to have her voice heard and to influence decision making. " *I wanted to influence decision making; I wanted to be an advocate for my colleagues; I wanted to have my voice heard. I wanted the flexibility and the income that I perceived leaders to have.*" Participant 015 faced opposition when advocating for equity in work. " *when advocating in the work that I was doing as a leader for a program, like advocating for equity in our work in and more specifically racial equity and getting pushback from predominantly White folks .*" As a Black leader, she dealt with the restriction being placed on her level of authority and autonomy in doing her job and dealt with assumptions made about her readiness to lead. " *I've had [the] experience. there were more restraints that were put on me and the*

*authority and influence that they were willing to give me in the position.” She experienced racial bias and assumptions because of her race and gender. “As a Black woman, often being the only one being in the room and being perceived as there to serve in an administrative support capacity and like to make coffee and clean up.” She believes in doing work that you care about. “you got to care about what you’re doing. And the people that you’re doing it with, that’s part of being a good leader.” Her voice is her greatest asset and is reflective of her lived experiences. “My voice, my brain, and the articulation of the are my greatest asset.”*

#### **Structural Description Olivia:**

Olivia described herself as a reluctant leader. She did not initially seek to obtain a leadership position because she did not view herself as a leader. Her perception of a leader was based on her negative experiences with older White male leaders. Olivia affirmed that she initially did not understand what leadership meant. She did not aspire to be in leadership until later in life. She was motivated to become a leader to influence decision making, have her voice heard, and to gain economic flexibility. Olivia dealt with external as well as internal barriers in her leadership journey. Her internal obstacles included not understanding that she had the ability and had already been operating in a leadership capacity. She went through an awareness and self-discovery that she had the power to define leadership in her own way and not imitate leadership characteristics and practices she had seen demonstrated by ineffective leaders. She also went through a discovery of the important power in her voice and her opinions and that her brain is her

greatest asset. As a Black woman leader, she has dealt with assumptions based on her race and gender, including being perceived as being in an administrative support capacity to clean up and make coffee. She has dealt with her authority being undermined and not being given the same authority and leeway to make decisions as her White male predecessor. Olivia developed as a leader through maturity, wisdom, and working on herself to rediscover the qualities, talent, and skills that to be celebrated. She understands the importance of surrounding one's self with a support system of people who will encourage and provide critical feedback. She believes that it is important to care about the work that you do and in taking risks to achieve your goals.