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A Phenomenological Study of Executive Coaching for African American Leaders

Barrhonda White
Walden University

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Walden University

College of Management and Human Potential

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Barrhonda White

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Walden University
2023

Abstract

A Phenomenological Study of Executive Coaching for African American Leaders

by

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MS, Walden University, 2021

MS, Walden University, 2015

MA, Averett University, 2002

BS, James Madison University, 1995

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Industrial / Organizational Psychology– Leadership Development and Coaching

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Abstract

African American leaders face inequalities in executive leadership development support such as executive coaching. This phenomenological qualitative study explored the lived experiences of African American leaders that worked with a leadership coach. The intention of the study was to gain insight into factors that led African American leaders to seek assistance from a leadership coach, preferences regarding leadership coach demographics, and goals from coaching. The theoretical foundation for this research was Self-Discrepancy Theory. The study utilized two research questions related to a) the lived experiences of African American leaders that work with, or have worked with, an executive coach, and b) coach matching preferences of African American leaders as they pertain to a coach's ethnicity. In this study, 11 African American leaders were interviewed. The Descriptive Phenomenological Psychological Method was used to gain insights from the interview data. Notable emerging themes included a) relatability of African American Coaches to the plight of African American leaders, b) Caucasian coaches offering diverse learning opportunity, c) inclination of African American Coaches for mentorship, and d) Caucasian coaches' knowledge and experiences in mainstreamed leadership. In the spirit of positive social change, these results can help shape a better future for African American leaders and other minority groups through equitable and effective leadership development interventions such as executive coaching.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Introduction

African American leaders face many leadership inequalities. For example, African Americans are underrepresented in leadership positions, especially in executive leadership positions, in organizations (Wilson, 2014). Secondly, the promotion rate for African American leaders was more than 50% lower than White leaders (Guest, 2016). Additionally, demotion and attrition rates are higher for African American leaders (Guest, 2016). Another challenge for consideration pertains to leadership development opportunities for African American leaders. Sy et al. (2017) posit that traditional leadership development approaches are typically designed to align with the values and belief system of a majority leader, and thus may not fully meet the leadership development needs of African American leaders. This inspired the question of whether African American leaders are receiving the support needed to be effective in leadership positions. A specific area for focus regarding support for African American leaders was leadership development in the form of leadership coaching. This study explored the lived experiences of African American leaders that work with, or have worked with, an executive coach, and leadership coach matching preferences of African American leaders. This study also explored the application of self-discrepancy theory to help explain and understand the lived experiences of African American leaders that are or have worked with a leadership coach.

This chapter includes the foundations of the study. In this chapter, the background of leadership coaching and research regarding the challenges faced by African American

leaders was explained. Details of the problem that precipitates this study were discussed as well. This chapter shares an overview of the nature of the research, the theoretical basis, the primary research questions, and anticipated limitations of the study.

Background

Over time, leadership coaching has become a highly regarded leadership development intervention that is commonly used for middle and senior level leaders within small, medium, and large size organizations. Salavert (2015) posits leadership coaching as being a respected practice among leadership development techniques and was prominently used as a professional development approach in corporate leadership, sports leadership, noting there was a growing presence for education leadership. Passmore and Fillery-Travis (2011) describe leadership coaching as a future-focused technique that borrows from counseling, psychology, and consulting best practices.

Kilburg (2016) described a typical coaching process as follows: a) starting with the establishment of a coaching contract, b) establishing rapport between the coach and leader, c) baselining the leader's current state through an assessment, d) collecting perspectives and observations of the leader from their peers and direct reports, e) setting goals for growth, f) executing and monitoring a growth plan and g) measuring growth and success from coaching. Research also showed leadership coaching was an effective intervention. One study compared the effectiveness of leadership coaching with other interventions such as self-coaching, group coaching, and group training. In this study of 84 participants, leadership coaching proved to be more effective than self-coaching for reducing procrastination and increasing the likelihood of developmental goal

achievement (Losch et al., 2016). Another example was a qualitative study of 15 leaders in a financial organization. Based on the data gathered, the researcher concluded that leadership coaching was effective for helping leaders to better understand their identity as a leader (Cilliers, 2018). While leadership coaching appears to be effective based on past and present research, a key component that must be present for coaching to be effective is a leader's intrinsic motivation to change and grow (Taylor et al., 2019).

Regarding the role of ethnicity and coachee/coach relationships, there was limited research available (Bozer & Santora, 2015). Rather, the available research was general and more specific to gender. Another variable of interest was coach matching. In their empirical research of 68 coaching relationships, Bozer and Santora (2015) did not find a significant impact of coach matching on achieved coaching outcomes. At the same time, their research showed 84% of the leaders being coached had a strong preference for a strong relationship with their coach (Bozer & Santora, 2015). Coach matching based on ethnicity was explored in the current study.

As noted by the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2019), African American leaders represent eight percent of U.S. workforce management positions, while White leaders represent 82% of management positions within the U.S. workforce. Some hold a position that African American leaders are undervalued within organizations that are predominantly White and may feel a low sense of belonging (Smalls, 2019). Based on this, it was concluded that a lack of research on African American leaders, in conjunction with leadership coaching, may be attributed to the disproportional representation of African Americans in leadership positions and perceived value as compared to White

leaders. For this reason, the intention of this study was to deepen understanding of African American leaders who have worked with a leadership coach, as well as what factors contributed to the effectiveness of their leadership coaching experience.

Problem Statement

Significant research exists regarding the efficacy of leadership coaching, and leadership coaching has been empirically proven as an effective development countermeasure for improving the effectiveness of leaders (Gregory & Wiles, 2018; Walston, 2014). While there was significant research regarding the efficacy of leadership coaching as an intervention, existing research was generic from an ethnicity perspective. Traditionally, research regarding leadership has focused on the perspective of White male leaders (Davis & Maldonado, 2015). Smalls (2019) asserts that while significant research has been completed regarding leadership development, the studies failed to adequately explore the lived experiences of African American leaders. Kovacs and Corrie (2017) recommended future research on the topic of coaching efficacy for culturally diverse leaders, more specifically as it pertains to how leaders gain support from coaching to solve complex leadership challenges. In their research study, not directly considering cross-cultural aspects was a stated limitation of the study (Kovacs & Corrie, 2017). They also acknowledged that exploring this and the different needs of diverse executives would be a topic of interest for future research with an emphasis on understanding distinctions between challenges diverse leaders may experience that could lead to the need for support from an executive coach. (Kovacs & Corrie, 2017). Additionally, Smith (2015) suggests that leadership coaching research could benefit from further exploration of the

efficacy for diverse leaders. de Haan and Duckworth (2013) also suggest that there is a need for continued research on the efficacy of leadership coaching for diverse coaching clients. Further, Baron et al. (2011) suggests that African American leaders that work with an executive coach may still face leadership challenges after coaching. As such, a gap in peer reviewed literature was present as it pertains to coaching for diverse leaders and more specifically, African American leaders.

Coach matching was an important consideration for effective leadership coaching (Gehlert et al., 2013). Coach matching can influence the outcomes from leadership coaching, especially as they pertain to increased self-awareness (Bozer et al., 2015). Research shows when an executive coach and a coaching client share common personal characteristics or world views such as ethnicity, the likelihood for coaching chemistry increased (Chinn, et al., 2015; Gehlert et al., 2013). Van Oosten et al. (2019) studied leadership coaching and found that the quality of the relationship between a leader and their coach was critical and ultimately influences coaching outcomes. As such, ethnic congruency when matching an African American leader with an executive coach was worth further exploration.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore the lived experiences of African American leaders that have worked with a leadership coach and to understand what factors made leadership coaching effective for them. A sub-factor for exploration was the perceived importance of working with an African American executive coach versus another ethnicity. Gaining enhanced awareness about the lived experiences of

African American leaders while working with an executive coach may lead to insights that could help to inform the use of leadership coaching within leadership development programs aimed for African American leaders.

Research Questions

Research Question 1: What are the lived experiences of African American leaders that work with or have worked with an executive coach?

Research Question 2: What are the coach matching preferences of African American leaders as they pertain to a coach's ethnicity?

Theoretical Framework

The applied theory to help understand the lived experiences of African American Leaders that have or currently work with a leadership coach was self-discrepancy theory (Higgins, 1987). Self-discrepancy theory explains that when there is a conflict between an individual's perception of who they should be and who they want to be, negative emotions can result (Barnett et al., 2017). The tenets of the theory also explain discrepancies between self and what they believe others want them to be, self and what they perceive others expect of them, and self-compared to what they expect from themselves (Higgins, 1987). Essentially, the theory helps to explain conflicts between the actual self, ideal self, and "ought to" self (Mason et al., 2019). Barnett et al. (2017) found that individuals are likely to show sadness when they perceive that they must present themselves in an unauthentic fashion. Furthermore, research showed that individuals who experience a discrepancy between their desired self and who they ought to be, tend to experience a lower sense of purpose (Stanley & Burrow, 2015).

Considering the aforementioned research regarding white male leaders, some African American leaders may hold a perception that they must present themselves like a White male leader in order to be selected for and to maintain an executive level position. With this in mind, self-discrepancy theory may inform areas for development focus with a leadership coach. Self-discrepancy theory may also inform coach matching preferences for a White executive coach, especially for African American leaders that participate in leadership coaching for the purpose of enhancing their ability to emulate White leaders.

Nature of the Study

The nature of this study was qualitative. Qualitative research helps to interpret how situations occur and why they occur, especially when the context is unknown (Degen, 2017). The qualitative approach that was deployed for this study was phenomenological. Phenomenological research seeks to understand a phenomenon from those that have lived or directly experienced the subject of research (Englander, 2019). This approach enables a researcher to understand an experience from the view of the participant. Understanding the experience from the view of the participant can help to create meaning and insights that may help to advance future improvements or research in the given subject area.

Phenomenological research typically entails interviewing a sample of participants relative to a subject of interest. The interviews involve the use of open-ended questions that are asked consistently in each interview. The context acquired from the research interviews are then transcribed, coded for a thematic view, and then assessments are made accordingly based on the emerging themes. Passmore and Fillery-Travis (2011)

completed a review of research surrounding executive coaching and noted there was precedence for using phenomenological research for executive coaching related studies, especially while using the Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis approach. Again, this study will explore factors that influence the perceptions that African American leaders hold regarding leadership coaching.

Definitions

African American: According to the U.S. Census Bureau (2020), African American is defined as someone that identifies themselves as having ethnic roots from African countries or Haiti. This populations may also choose to identify as Black.

Coaching: A partnership between a coach and coachee designed to creatively unlock a coachee's potential to achieve their desired goals (International Coach Federation, 2020).

Crabs in a Barrel: A term that represents a phenomenon when female and/or minorities feel threatened and a sense of competition with others that look like them (Paustian et al., 2017).

Executive: A senior-level leader within an organization that is within three to five levels from the chief operating executive (Smith et al., 2019). Furthermore, the senior-level leader is placed in a position of decision accountability and authority for their designated part of an organization.

Glass Ceiling: An invisible constraint informed by biases held within organizations that limit the advancement of minority employees within an organization (Davis & Maldonado, 2015).

Leader: An individual in a position to set business goals and to influence others to effectively achieve the established goals (Badura et al., 2020). This is further interpreted as someone that sits in a position of power, or in a position that was superior to others within their industry, field, and/or organization. This person is in a position to be influential over others and is accountable for a designated area or result for the organization.

Leadership/Executive Coach: A practitioner that provides coaching services while deploying coaching competencies and ethical standards as described by the International Coach Federation (International Coach Federation, 2020).

Assumptions

As it pertains to this research, I assumed there are African American leaders that have worked with, or are working with, an executive/leadership coach for a minimum of three months. It was also my assumption that the coaching service provided to African American leaders was traditional coaching and did not cross ethical lines into other professional helping interventions such as counseling or consulting. I also assumed that African American leaders that participate in the study entered into coaching voluntarily instead of as a performance management mandate made by their respective organizations. It was assumed that African American leaders who participated in this research were contracted with a coach that adequately demonstrated leadership coaching competencies. Lastly, it was assumed that the participants in the study demonstrated candor when responding to the interview research questions.

Scope and Delimitations

As with any profession, ongoing research may assist with ensuring that the profession thrives long-term and contributes to society in a meaningful way. This was the underlining purpose of this study. Research already exists regarding the efficacy of leadership coaching; however, research specifically focused on the efficacy of leadership coaching for ethnic groups such as African Americans was limited. The intention of this study was to contribute to the growth of the coaching profession. Furthermore, the desire from this study was to learn about the ways in which leadership coaching has and has not been effective for African American leaders. Having this content may ideally contribute to coach education.

There are boundaries associated with this study. First, the study focused on leaders that identify as African American. While it was equally important, exploring the efficacy of leadership coaching for other ethnic groups such as Latino, Native American or others was out of scope for this study. The study also focused on African American leaders in positions of power within their organizations. As an example, the study targeted African American leaders that were no more than five layers removed from the CEO of a Fortune 500 organization, or within three layers of the CEO if working within a small business. African American leaders working at a for-profit, not for-profit, or government agencies were within scope. More importantly, African American leaders who had specifically worked with or were working with a leadership coach were in scope, as opposed to those that were working with a career counselor or other type of employee assistance service that may have been available to them. Therefore, African

Americans who were in a junior leadership position, or in a non-leadership position, were not invited to participate in the study.

Limitations

There were limitations within this study. First, the completion of work with an executive/leadership coach was based on the admission of the African American leader versus being validated. This study was limited to the lived experiences of the African American leader. While it was possible that a respective coach may have supplementary context that could elaborate on a participant's level of participation and displayed behavior, the focus of the study was limited to the perspective of the leader participating in the study. Self-selection bias was another limitation of this study. While perhaps not likely, it was possible that a leader that was not verifiably African American may have identified as such. Because self-identification as African American was a selection criterion for this study, the leader's declared ethnicity was honored versus challenged or omitted. Another potential limitation was the inability to control who self-selected to participate in the study. There was risk that the majority of participants who opted into the study had positive experiences while working with a coach or vice versa. If this occurred, it could limit the ability to gain meaningful and balanced insight.

Confirming the certification and/or credentials of the executive coaches that the research participants referred to was not intended to be validated. It was possible that an African American leader may have worked with a coach that had not completed formal coach certification training and said coach may not have been credentialed by an accredited coaching organization. While it could be assumed that a coach's training,

certification or lack thereof may have an impact on the African American leader's expressed lived experiences. Even still, this study stayed focused on the leader versus the coach's credibility.

Significance of the Study

It was acknowledged that there was vast research available regarding leadership development through executive coaching. Substantial research was found pertaining to leadership development for White leaders, while insufficient research was found pertaining to the study of diverse leaders, or the perspectives of diverse leaders pertaining to leadership development (Chin et al., 2016). The uniqueness of this study was a focus on perceptions that African American leaders held specifically regarding their lived leadership development experiences while working with an executive coach. Results from this study may lead to enhanced awareness about if and how leadership coaching was an effective leadership development intervention for African American leaders and the perceived importance or benefit of working with an African American executive coach.

This study could potentially contribute to the leadership coaching profession. Opportunities to improve leadership coaching methods for African American leaders were gained because of the study, especially for ethnic minorities that are working with a coach to help improve their leadership brand and respect as a leader. In the spirit of social change, this study ideally could lead to increased numbers of successful African American leaders that serve as role models for emerging leaders in for-profit and non-profit organizations.

Summary

In summary, research on the effectiveness of leadership coaching for African American leaders was limited. As such, the study explored leadership coaching as a leadership development intervention for African American leaders to bring clarity to the lived experiences of a sample of African American leaders that have and/or are working with a leadership coach. While critical race theory was considered, the theoretical premise for this study was self-discrepancy theory. The scope for the intended phenomenological study was limited to leaders that identify as African American. The target participants for the study were gender agnostic.

The study was anchored on qualitative research questions that sought to understand the lived experiences of African American leaders that experience leadership coaching and preferred considerations when selecting a coach to work with. There were limitations pertaining to the study due to the qualitative nature and sample size. In lieu of the limitations, there was potential for at least minimal transferability for other leaders that work with a leadership coach and identify as a minority from an ethnicity perspective.

Chapter 2 features evidence of extensive review of existing literature that pertains to the research study topic. The literature review explored relative topics such as the history of leadership coaching, the efficacy of leadership coaching in general, cross-cultural coaching, leadership barriers for African American leaders, and other pertinent topics. The subsequent literature further expands on what was available regarding leadership coaching and aspects relative to African American leaders.

Chapter 2: Review of the Literature

Introduction

This study intended to explore the lived experiences of African American leaders that have worked with a leadership coach and identify factors for effectiveness of the experience. The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2019) showed a significant disparity between the number of African American leaders in leadership positions as compared to White leaders. As such, the research topic was an important topic to understand, with hopes of contributing to an increase of African Americans in leadership positions.

Researching existing literature is an essential step in an empirical research study. As such, extensive review of literature was completed for this study. During this stage of the research process, significant research was discovered on the topic of leadership coaching. Various sources were used to inform this research study including peer-reviewed journal articles, dissertations, and textbooks, with a majority focus on works published between 2015 and 2020. Key themes that emerged from reviewing existing literature include the history of leadership coaching and general efficacy, how coaching was leveraged, and limitations of leadership coaching for African American leaders. These sources will provide context before going into the data collection phase of the research study.

Literature Search Strategy

An extensive review of existing literature pertaining to the topic of leadership coaching in general and leadership coaching for African American leaders was completed. The results from the review of past research contributed to the design of the

research purpose, research question, and overall framework for the study. The review included various academic databases including but not limited to the following: Journal of Managerial Psychology, International Coaching Psychology Review, Journal of Applied Behavioral Science, Journal of Management Development, The Humanistic Psychologist, Journal of Cultural Diversity, Journal of Economy & Society, Journal of Applied Social Psychology, International Coaching Psychology Review, International Journal of Educational Leadership, and Management and Consulting Psychology Journal: Practice and Research. Various key words were leveraged to find relative research. Examples of key search words used include *leadership coaching*, *leadership coaching and history*, *leadership coaching and African American*, *leadership coaching and black leader*, *self-discrepancy theory*, *executive coaching*, *executive coaching and African American* and *executive coaching and Black leader*, *psychological safety*, and *cultural competence*.

Theoretical Foundation

Self-discrepancy theory was the chosen theoretical platform for this research. As discussed in chapter 1, self-discrepancy theory seeks to explain the disconnect between how a leader may perceive the expectations of how they perform, versus how they prefer to perform (Barnett et al., 2017). As a result of a leader's internal conflict with perceived external pressures, implications such as emotional distress, lower productivity, or job dissatisfaction could manifest (Higgins, 1987). Based on research completed by Barnett et al. (2017), African American leaders prefer to be their authentic self, but they perceive a need to suppress their authentic self for the sake of living up to perceived expectations.

Lastly, a leader's sense of purpose may deteriorate when they feel external pressure to show up in a way that contradicts their authentic self (Stanley & Burrow, 2015).

Additional Theories

While self-discrepancy theory was the chosen theory for this study, the literature review highlighted additional theories that could be considered for future research on the topic of African American leaders and experiences leading up to and during a leadership coaching experience. One example of a theory that could be considered for future research was critical race theory. Critical race theory explains the dynamic where racism was accepted as a norm, and underrepresented groups such as African Americans are more likely to experience racism-related oppression (DeMatthews, 2016).

As it pertains to African American leaders, critical race theory may help to explain why African American leaders feel that leadership coaching may or may not support their performance and potential within their organization. Critical race theory may also inform perceptions that African American leaders may hold regarding the chemistry that they may feel with an African American executive coach as compared to a White executive coach. In other words, critical race theory may help to explain an African American leader's preference for working with an African American executive coach. Even still, this research study utilizes one theory as a basis, which was self-discrepancy theory because it aligns more appropriately with the intended research questions.

A third theory that was used to inform leadership coaching was self-determination theory. Self-determination theory explains how leaders strive to form a connection

between their past experience and the experience they choose to have, which in turn develops into intrinsic motivation (Taylor et al., 2019). Having intrinsic motivation supports the coaching process, especially when a leader feels passionate about achieving more impactful results through thinking, feeling, and doing things differently from their normal stance. Leaders with a high degree of intrinsic motivation are more likely to achieve their desired outcomes from a coaching engagement (Taylor et al., 2019).

Another theory used in leadership coaching was intentional change theory. Intentional change theory focuses on explaining how leaders change. According to Taylor et al. (2019), intentional change theory posits the following steps to the leadership change process: a) declaring a goal for change, b) measuring the gap between the current self and the desired future self, c) creating a learning curriculum for change, d) experimenting new approaches, and e) garner support from trusted relationships for feedback and observations.

Literature Review

The following section demonstrates expansive literature research to ensure a deep understanding of the intended study. Various aspects were explored, such as the history of leadership coaching, coaching models, existing research on African American leaders, and other aspects related to inspiring the need to work with an executive coach. It was critical for me to complete a thorough investigation into existing research pertaining to the topic of study. The following section demonstrates due diligence in learning about leadership coaching, existing research pertaining to African American leaders, as well as

factors that may contribute to an African American leader wanting to solicit leadership development assistance from an executive coach.

Leadership Coaching History and Efficacy

Leadership coaching is a developmental intervention aimed at helping a leader declare their goals, increase awareness of their gaps, craft a plan to close the gap, and provide a safe space for vulnerability and accountability (MacIntyre, 2020). Additionally, leadership coaching is a \$2.3 billion-dollar profession that serves across various industries (Fatien & Nizet, 2019). Examples of industries in which leadership coaching is popular includes financial, manufacturing, technology, education, health, marketing state government, federal government agencies, and retail. Leadership coaching is designed for application in both for-profit and non-profit organizations, as well as small, medium, and large organizations. Through the use of models and frameworks, coaching is intended to transform a leader's performance and thinking (Taylor et al., 2019).

Leadership coaching was traditionally reserved for leaders in the executive ranks. Senior leaders such as CEOs were the intended audience of leadership coaching when the professional initially emerged, which contributed to the service being referred to as executive coaching (Van Oosten et al., 2019). Over the past few years, leadership coaching has been expanded to serve emerging leaders and middle management that are projected to develop into executive positions in the future (Fatien & Nizet, 2019).

Studies demonstrated positive outcomes because of investing in leadership coaching (Van Oosten et al., 2019). Gregory and Wiles (2018) studied the topic of executive coaching. The researchers confirmed the efficacy of executive/leadership

coaching in general. The literature can serve useful for explaining how coaching should occur and what the experience may look like for leaders that are working with an executive coach. Leadership coaching was described as a method for helping leaders to make sense of their current and future state (Fatien & Nizet, 2019). Results from a study further support the benefits of leadership coaching as a leadership development approach with a particular lens on improving a leader's self-efficacy (Dwyer, 2019). Leaders endure a high degree of stress given their high-stake accountabilities. Leadership coaches have shown the ability to help leaders lead through stress, which helps to avoid negative consequences to an organization's bottom line (Rook et al., 2019).

Use of Leadership Coaching

Research shows the use of leadership coaching has increased over the years and has expanded beyond the executive ranks to emerging leaders and those that are new to management positions (Van Oosten et al., 2019). Leaders are rewarded with a high sense of responsibility for self, those that they lead, and business results that they are accountable for. Leaders are also reliant on their teams and peers to support decision making, people management, and the achievement of business results (Berman, 2019).

Leveraging an unbiased third party may be viewed as a benefit.

Leadership coaching was evidenced to be effective as an intervention for imposter syndrome (Kuna, 2019). According to Lee and Morfitt (2020), imposter syndrome occurs when someone suffers from low confidence to the point of feeling insufficient in the eyes of others, and a heightened occurrence in African American women was noted. The effects of self-discrepancy theory that were previously discussed can compound this

issue. Kuna (2019) also found through their research that some executive leaders, especially leaders that are in the C-suite, often rely on executive coaches as an antidote to feeling lonely and without support while sitting at the top of an organization. In summary, working with a leadership coach may help a leader process the factors that contribute to their feelings of inferiority while increasing confidence.

Leadership coaching has proven to be beneficial for addressing needs pertaining to behavioral modification, upgraded skillsets, mindset shifts, relationship building capability, emotional intelligence, life balance, and overall leadership effectiveness (Van Oosten et al., 2019; Wittmer & Hopkins, 2018). Leadership/executive coaching was also noted as beneficial when the coach a) served as a mirror for the leader by restating or paraphrasing what was heard from the leader; b) serving as a memory bank by reminding a leader about past insights that they gained and how to leverage the insights in the current state; c) providing candid and direct feedback to a leader regarding their strengths and opportunities for growth as a leader; and d) serving as their accountability partner and cheerleader to support their progress in their development and growth (Wasylyshyn, 2019).

Leadership coaching was also an empirically proven intervention for preparing leaders for what was required to effectively lead change within an organization (MacIntyre, 2020). Other common topics that inform coaching goals include enhanced listening, emotional intelligence, strategic thinking, leader identity and work / life balance (MacIntyre, 2020). Other development needs that coaching may be used to support

include unconscious bias and inclusion, giving actionable performance feedback, team leadership, motivating and inspiring others, influence, and conflict management.

For some leaders, leadership or executive coaching relationship was taking on a new form. One study showed a perception that executive leaders appreciate working with an external coach due to their ability to leverage them as a trusted advisor (Rathmell et al., 2019). Another study showed an increase in executive performance as a result of an executive coach serving as a trusted advisor (Wasylyshyn, 2019). Wasylyshyn (2019) further warns coaches to ensure they are adequately prepared to serve leaders as a trusted advisor, especially considering the sensitive nature of the conversations that are typically had when advising occurs. While coaching was intended to be high on asking questions and lower on giving answers, it appears that some senior leaders are presenting needs for more expanded service from a leadership coach.

Coach Competency

Leadership coaches gain coaching skills through means that include informal training and formal accredited training through a university or credentialing bodies, such as the International Coach Federation. The International Coach Federation (2020) accredits coach training programs that include instructional focus on nine coaching competences. The first two are adhering to ethical guidelines per the International Coach Federation and establishing a coaching contract for an end-to-end coaching engagement, as well as approach for confirming the goals for each specific coaching session. Coaches are also evaluated on their ability to establish rapport with a coaching client with intent to create a space for trust and vulnerability, their presence and how they show up for their

client, and their listening skills, which go beyond what a coaching client shares verbally. A coach must seek to listen for what was said non-verbally and/or what was omitted. Coaches must also ask questions that are open-ended and invite the coaching client to reflect and think about themselves and/or a situation beyond the current state. Another competency is the coach's ability to offer balanced direct communication that is respectful and intended to serve as a verbal mirror for a client. This goes into helping clients reflect on the insights they may gain about themselves or a situation as a result of the discussion held during a coaching session. Lastly, coaches must partner with a client to design a plan for taking action on their improvement journey, confirming adequate accountability and support are in place for the client to successfully achieve their planned goals. Inferring from the coach competency model established by the International Coach Federation, there are specific guidelines and skills that a declared certified leadership coach should be able to adequately demonstrate on a consistent basis.

In addition to coach specific training, coaches typically have an extensive business background and/or have experience as a licensed psychotherapist (Yanchus et al., 2020). Kovacs & Corrie (2017) posit a need for leadership coaches to be equipped to serve leaders with a variety of tools, frameworks, and models versus a one size fits all approach to address the volatility and uncertainty that exists in organizations and beyond. Berry (2020) asserts a need for leadership coach training to include frameworks for helping coaches make enhanced rational decisions, as opposed to allowing unconscious bias to inform decisions they may make about how to support their clients.

Coaching Modes and Frameworks

There are similarities between leadership coaching and psychotherapy. Examples of similarities include considering how a client is behaving, how they are thinking and how they are feeling (Yarborough, 2018). Just as there are similarities, there are also differences. The distinction between psychotherapy and coaching pertains to depth and focus. Coaching is intended to acknowledge emotions; however, it was not designed to go deep into the emotional domain or healing as with psychotherapy (Yarborough, 2018). Simply, coaching is focused more on the future versus a reflection of the past (Yarborough, 2018). Although purposefully different from psychotherapy, some executive/leadership coaches incorporate psychological theories, frameworks, and models within their coaching approach. As an example, cognitive coaching was a model that originated in 1984 with the intent to help self-guided leaders to solve their needs and develop their own conclusions as a result of being asked a series of open-ended questions by a coach (Wise & Hammack, 2011).

Coaching specialization was something for consideration as well. Performance coaching and developmental coaching are a couple of examples worth naming. Performance coaching aims to help a leader enhance or upgrade their performance or behaviors, while developmental coaching was aimed at helping a leader think differently, expansively and / or inclusively (Yarborough, 2018). Yarborough (2018) also shared six principles of leadership coaching that coaches should deploy when working with a leader:

a) Ensure the environment was conducive for safely challenging the leader's current mental models and behavior, b) allow the leader to define the goals for coaching,

c) facilitate a conversation with the leader that invites exploration, d) create space for the leader to develop from within versus based on external factors, e) leverage creative experiential opportunities and f) model or demonstrate the behaviors that the leader was working to develop.

Leadership Coaching Limitations

Research findings indicate that it was possible for a coaching client to not feel or demonstrate growth after working with an executive coach. This serves as precedence for the hypothesis that ethnic minorities who have worked with an executive coach to address respect related perceptions may feel incomplete with regard to goals for coaching (Baron et al., 2011). Another limitation as it pertains to leadership coaching was ethics and the standards to which a leadership coach holds themselves to. A study highlighted that the degree to which a leadership coach holds themselves to a code of ethics was conditional based on their experience, preference for strict versus loose application, assessment of the relevance of the code of ethics, person they are coaching and the organization they are contracted with (Diochon & Nizet, 2015). In the absence of consistently followed coaching ethics, the window opens to risk of disproportionate treatment of coaching clients. Another potential limitation pertains to the degree to which a leadership coach was trained to ethnically diverse clients. It was recommended that leadership coaches are adequately educated on diversity intelligence and can pivot their approach to meet the diverse needs of their clients (Wittmer & Hopkins, 2018). This would be especially important when coaching African American leaders.

Lastly, a leader that demonstrates low motivation to change may limit the effectiveness of an overall coaching engagement. Bozer, Sarros and Santora (2013) completed research and found a significant linkage between how motivated a leader was about working with a leadership coach prior to the start of the engagement and self-reported achievement as a result of a completed coaching engagement. Throughout this upcoming study, it was interesting to listen for responses from research participants that pertain to their degree of motivation to work with a leadership coach and to what degree of improvement they perceive resulted from their coaching engagement experience.

African American Leaders in Business

Research confirms the under-representation of diverse leaders which includes African American leaders. Some researchers assert a need for increased numbers of diverse leaders in executive level positions and board positions (Chanland & Murphy, 2018). A quantitative study of almost 400 public companies in multiple countries showed a statistically significant relationship between profitable business results and having diverse leaders sitting in executive leadership seats (Chanland & Murphy, 2018). Leadership development offerings such as leadership coaching may aid minority leaders with their quest and readiness for the executive ranks.

Additional research supports the potential of a financial downfall when organizations knowingly or unconsciously continue oppressive practices that have negative consequences for diverse employees and customers (Makino & Oliver, 2019). As such, it was inferred that failure to invest in elevating diverse leaders within an organization may have negative consequences for an organization.

Competency bias was another aspect that impacts diverse leaders such as African American leaders. Research suggests there was risk that diverse leaders may be wrongly assessed as being incompetent or having a personality issue due to misunderstanding or misinterpreting the cultural norms of the diverse leader and as a result, the diverse leader lags in promotion opportunities as compared to non-minority leaders (Makino & Oliver, 2019). This research context pertaining to diverse leaders found in research supports the need for this study as it will seek to understand if and what thoughts African American leaders who have experienced leadership coaching hold about the effectiveness for setting them up for success in high leadership ranks.

Leadership Barriers for African American Leaders

A proverbial glass ceiling or constraint on upward mobility for African American leaders was a noted trend in research pertaining to African American leaders. First, Cook and Glass (2014) investigated the promotion rate of CEOs in the United States. The results from their study showed that white male leaders were promoted into CEO positions significantly more than ethnic minority leaders. An evaluation of executive leadership in hospitals showed that only 14% of the executives were diverse, in lieu of having over 30% of patients being minorities (Zambrano, 2019).

Flores and Matkin (2014) completed a study pertaining to minority leaders and the barriers they experience. The researchers found that white male leaders continue to be the pro-typical version of a leader despite advancements in racial equality. Sy, Tram-Quon and Leung, (2017) investigated leadership development for ethnic minority leaders. They found that leadership development was typically designed to meet the needs and

beliefs of ethnic majority leaders versus ethnic minority leaders. Nelson (2016) researched African Americans in senior executive positions in the U.S. government and found that a mere 11.4% of the senior executives within the Department of Defense were African American. Davis and Maldonado (2015) completed research on the topic and concluded that research was lacking on how both race and gender influence leadership development needs, especially as it pertains to African American female leaders. Wilson (2014) completed a study on diversity and the perceived glass ceiling as it pertains to leadership positions and culture. The research results confirm the need for ongoing improvement with regard to ethnic minority leaders breaking through the glass ceiling and suggestions for doing so.

Other research advocated for a new term that represents the upward mobility constraint specifically for African Americans. The new term that was recommended to represent the plight of African Americans in organizations was color ceiling. “Color Ceiling refers to the invisible barriers that impede financial equity, employment equity, and promotional advancement for African Americans in the workforce. In arenas where equality should be the end result, prejudicial and indomitable barriers, which have resulted in financial and promotional gaps, persist for African Americans” (Osaro, 2017, p.3). Osaro (2017) also confirmed there was evidence to show a significant compensation gap between White and African American leaders.

Similar to the glass or color ceiling, another barrier for African American leaders was the crab in a barrel phenomenon. Research shows this can occur when female and / or minorities report into the same supervisor or organization (Paustian et al., 2017).

Additionally, minorities feel in competition with other minorities with the premise that there are limited slots for upward mobility for minorities (Paustian et al., 2017).

Furthermore, Paustian et al. (2017) recommend that organizations aim to increase diversity of their employees and leadership positions to mitigate the risk and impacts from crab in a barrel mentality.

Another aspect for exploration was an additional barrier experienced by African American female leaders. Research shows there are fewer African American women in leadership positions within organizations as compared to other genders and ethnicities (Livingston et al., 2012). A challenge that African American women face when in leadership positions was the risk of being misunderstood and being labeled as angry when their white counterparts that display the same behavior would be interpreted as being strong and assertive (Livingston et al., 2012). This challenge should be understood and acknowledged during a coaching relationship with an African American female leader.

Influence of Spirituality on African American Leaders

Spirituality was a pivotal aspect of being African American and can influence how African American leaders lead within organizations (Small, 2019). Research shows a connection between leaders that hold a strong spiritual base tend to demonstrate empathy and high ethical standards (Small, 2019). Research supports how leaders with high spiritual platforms tend to inspire higher productivity, leadership following, lower attrition, and employee overall engagement (Small, 2019). The relevancy to this study was the potential for spirituality to influence beliefs and / or behaviors shown by African

American leaders that may enable or get in the way of professional growth within organizations. As such, this context was important as it relates to this research study and understanding the lives of African American leaders.

Social Dominance and Discrimination

Social dominance and discrimination are additional themes that emerged during the review of literature. Research confirms that African Americans experience a high degree of discrimination while working in organizations in the form of separatism, significantly less compensation as compared to White counterparts and recruiting / selection processes (Wingfield & Chavez, 2020).

Hoyt and Simon (2016) offered research that examined how implicit leadership theory and social dominance perspectives impact ethnic minority leaders. Their study demonstrated that social dominance has a negative impact on the performance evaluations of minority leaders. This supports the notion that ethnic minority leaders are confronted with barriers.

Discrimination was a key concern for African Americans. A study that included 806 African American participants demonstrated a significant correlation between experiencing discrimination and suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder as result (Brooks et al., 2018). Banindro et al. (2019) completed a quantitative study consisting of 176 American employees and found that the discriminatory beliefs held by the employees that were informed by external factors had a significant influence on their perception of discrimination within the workplace as well as how they perceived the culture within the organization. The study also concluded that perceptions of discrimination within an

organization was higher if an organization's performance management practice incentivizes individual achievement over team achievement due to the competitiveness that results from individualized incentives (Banindro et al., 2019). Another study consisting of 310 participants confirmed that when employees suspect discriminatory practices, their commitment and performance suffers and ultimately may lead to attrition from the organization (Qablan & Farmanesh, 2019). The inference from this was some African American leaders who learned from societal influences that they are inferior and / or have to work harder than their White counterparts may be more sensitive to discrimination in the workplace.

Cross-Cultural Coaching

It was possible for a leadership coach and a leader that was being coached by them to be the same or different from an ethnicity and / or cultural perspective. When this was true, cross-cultural coaching should be a mindful act. Cross-cultural coaching suggests the idea that a coach and leader being coached by said coach would come to an agreement on how they can work together with common frameworks and mindsets that feel comfortable for both parties versus just one (Kliewer & Ndirangu, 2019). Furthermore, research indicates an increasing need for leadership coaches to educate themselves on cultural awareness as the potential for them to work with diverse leaders increases (Mattar et al., 2018). The same benefit was listed for leaders. Leaders that demonstrate a strong competency for leading across differences tend to be better equipped to transform organizations and demonstrate a higher degree of adult maturity (Woodland, 2016). The relevance for this research pertains to the question regarding

coach matching for African American leaders. The study will listen for the lived experiences of a coaching relationships especially when the coach and leader identify as different from each other.

Psychological Safety

Psychological safety was another aspect for consideration as it pertains to this study. First, psychological safety was defined as the degree of comfort that an individual may feel with regard to being and showing their authentic self to others (Woodson, 2020). Similar to what was previously described in the section about self-discrepancy theory, the degree to which African American Leaders feel a strong sense of psychological safety was in question. Psychological safety can be impaired or disrupted due to factors related to post-traumatic stress disorder. Research shows that African Americans are more likely to suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder than Whites (Brooks et al., 2018). As such, there was risk that an African American leader may feel psychologically unsafe due to a variety of factors that they may have experienced within or external to their organization. Based on this, it was inferred that the absence of or need to increase psychological safety may hinder leadership performance for an African American leader. Improving psychological safety may be factor in an African American leader choosing to work with an executive coach.

An additional concept for awareness was that African American's who successfully achieve leadership ranks, sometimes feel the burden of being the beacon or example for other African Americans who aspire to reach the executive ranks (Roysircar et al., 2017). Woodson (2020) also posits that African American female leaders run the

risk of being undervalued unless they conform to the status quo behaviors of those that are typically in leadership positions, essentially White male, and female leaders. It was interesting to explore perceptions of psychological safety in the workplace for male and female African American leaders that will participate in this study.

Cultural Competence

Cultural competence was a relative subject for this study. First, cultural competence advocates for a mindset that respects and appreciates all human beings regardless of their differences in ethnicity, upbringing, or other diverse indicators (Di Stefano, Cataldo & Laghetti, 2019). Furthermore, cultural competence was essential for corporations that have or aspire to have global presence. Organizations that have global presence, must be familiar with and adapt to the cultural norms of all countries in which they establish business (Di Stefano et al., 2019). The same degree of cultural competence was essential within an organization that consists of multicultural employees. It was also prudent for organizations to recognize the diverse needs that multi-cultural employees may have in order to serve at their best capacity versus expecting all employees to adapt to one culturally insensitive model (Di Stefano et al., 2019).

Review of literature showed additional support for improving cultural competency within organizations. Another study sought to research what would happen if an investment was made on educating executive level leaders and staff on cultural competence. As a result of the study, a conclusion was made that introducing interventions that create and / or enhance cultural competence had a positive influence on

overall employee performance and employee motivation to work for the organization, especially African American employees (Weech-Maldonado et al., 2018).

As it pertains to African American's, African-centered psychologists assert that it was imperative to understand and incorporate awareness of cultural norms within developmental interventions versus assuming that developmental interventions designed for White leaders would be applicable (Roysircar et al., 2017). The relevancy for this research study was curiosity about how the benefits of cultural competency within an organization or the lack of cultural competency influences an African American leadership coaching engagement goals and experience throughout the coaching lifecycle. This context was also prudent for executive coaches to keep in mind when serving African American leaders.

Summary and Conclusion

In summary, it was important for this study to have awareness of the literature that already exists on this topic. Literature exists regarding various aspects of leadership coaching and some literature exists regarding diverse leaders such as African American leaders. Aspects from the literature research that will serve useful for this study include context on what leadership coaching was, the history of the intervention, how it was typically applied, coach training requirements, limitations of coaching, psychological safety, cultural competence, and other aspects for consideration. The key insight gained as a result of the literature review was there are multiple aspects for exploration when assessing the effectiveness of coaching for African American leaders. During the

phenomenological research phase of this study, the researcher listened for any shared context regarding the topics explored during the literature review phase of the study.

Chapter 3: Research Method

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to explore the lived experiences of African American leaders as they pertain to their experience working with a leadership coach. The research method was of qualitative nature and derived from phenomenology. This approach examines the lived experience of participants in a study, as well as the way the participant makes sense of their experience (Smith, 2011). A viable participant identification approach was purposive sampling, which refers to the selection of participants that have experienced a particular phenomenon (Groenewald, 2004). An example of a potential execution approach includes the following steps: reviewing the original transcript from each completed interview while listening to the recorded interview; capturing descriptive, linguistic, and conceptual comments noted from the transcript; identifying the emerging themes, d) mapping the emerging themes for connectivity; repeating the prior steps on subsequent transcripts; and identifying patterns that emerge across all transcripts (Smith et al., 2009). Data were then obtained from interview transcripts and coded or analyzed for key terms and themes. The following section will elaborate on the specific research approach that was used for this study.

Research Design and Rationale

As previously declared, the intended qualitative research design was derived from the phenomenological approach, which involves a series of interviews with participants that align with a research study. The output from the interviews is then analyzed for themes, new insights, and application for future use. The rationale for using

phenomenology was that the approach will aid in the researcher's ability to understand the worldview and experience of the participants, which was supported by research (Passmore & Fillery-Travis, 2011). Passmore and Fillery-Travis (2011) also confirmed that phenomenological research was an effective approach to use when performing research on topics such as executive coaching. Furthermore, a deeper understanding and appreciation can be gained about the lived experiences of others when perspectives are shared directly from a participant to a researcher (Englander, 2019). This approach also provides an opportunity for a researcher to probe the participant for clarity, and this opportunity would be less likely if using another approach such as the quantitative method.

It was acknowledged that alternative research approaches could have been leveraged. One alternative approach could be the case study method for qualitative research. The case study approach was intended for the exploration of a particular phenomenon or event (Burkholder et al., 2016). The intention for this study was to explore the perspectives and experiences of African American leaders that leveraged leadership coaching as a method for leadership development. As such, the case study method was not relevant.

Ethnography was another example of an alternative research approach that could be applicable for this intended study. The ethnography research approach evaluates the way a group of individuals that share cultural norms behave with regard to a research topic (Burkholder et al., 2016). In this case, the study would be on the cultural aspect of the group. Rather than performing interviews, ethnography requires a researcher to

complete a deep immersion into the culture being studied and doing so over a significant amount of time to acquire sufficient context for analysis and conclusion purposes (Burkholder et al., 2016). Phenomenology, on the other hand, focuses more on individuals that have something in common, and context was acquired through a short series of interviews. Given the intention of this study along with time constraints, applying a phenomenological approach was better suited for this research study.

Role of the Researcher

The role of the researcher in this study was to serve as observer. The researcher will facilitate recorded interviews and will observe the non-verbal and verbal responses provided by the participants. The researcher will refrain from interviewing participants with whom a personal relationship exists or formerly existed. Depending on who responds to the study solicitation on LinkedIn or another network, there was potential that I would be familiar with the participant because of past employment at a similar company. Risk of supervisory or instructor relationship was low as no past direct reports were included in this study.

There was also potential for researcher bias in this study. Notably, I identify as an African American woman. Thus, I had a bias that some African Americans are disadvantaged when compared to leadership development investments for non-minority leaders. Another bias pertains to leadership coaching and the efficacy for African American leaders. I have been a certified and credentialed leadership coach for 15 years and have experience coaching directly and overseeing other coaches that coach leaders of all ethnic and cultural backgrounds, including African American. As such, I held a bias

that the effectiveness of leadership coaching was more aligned with the coach's competency, clarity of goals for coaching, and the coaching client's commitment to the process. Similarly, I hold a bias that when these conditions are met, the efficacy of leadership coaching was ethnicity agnostic. Even still, my role was to suppress all bias and objectively listen for the lived experiences of the participants and make assessments based on the coded data from the interviews.

Regarding ethical issues, the goal was to maintain all ethical guidelines. At the same time, there was potential for familiarity of the participants due to my network as a leadership coach, which was utilized to identify participants for the study. In this event, I abided by research ethical expectations when conducting research. Each participant, regardless of familiarity with me, received consistent information about the purpose of the study, the interview process, confidentiality and how the qualitative data collected were leveraged. Lastly, no incentives were offered to any potential or confirmed participants to maintain the integrity of the study.

Methodology

Participant Selection Logic

As previously mentioned, the intention was to study organizational leaders that are African American and currently are or have worked with an executive coach for a minimum of 3 months since the start of their coaching engagement. Coaching engagements that have ended would need to have been completed within the last 24 months of the research interview. The estimated volume of African American leaders to be interviewed was 8-12. The solicitation of participants was gender and age agnostic.

For the purpose of soliciting participants for this study, the following question was asked: “Are you an African American serving as a leader in a for-profit or not-for-profit organization and have completed a coaching engagement with an executive coach over the last two years, or are currently working with an executive coach for a minimum of three months?” The question helped to identify potential participants that meet the intended ethnical aspect of this study. The question was intended to eliminate potential participants that have not worked with an executive coach, and thus may not be in a position to adequately inform the intended learning from this research study. More specifically, the inclusion criteria for participants was the following: (a) a leader that identifies as African American; (b) has at least 5 years of experience in a leadership position; (c) interest in participating in the research study seeking to understand the efficacy of leadership coaching for African American leaders; (d) the leader currently works in a leadership capacity at a for-profit or not-for-profit organization; (e) leader holds an executive title within their organization such as Vice President, Senior Vice President, or above; (f) the leader worked with a leadership coach within the last two years or was currently working with a leadership coach for at least three months for a total of six sessions; and (g) the leader grants consent to the researcher to contact them to schedule a research interview.

Participant Recruitment Channels

Five channels were leveraged to solicit participants for this study. The selected channels for finding and soliciting participants for this study were the Black Chamber of Commerce (Various chapters across the US); the Executive Leadership Council (ELC);

National Black MBA Association; Network of Leadership Coaching Firms; and (e) LinkedIn.

The following process steps were deployed for participant recruitment and the qualifying aspect of the study:

1. Sent introductory emails to contacts for the first four channels listed above from the my university-provided email address. Highlighted the importance of the study and the aspiration to inform the coaching profession on if and what adjustments may be needed when serving African American leaders during leadership coaching engagements. The email sent to channel contacts and the social media post included a link for the potential participant to complete for qualifying purposes.
2. Posted to professional social media site, LinkedIn.
3. Potential participants that responded to study solicitations also confirmed their participation interest by sending an email to the my university-provided email address.
4. Qualified respondents via a survey tool such as Google Surveys or Survey Monkey to ensure they are a match for the study. The qualifying questions are noted in Appendix C.
5. Scheduled a research interview with participants that met the qualifying criteria as a study participant and confirmed consent for contact. A link for scheduling the research interview was sent. The scheduling platform Acuity Scheduling was used.

6. Emailed an informed consent form to the participant via DocuSign included a summary of the study including the purpose, the nature of the interview, the interview process, disclosure that participation was completely voluntary and without an incentive or compensation, and confirmation of confidentiality and anonymity. The consent form also highlighted that the interview was recorded to facilitate the post transcription process for research purposes. The consent form asked the participant to sign to agree and acknowledge consent for their participation and for recording, transcribing, and leveraging their interview results for the purpose of the research study.
7. Facilitated the research interview with qualified participants. Depending on the location of the participant, interviews were conducted in person, via video conferencing such as Zoom, or via audio call. Offering these channels for communication was to ideally expand the pool of potential participants.
8. Completed member-checking by sending a summary of the interview to the participant for confirmation of accuracy.

Instrumentation

Qualitative data were collected via interviews completed in person, via video call, or audio via Zoom. When Zoom was used, a unique virtual meeting link and password was assigned for each interview for confidentiality and security reasons. With the participants consent, which was obtained via a signed consent form using DocuSign, all interviews were recorded for transcription purposes. Transcription was completed for the purpose of completing qualitative analysis.

Interviews were open-ended in nature for the purpose of soliciting lived experience context from the participants' point of view. The interview started with a brief introduction about me as the researcher and the purpose of the interview. The participant was reminded about confidentiality, anonymity, the recording of the conversation for research purposes only. The participant was asked for verbal confirmation of consent to record the interview. The participant was then asked about any questions or clarity that they may need prior to starting the interview and during the conclusion of the interview.

Assuming the participant was comfortable with proceeding, I started the interview process. The interview was mostly facilitated based on a list of standard sub-questions that sought to understand the aforementioned research questions. Table 1 illustrates the research questions, supporting interview questions and rationale for each.

Table 1*Interview Questions*

Research Question	Interview Question	Rationale/Theory Application
RQ1: What are the lived experiences of African American leaders that work with or have worked with an executive coach?	What brought you to coaching?	Self-Discrepancy Theory: Seek to explain if and what discrepancies between the leader's perception of what they need to develop and if that particular need was based on how they want to be or based on how they ought to be (Higgins, 1987).
	How long was your coaching engagement?	
	On a scale of 1-10, 10 being the best, how do you rate your overall experience in coaching? What led to that rating?	
	In what ways did coaching serve you?	Context Gathering
	How could coaching have served you more?	
	How did being an African American leader influenced your coaching experience?	
RQ2: What are the coach matching preferences of African American leaders as it pertains to a coach's ethnicity?	How was your coach determined?	Self-Discrepancy Theory – Seek to explain if and how discrepancies between the how the leader wants to be or based on how they perceive they should be like others and how it informs how they select a coach if given the option to choose.
	What factors were used for choosing your coach?	
	What was your coach's ethnicity?	
	What role did ethnicity play in your coach selection decision?	
	If you work with another coach in the future, what would be your preferred coach matching criteria, including ethnicity and why?	Context Gathering
	What might be the benefits and limitations of working with a coach that was not African American?	
	What else would you like to share that may be helpful for this study?	

Data Storage

Data storage was a key component of the research process, especially since the interviews were recorded. The recordings were saved in a secured cloud platform, such as a password protected box or iCloud. Recordings and transcripts were securely saved throughout the duration of the study. Recordings and transcripts will be destroyed/deleted five years from the date that I graduate from the doctoral program.

Data Analysis Plan

This study will deploy the Descriptive Phenomenological Psychological Method (DPPM). DPPM was introduced to psychological research in the early 1900s by Edmund Husserl (Giorgi & Giorgi, 2003; Giorgi, 2012). DPPM consists of three fundamental process steps. The steps include a) describing the experience of the research participants, b) completing a phenomenological reduction or in other words critically evaluating the expressed experiences and c) applying free imaginative variation to the lived experiences that are heard from participants of the study (Giorgi & Giorgi, 2003). In more granular terms, the DPPM steps that was used in this study will consist of the following.

Facilitating an interview with research participants. The interviews were scheduled to be 1 hour in length. The interview began with a reminder about the intention of the interview, confidentiality, the recorded nature of the interview, and the questions listed in Table 1. The interviews were performed via video using Zoom, via audio phone or in person, depending on the participant's geographic location and preference.

Transcription. Subsequently, the interview recordings were transcribed word for word. A secured transcription service was leveraged to capture the results from each

interview. The service NVivo by way of www.transcriptdivas.com was used given their offering for ethics confidentiality agreement, de-identification process for the data and end to end encryption data security protocol. Note that the participant's name will not be stated during the interview in order to protect anonymity during the data transcription stage reading the completed transcription.

Review and Synthesis. for a holistic view was performed reading the transcription again multiple times for meaning and noting on the transcription where psychosocial meaning was identified. The researcher will more specifically listen for thematic similarities between all the interviews to identify and understand any shared experiences among each of the research study participants transforming or categorizing the identified meanings into expressions related to the psychological meaning (Giorgi & Giorgi, 2003). The researcher will compare the responses for each research question across each of the interview transcripts. Synthesize and describe the themes that emerged across all interviews with regard to lived experience.

Data Coding and Analysis. With regard to the data that was collected from the interviews and subsequently coded, there are various coding methodologies that was leveraged. First, open coding seeks to identify thematic similarities across all interview data that can be formed into categories (Burkholder et al., 2016). Next, axial coding was leveraged. Axial coding entails analyzing the categories that emerge from the open coding process and identifying connection points within the categories (Burkholder, Cox & Crawford, 2016). Next, selective coding was completed with an aim for combining the results from open and axial coding. From this, generalized conclusions will result.

Issues of Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness was an essential aspect of a research study. As such, issues of trustworthiness were accounted for in this study. More specifically, the research design will account for credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

Credibility

Credibility was defined as having trust and assurance in the accuracy or validity of the research data and conclusions (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). A method for ensuring credibility was called triangulation. Triangulation aims to confirm how consistent the findings are and where there may be inconsistencies (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). During the analysis phase, the researcher will look for consistencies in the categories that emerge from the 8-12 interviews that was performed. A category was formed only if it was heard from a minimum of three respondents. When analyzing the transcribed data for themes, the rule of three will apply. When three or more of similar data points or descriptions of lived experiences emerge, it can be considered a theme (Burkholder et al., 2016). Credibility will also be confirmed through member-checking. Member-checking entails providing a summary of the interview to the participant to give them an opportunity to confirm accuracy and comprehensiveness (Burkholder et al., 2016). As such, a summary of the researcher's internalization of what was heard from the participant. As such, an interpretation of the context provided during the interview was provided to the participant via a copy of the interview transcript as well as the researcher's summary of insights gained.

Transferability

Transferability was concerned with how the conclusions from this study may be applied in different context (Lincoln & Guba,1985). Transferability was addressed through the thick description method. While following the thick description method, the researcher will create a detailed description of the setting of the interviews and the participants involved in the study, along with anonymized quotes to serve as evidence of the thematic assessments made. The thematic assessments made from the study was evaluated for application with other minority leaders or for other interventions such as counseling on African American leaders.

Dependability

Dependability was synonymous with reliability if compared to a quantitative research study and demonstrates that another researcher completing the same study would yield the same results (Burkholder et.al., 2016; Lincoln & Guba,1985). In the case of a qualitative study, dependability was established through the consistent use of standard questions during the research interviews. Triangulation was used to create *credibility* and thus would serve useful for dependability. In addition, the researcher will also use the audit trail method. All decisions made and processes followed during the study was documented in detail. An alternative approach for proving dependability could be asking an unbiased researcher to redo the coding process and compare their results with those found by the researcher of this study.

Confirmability

Confirmability refers to ensuring that the findings are solely based on the responses received from the interview and absent of bias (Lincoln & Guba,1985). The method that was used for confirmability was the use of a reflection journal. This approach calls for the researcher to maintain a journal in which they document their thought process and reflections about their own values and internalizations during the research lifecycle (Lincoln & Guba,1985). Audit trail was another potential method for ensuring confirmability. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), the audit trail method entails keeping a log of all steps completed during research. Having this method in mind, the researcher will document progress made during the research lifecycle.

Ethical Procedures

As with any reputable and empirical research study, there are ethical considerations that should be attended to. The intention of this study was to avoid and / or mitigate any harm or potential harm to participants that was interviewed for this research study. As such, this research proposal was presented to the Walden University IRB for approval prior to proceeding with the solicitation of participants.

There are two essential ethical considerations pertaining to the research study and they are privacy and confidentiality. According to the American Psychological Association (2017), researchers are expected to confirm a research study participant's consent to participate in the study and even more importantly, permission to record interviews. As aforementioned, the intention for this study was to confirm the participants consent to record and transcribe the interview via a signed consent form and verbally at

the start of the live interview. The consent form will also outline the commitment to confidentiality and anonymity of the research participant's responses throughout the duration of the research study and beyond. The intention will also be to avoid saying the participant's name during the recorded interview.

Other potential ethical concerns was accounted for. As it pertains to recruiting, it was possible for a leader that does not identify as an African American leader to express interest in participating in the study or may be offended by the specific design for interviewing African American leaders. If this risk should materialize, the person of interest was contacted with gratitude for their interest, and they would be educated on the intent of this particular research. Another potential risk could be a participant that completes the informed consent form and later chooses to end their participation in the study for some reason. The researcher will honor such request without judgement and will revisit the participant solicitation process to ensure the target sample of consenting participants are achieved.

Summary

In summary, much consideration has been applied to the design of the research method. To refresh, the two key research question that was explored in this phenomenological study include 1) What are the lived experiences of African American leaders that work with or have worked with an executive coach and 2) What are the coach matching preferences of African American leaders as it pertains to a coach's ethnicity? There was clarity for the role of the researcher, which was as an observer / interviewer. The research methodology was detailed and accounts for key considerations such as

ethical procedures and strategies to demonstrate trustworthiness of the data analysis.

Upon achievement of the proper approvals (i.e., IRB / URR), the researcher will proceed to the next stage in the research process.

Chapter 4: Results

Introduction

This phenomenological study explored the lived experiences of African American leaders that have worked with, or are working with, a leadership coach and to understand the factors made leadership coaching effective for them. A sub-factor for exploration was the perceived importance of working with an African American executive coach versus one of another ethnicity. The research questions of the study are as follows. What are the lived experiences of African American leaders that work with or have worked with an executive coach? What are the coach matching preferences of African American leaders as they pertain to a coach's ethnicity?

As shared in Chapter 1 and Chapter 3, the theoretical framework for this study was self-discrepancy theory. Self-discrepancy theory explains that when there is conflict between an individual's perception of who they should be and who they want to be, negative emotions can result (Barnett et al., 2017). The tenets of the theory also explain discrepancies between self and what they believe others want them to be, self and what they perceive others expect of them, and self-compared to what they expect from themselves (Higgins, 1987). In the context of this study, some African American leaders may hold a perception that they must present themselves like a White male leader to be selected for and to maintain an executive level position. Given the reminder about the research purpose, theoretical framework, and research questions, Chapter 4 will elaborate on the research process that was conducted. More specifically, Chapter 4 will explain the

research setting, demographics, data collection, data analysis, steps for trustworthiness, and the results.

Setting

Regarding setting, I conducted the research interviews with each participant remotely using the Zoom video conference platform. Each participant participated from their chosen location, such as their work office or home. Something to note is the research was completed during a global pandemic. As such, conducting the interviews virtually also attended to health safety needs for myself and the research participants.

I also listened for conditions that the participants shared that could potentially influence their experience and may influence how the research results would be assessed. Some participants noted organizational change and/or their own professional development as catalysts for entering a coaching engagement. One participant noted a concern about their relationship with their direct reporting chain, and thus wanted to work with a third-party resource for assistance. All in all, there were no significant influences noted because of what was learned during the interviews.

Demographics

Following IRB approval, the invitation to participate in this research study was posted on LinkedIn and shared with my network of leadership coaching firms. The invitation explained the research study and included a link to a qualification survey. A total of 38 potential participants completed the qualification survey. Of the 38 completed qualification surveys, 15 met all the criteria as a potential participant in this research study as described in Chapter 3. All 15 potential participants were sent an email including

a consent form and instructions for scheduling the research interview. Of them, 11 of the 15 potential participants replied to the email to confirm consent to participate in the research study and scheduled an interview.

A total of 11 participants were interviewed during the research study. Table 2 and Table 3 illustrate the disaggregated data based on the qualification demographics and participant genders. More specifically, nine of the participants identified as females and two of the participants identified as males. All the participants were based in the United States. Confirmation of age was not requested of the participants; however, they all presented as falling within the 35-50 age range. While all of the participants indicated they identify as African American via the qualification survey, one participant shared a Caribbean identity during the interview, and another shared a Nigerian identity. Both confirmed their selection on the qualification survey as African American due to living and working in the United States for multiple years.

Table 2

Qualification Demographics

Qualification	Count (#)
Completed the qualification survey	38
Qualified participant	15
Completed consent form and scheduled interview	11
Total completed interview	11

Table 3*Participant Gender*

Gender	Count
Female	9
Male	2
Total	11

Data Collection

Qualitative research data were collected via interviews, and I used Zoom video conferencing to virtually conduct the interviews. A unique virtual meeting link and password were assigned for each interview for confidentiality and security reasons. With the participants' consent via the consent form, all interviews were recorded for transcription purposes. Transcription was completed for the purpose of completing qualitative analysis.

Interviews were open-ended in nature for the purpose of soliciting lived experience context from the participants' point of view. Each interview started with a brief introduction about the researcher and the purpose of the interview. The participants were reminded about confidentiality, anonymity, and the recording of the interview for research purposes only. The participants were also asked for verbal confirmation of consent to record the interview. The participants were then asked if they had any questions or needs for clarity prior to starting the interview and during the conclusion of the interview.

Once each participant confirmed readiness to proceed, the interview process commenced. Table 4 illustrates the interview duration for each interview in minutes.

Each interview lasted between 22-45 minutes. A total of 358 interview minutes were completed, averaging 33 minutes per interview. The interviews were mostly facilitated based on a list of standard sub-questions that were aligned to the research questions. Interview questions were prepared for this study with the intention to solicit open-ended context regarding the lived experiences of each participant.

Table 4

Interview Duration

Interview #	Length of Interview (Minutes)
1	23
2	44
3	44
4	42
5	45
6	23
7	25
8	32
9	22
10	32
11	26
Total	358
Average	33

Data Analysis

For this research study, a variety of analytical approaches could have been used. As shared in Chapter 3, the Descriptive Phenomenological Psychological Method (DPPM) was selected as the intended method for this study (Giorgi & Giorgi, 2003; Giorgi, 2012). DPPM was an appropriate analytical method to explore and understand the lived experiences of African American leaders that have worked with a leadership coach, as well as to understand what factors made leadership coaching effective for them and to

understand any preferences as they pertain to the demographics of the leadership coach. DPPM was made up of three basic process phases. The phases included reporting the research participants' experiences; completing a phenomenological reduction, or critically analyzing the articulated experiences; and applying free imaginative variation to the lived experiences heard from study participants (Giorgi & Giorgi, 2003). The remainder of this section will discuss the analytical results from the qualitative research analysis.

Structured Experiences of African American Leaders to Coaching

Participant #1. Participant #1 shared they sought out working with a coach per the recommendation of their organization's CEO. Furthermore, they shared they are the only African American leader in the C-suite at their organization, and all of their White C-suite counterparts had all been sponsored for executive coaching in the past before them. They worked with an African American female coach and confirmed it was a positive experience. According to Participant #1, their executive coach effectively established trust and rapport with them. They said, "Coaching allowed me to be able to express my, my feelings and have a confidant to talk with outside of my firm."

Participant #1 shared more context regarding how the coach served them and how they could have served them more. Although Participant #1 appreciated the coach's approach, they preferred the coach to offer both coaching and mentoring. They said, "They never leave that role of coach...it never becomes mentor. They stay in that singular lane. And sometimes you actually want them to change lanes a little bit." Additionally, having an African American coach was an effective decision for Participant #1. They expressed that having a coach who shared similar experiences, "would be a lot

easier to relate and a lot easier to have those communication.” A shared leadership experience made leadership challenges easier for their coach to navigate.

Equally important to Participant #1 was getting diverse leadership perspective. They acknowledged potential benefits if they worked with a male Caucasian executive coach.

I'm not always the minority in the room when you think of it in the context of male and female. I also would love to get the perspective of what the white male who has been the majority all of the time throughout...what their perspective was because by combining the two perspectives, I believe will make me a better leader, better manager. Hopefully a better person.

Furthermore, Participant #1 shared their perspective on how a Caucasian executive coach would ideally interact with an African American leader.

I think that it's important for them to be open and honest with their opinion in guiding that African American executive you know, through the coaching experience. I think that oftentimes, you know, we have, we live in a society that's very politically correct. And so people often aren't their authentic selves with one another. And it's important for that coach to be their authentic self. Because that was, you know, that may be the experience that, that African American leader will have in the boardroom or inside of the office at some point in time and they should hopefully be prepared for that by their coach.

They described coaching as a process of creating synergy between a person who has navigational knowledge and experiences concerning leadership. They believed that these criteria are more important than race and gender.

Participant #2. Participant #2 described themselves as a novice leader. They entered a coaching engagement with a coach with hopes of becoming more structured and organized regarding how they lead their side of the organization. Without the funding support from their organization, they invested their own funds in support of their personal growth. They believed, “There's room to grow and different perspectives...to stay narrow in any vision was going to create some level of slow growth or no growth at all.”

Participant #2 valued the structure of the coaching engagement. For them, a good coaching structure quantifies the goals versus the outcome and the money they invested.

Participant #2 was critical about learning authentic information from a coach. Information conveyed to them should be new and genuine knowledge shared by a coach who learned and applied the leadership information from their own experience. For coaching to be effective for them, the coach must build a trustful relationship where knowledge shared to a learner was authentic. They stated, “It was personal when it's authentic. I think when people receive authenticity, they give it back.” This coaching expectation attracted them to select their coach outside the realm of their professional field, gender, and race.

While their preference for a coach did not include gender and race, Participant #2 stressed the incompatibility they experienced with a female Caucasian executive coach. Participant #2 shared that while there was recognition of them being a leader of color,

their coach did not understand the challenges African American leaders faced. Participant #2 described this incompatibility in a statement.

I think they see me. I think they do not understand. They are a white woman, understand the challenges that I face because in their world there are no challenges to be faced...I always try one comment to see how they respond, to know where I'm at with that subject. If it's not receptive then, alright. I already know where I'm at. Let's keep moving.

Participant #2 shared that while they had coach selection preferences, they selected based on their organization's criteria for a coach such as coach credentials and recommendations from people who were the majority race. Regardless, Participant #2 commended their coach on listening ability.

She listens, that was critical. Especially if you're coming in to help somebody, you can't tell them what to do unless you know what they do. So having the ability to really listen and not listen to respond. Okay. But a, a genuine listening to the fears. I mean, because there's a psychology to it, listening to the fears and the concerns the things where you think, oh, I'm excelling in this and she's like, okay, but maybe you're not, let's get you here. So again, I'm okay with coming straight at me. What she does well seems to be genuinely listening.

Listening skills was high on the priority list for Participant #2.

Participant #3. Participant #3 sought the help of a leadership coach to increase their self-awareness. They said, "There was a disconnect between me and my staff." Strong personality, lack of empathy, and weak communication skills were among their

recognized weaknesses as a leader. They found coaching as a safe space to be vulnerable about their weaknesses. They, however, had preferences on their coaching structure. They preferred their coach to be more mindful of their limitations and set the goals to improve these weaknesses. They felt that their coach thought of them as someone who was already great at something and did not need any coaching.

Participant #3 expressed valuing trust and confidentiality. They assumed that while their organization organized their coaching engagement, they would be matched with someone who would relate to their field and would support their developmental needs. According to Participant #3, relatability includes both ethnicity and experience in the field of work.

I don't think I would worry about ethnicity as much as I would worry about them being relatable to the work. Because I have some friends who are Caucasian, who are die hard rebel professionals in the work that I do. They don't see color; they just see the work. I don't think that was as important to me as knowing that the person understands the work that I do.

Participant #3 acknowledged that working with an African American coach would be beneficial in terms of “being culturally sensitive and aware of the dynamics of everyday life.” Participant #3 appreciated having a trustful working relationship with an African American coach because they felt understood without having to explain or translate.

Participant #3 also stressed the importance of diversity of thought. They worked with a lot of women in past and current organizations and would like to gain more insights from a male coach. They said: “I think having a different gender would've been

helpful.” Other criteria they mentioned was having an outsider coach who did not work with other colleagues within the organization.

Participant #4. Participant #4 was part of a succession plan where leadership coaching was an integral part of the career path within their organization. They considered coaching as an “opportunity” both for personal and career growth. Participant #4 claimed “I am a self-identified and tested introvert.” As a result, they wanted help from a coach to strengthen their social engagement skills. The COVID-19 pandemic necessitated a virtual coaching setting, which made the relationship difficult for Participant #4. They said, “It takes more time and effort out of me to get there.”

Participant #4 described their working environment as, “I worked for a very large fortune 100 company that was extremely matrixed and the leadership at the most senior level of the organization does not look like me from an ethnicity or gender perspective.” However, with limited options provided, they had a White male executive coach, who they justified had knowledge and expertise in leadership of a similar industry. They claimed the coach offered them more diverse perspectives: “he's bringing something different that I don't have into my sphere of thinking.” Even still, Participant #4 saw their ethnicity as a structural barrier to any kind of coaching, no matter how good the executive coach was. They hold a perception that White coaches are uncomfortable asking questions about African American heritage and that creates awkwardness. Participant #4 believed this awkwardness would not be a barrier with a coach who shared the same ethnicity. They further mentioned, “Race was not an uncomfortable topic for black people...but in talking with white people, it can become uncomfortable for them.”

When asked about how the coach could be more effective, Participant #4 expressed a desire for the coach to show up consistently as a coach. They said the following about their coach:

He has admitted that he sometimes straddles the line between coach and mentor and in his definition was that will come in and try and solve it where a coach was just going to ask the questions. I don't know if that was accurate or not as, you know, one professional to another, but I have found that sometimes he will lean in to say, oh, well, I experienced X, Y, Z. And I'm like, are you, are we solving, are we, are you giving me examples? So like just the clarity around that would be very helpful... So know if he said, oh, I'm, I'm overstepping into mentor, then I'd be like, yep. Nope. That's not how I want this relationship to work. I want this to be coaching.

Participant #4 was clear that they wanted a coach that would push their thinking in traditional coaching manner versus giving advice as a mentor. Interestingly, this was the direct opposite from Participant #1.

Participant #5. Participant #5 experienced two leadership coaching engagements in their career. Their most recent experience had been part of their organization's succession plan. They described this opportunity as, "I took on a new role within a large company where coaching was required for anyone arriving at that level." They claimed their first engagement was driven by the organization's objectives and not the guiding goals they wanted to work towards. As the company funded the coaching engagement, the selection of the coach was more based on their cadre of coaches that were vetted via

positive reviews and credentials. Participant #5 was matched with a Caucasian female coach. Participant #5 shared they looked for the “connection” aspect of a coach. They explained, “coaching was very much a connection piece. If you connect great, you gain value. If you don't, then it's just an exercise.” They however recognized that while connection was seemingly not present in their coaching relationship, the new perspectives offered to them by their coach were valuable. As such, they requested a coaching extension when the engagement matured. With the extension they felt the experience was more personally driven for them. They expressed this sentiment as, “I think allowing it to be driven by the individual from the get-go was more valuable than it being a company process... I think that's a more realistic view in the circumstances and maybe make it situational.”

Participant #5 experienced dissonance in their view about the influence of ethnicity in a successful leadership coaching engagement. This disconnect stemmed from living in two worlds of mainstreamed and an African American society. They described this sentiment as

More so in my more senior roles that's become the norm. Not white female, but Caucasian. There's not much offering of other alternatives...they bring a perspective that was the world or environment I do live in. I want to draw from that perspective... I'll talk to my girlfriends when I need my ethnicity side of it or that perspective... I think it's that balance between the two worlds for me was drawn that way. My personal relationships provide the ethnicity. My professional, rarely do I find professionals at my level.

Effectively, Participant #5 alluded to the need to work with a Caucasian coach that can offer perspective on effective leadership in the mostly Caucasian system they work in. At the same time, they need someone they can express themselves to that can relate to their lens and they solve for that need by speaking with their friends who are also African American leaders.

Participant #5 also explained a desire for their Caucasian coach to demonstrate sensitivity to if and how bias may show up in feedback they collect on their behalf. With regard to negative feedback the coach collected from Participant #5's manager about their communication approach, Participant #5 said:

You have to ask some questions about bias, like what biases are there. Yeah. And I don't know that that conversation happened. I don't know that there's a comfort in having that conversation. I don't, I think they'll talk about the relationship was broken, that this was this and, and I'm going. Yeah. But why, let's talk about that and let's talk about the trail of women before. So where's that push? I don't know. And I think when there's a double whammy in this instant female and black, I think it gets more sensitive both for the company and for the coach. So I'm not sure. I'm not sure.

In essence, Participant #5's position was that a Caucasian leadership coach that was supporting an African American leader will need to have their ears open for bias, be willing to call it out, and explore it on behalf of the minority leader they are supporting.

Participant #6. The decision to participate in leadership coaching was driven by their organization's career pathing efforts as well as their personal drive for professional

growth and development. They considered coaching as a valuable asset. Even after they left their organization, they still held on to the learning gained from their coach. They said, “that encouraged me to continue to have coaching that was being done, that I invested in myself for.” They stressed the importance of a structured coaching engagement. They appreciated having a plan to discuss scenarios and unique needs during coaching sessions.

Relatability was the top criteria for Participant #6 during their coach selection process. While credentials and positive reviews were important to them, relatability was more critical for them than ethnicity. They defined relatability as the coach having work experiences and professional grit similar to theirs. Relatability also meant the unspoken “chemistry” of the coach with them. They described this chemistry as, “I wanted to have a coach that I was able to let down my guard with that I could be transparent with and someone who I could be vulnerable, but more importantly, someone in which I could learn from.”

Participant #6 acknowledged the drawbacks of having an African American coach who they described mostly can establish the “chemistry” they were looking for. They said

They're not able to give you a different perspective... if they have not had the opportunity to work with a wide array of other ethnicities and backgrounds, they may have a very narrow focus as far as them being able to be objective and providing feedback and guidance.

However, they also explained, “the cons of working with someone that may not look like me was you don't have that relatability... they likely would require more explanation or the potential of them not being able to relate at all.”

Participant #7. Participant #7 expressed an opportunity for gaining more value from their coaching experience. They explained how coaching could have served them more.

...takeaway homework... I would love to have walked through more of those activities in real time with my coach to be able to apply some of the practices and then get real time feedback or an assessment of how I utilized it and applied it.

Participant #7 also shared that competing priorities made scheduling with their coach difficult. Participant #7 shared a unique perspective about coaching. As an example, coaching adds value to their leadership brand and their overall value by their peers. They described this perspective as follows:

Coaching was viewed as a form of differential investment... to be a BIPOC leader and show that or be able to say that my company invested in me was sort of an endorsement, a stamp of validation of myself as a leader.

They also emphasized “the perceived value that it carries,” when referring to coaching. Participant #7 equated coaching as a tool to position them for upward mobility and being twice as good as everyone else.

Relatability was an important criteria Participant #7 looked for in an executive coach. They said, “It was important to have a coach who had a shared experience.” Shared experience for them included ethnicity, gender, and field of practice. This

preference stemmed from their desire for a coaching relationship bound with trust and transparency. They described the coach as someone who would guide them through self-discovery and someone who would not hesitate to offer constructive feedback. They described this as “honest communication.”

Other than leadership branding, Participant #7 also recognized the benefit of learning different perspectives from the mainstreamed majority leaders. Although being surrounded with leaders who did not look like them, leadership challenges were easier to navigate with the help of the coach. Although not all strategies discussed with their coach worked, their coach provided insightful strategies.

Participant #8. Leadership challenges in their new role inspired Participant #8 to hire a coach and the coach was recommended by their father. Their coaching needs stemmed from their lack of focus and confidence of pleasing leaders who they described do not look like them. They wanted a coach who could guide them towards a growth mindset. When asked about how the coach served them, Participant #8 articulated more of personal and leadership development by listening to “shared experiences from other women around my age, women of color in particular.”

Participant #8 preference of a coach included being an African American, same age, and positive reviews from leaders who had been successfully coached by a prospective coach. For them, compatibility was measured by number of leaders successfully coached by the coach. They said:

I would look at the other people whom they have coached that information was public as a big factor in my decision. So that to me also would speak volumes. So

I would rather work with say like an AAPI or like a Latinx coach who had coached more people that I really admire and looked up to than an African American coach would coach people that I don't really want to do what they're doing, but I would say that if all of those things were equal and were the same, that I probably would pick the coach of color.

Although they preferred a coach with a similar age, they clarified that age must come with wisdom that the coach can offer. In the case of Participant #8, their coach was older than them. Even still, they felt they benefited from the valuable insights.

Participant #9. The complexity of leadership within the organization ignited Participant #9's desire to hire an executive coach. Under the organization's leadership development program, Participant #9 was able to test their compatibility with the coach for two weeks. The two-week timeframe was used to establish a coaching plan tailored towards their leadership goals. In addition to the coaching structure the coach offered, Participant #9 appreciated the relatability their Caucasian male coach offered them. They shared the following.

He literally had lived experiences with, for lack of better terms, other diverse folks. And he was trying to connect with me in that way. He understood the level of role that I was in and the complexities that I was being faced with, being a black male in the technology industry. So, it was really interesting to me that he took the time to make those connections. And also compare me to folks that were not of underrepresented background. So, I think that was what really helped him be a great coach in this scenario.

Participant #9 appreciated the past experience the coach had working with other minority leaders how their coach leveraged that context to spark a connection. This connection was integral in developing a good rapport in the coaching process.

As mentioned, Participant #9 appreciated how their coach compared how other minority leaders responded to leadership challenges and how mainstreamed leadership reacted to it. Participant #9 appreciated the “different tools or tricks of the trade...communication strategies....” provided by their coach and noted what was shared enhanced their optics as a leader. Participant #9 stressed that their coach was able to transcend their expectation of having a coach with different ethnicity. They said, “we talked a lot about the in group and the outside.” Their coaching experience made them realize that mainstreamed leadership would view their leadership as a Black male first before people would get to know the person behind the leadership. Their coach prepared them to face the social lens and handle the pressure courageously.

Participant #9 shared a preference of a coach who shared a similar leadership path they currently walk. Their priority was someone who “knows the nuances, executive leadership... specifically someone that knows how to navigate corporate America or the technology industry.” In addition to this criterion, they added: “knows that there are certain areas in that space that just aren't conducive to the success of a black male...a black female or any other underrepresented group.” They further explained that society has a different rule for different groups of individuals. Participant #9 shared a perspective that the rules are not readily provided. They said, “It's a statement of fact that everyone has to navigate differently.”

An effective coach for Participant #9 was someone who knows their weaknesses and strengths. An effective coach maximizes this information to guide a client in navigating their own leadership path. Participant #9 opposed a coaching structure based on a leadership template.

Participant #10. Participant #10 had a positive experience with their coach. They described the coach as:

Someone who gets the difference between mentoring and coaching. And sometimes we'll take off their coaching hat when I need more of the guidance around leading... I really like about this experience, which was different from others, it's actually a blend of mentoring and coaching.

Participant #10 described the blend of both processes as “flexibility” to which they indicated was helpful for them.

Participant #10 was a leader within the federal government, and they were coached by a female African American coach who also had federal government leadership experience. They shared, “It's more difficult to manage the conduct issues and sometimes performance and they helped me kind of navigate that.” They described the coach selection process as tedious and found it challenging to find their preferred African American women executive coach that has successfully navigated the leadership path within the federal government. They said:

I wanted someone who looked like me and it didn't matter if, whether or not they had been a leader in the federal government initially. It's added value, but that wasn't important to me at the time. I wanted someone who could relate.

Between Caucasian and African American coaches, Participant #10 said an African American coach would better understand them. The overall benefit they explained of this relationship was, “just not having to explain... just that basic understanding of what the struggle was like to be where I am.” However, they also acknowledged that having a coach who looks like them may limit exposure to diverse perspectives. Participant #10 confirmed the value of working with a coach in general. They shared that their coach held “a safe space for [them] where I can talk about my specific things that are happening at work and at the same time not worry about confidentiality.” This perspective aligns with other participant’s comments about having a good coaching relationship where there was trust and confidentiality.

Participant #11. Coaching leadership for Participant #11 was driven by their interest to navigate the leadership path within the organization. They treated paying the service as a career investment. Selection of coaches was driven by ethnicity and experiences in coaching African American women in leadership roles. During the course of the selection process, they considered the compatibility of the coach to their personality being less formal and someone who was loyal to their trust and confidentiality.

Participant #11 described the coaching experience with a male African American coach as a “good relationship.” The coach offered the flexibility of providing both coaching and mentoring. They shared how their coach would take off their coaching hat to serve as an advisor. Participant #11 also discussed the importance of the relationship with a coach.

You can build a relationship most likely. I'm not going to say across the board, but most likely you'll be able to find some commonality around which to build a relationship, which then makes some of the more difficult conversations, potentially easier.

Participant #11 also stressed potential drawbacks of hiring a coach of similar ethnicity and background. According to Participant #11:

You [are] closing yourself off to an opportunity that could make you more comfortable in the corporate world where let's face it, the higher you climb, the less likely it was you are to see people like you as a black person.

Phenomenological Reduction of Experiences

The open and axial coding methods were used to interpret the essential experiences of each phenomenon or in this case, each African American leader that participated in a research interview (Appendix 2). Each individual interview transcript was reviewed for insights and learning about the African American leader's experiences while working with an executive coach. More specifically, the researcher completed open coding through a process of questioning, reflecting on, and categorizing the perspectives and words of the participants featured in the transcribed interview data. Using the participants' words, the researcher labeled the phrase or phrases that described a particular phenomenon. The researcher initially coded 110 codes. A few of the codes shared similar meaning, thus were merged. After careful review and process reduction for codes with similar meaning, the researcher generated 60 open codes. Example of the

open codes identified by the researcher included “acceptance of need for knowledge,” “aim to development,” and “authentic learning” among others.

In contrast to open coding, where material is divided into discrete portions, axial coding involves establishing links between codes. With axial coding, the codes produced in open coding were organized. The researcher linked and labeled codes into 8 axial codes. These are a) “reason for coaching,” b) “effective coaching relationship,” c) “quality of an effective coach,” d) “influence of race to coaching,” e) “perceived visibility to coach,” f) “factors in coach selection,” g) “coach matching criteria,” and h) “role of race in coach selection.” Using both open and axial codes, the researcher proceeded with the determination of the phenomenon of the study or in other words the resulting themes.

To be regarded as a phenomenon in this study, the researcher must notice and critically evaluate the concept in the context of the presentation of the experience (Giorgi, 2012). Using this method revealed a pattern of thematic areas and sub-themes that were useful in determining the imaginative variation of the lived experiences of African American leaders with their coach. This section illustrates the thematic areas and sub-themes identified during the phenomenological reduction.

Table 5

Thematic Areas and Sub-Themes

Theme	Sub-Themes	# of Occurrences	% of Occurrences
Coaching Intention	Development of leadership competency	11	100%
	Participate in organizational succession planning	8	73%
Perceived Effective Coaching Relationship	Relatability	11	100%
	Build self-efficacy	11	100%

Qualities of an Effective Coach	Compatibility	11	100%
	Structured	7	64%
	Transparency	7	64%
	Relatability	11	100%
	Qualities of a mentor	11	100%
	Offering of diverse thoughts	11	100%
	Skills and experience navigating in mainstreamed leadership	8	73%
Role of Ethnicity in Leadership Coaching	Structured	7	64%
	Relatability of African American Coaches to the plight of African American leaders	11	100%
	Caucasian coaches offer diverse learning opportunity	11	100%
	Inclination of African American Coaches for mentorship	9	82%
	Caucasian coaches' knowledge and experiences in mainstreamed leadership	9	82%

Note: See Appendix 2 for the Open and Axial Codes.

Theme 1: Coaching Intention

The intention of this research study was to understand the context of how these participants viewed and lived the coaching experiences they had as African American leaders. All participants (11 or 100%) self-recognized a need to develop their leadership competency, which informed their intention to work with an executive coach. These narratives are depicted in axial code “reasons for coaching” where open codes that label the participants’ intention in hiring an executive leadership coach (Appendix 2).

The narratives of the participants as labeled by the underlying codes emphasized their difficulties while navigating the mainstreamed leadership systems they worked in. All participants expressed valuing the assistance of an executive coach who has the knowledge, skills, and experience to help leaders succeed in their leadership career path. These were illustrated in codes “acceptance of need for knowledge,” “aim for development,” “need for unbiased leadership opinions” among others. Participant #2 highlighted this intention in this statement: “there's room to grow and different

perspectives and to stay narrow in any vision was going to create need some level of slow growth or no growth at all.” Participant #6 viewed coaching as “development opportunities.” Participant #3 viewed coaching as a strategy that could address the “disconnect between me and my staff.”

The researcher identified a second subtheme under the theme “Coaching Intention.” Eight of the participants indicated that other than developing their leadership competency, coaching was an integral component of a leadership development program in their respective organizations. These are illustrated in open codes “

Participant #3 shared leaders in the organization made coaching a requirement for leaders to climb the leadership ladder. Participant #4 also shared similar experience: “I am at a point in, in the organization where it's, it's a tipping point, but between being senior director plus, and kind of mid-level, and this was recommended by, by my manager.” However, not all participants had financial support from their organizations to work with a coach. Two of the 11 participants self-funded their coaching engagements. Those whose organizations sponsored their coaching relationship had less influence on the executive coach options presented to them by their organizations. Some were left to pick from coaches who they said were not compatible to their preferences. Participant #1 recalled the first coach picked and hired by the organization who was a female Caucasian executive coach. Participant #1 said coaching for the organization knows no ethnicity boundary.

Theme 2: Perceived Effective Coaching Relationship

A theme emerged from the interviews regarding perceptions about an effective coaching relationship. A deduction of this theme resulted in five sub-themes. These sub-themes include: a) relatability, b) build self-efficacy, c) compatibility, d) structured, and e) transparency. The researcher will discuss a few of the sub-themes with evidence emerging from all participants' transcripts.

The first sub-theme that emerged, *Relatability*, refers to the quality of a coach who was able to form a social and / or emotional connection with the participants. Eleven participants described this phenomenon in different forms such as “connection,” “chemistry,” “compatibility,” “ability to understand without explanation,” and “flexible.” Participant #10 expressed this in a statement: “I wanted someone who could relate.” Participant #11 described this aspect as: “I could be really open and honest with him, and he was with me and he also had an HR background.”

The second sub-theme, *build self-efficacy*, emerged from various codes where participants shared the beneficial effects of having an effective coaching relationship. The identified codes that share this meaning include “diversity of thoughts,” “offering structured coaching,” “knowing challenges,” “self-awareness,” “empowering,” and “in-person interaction.” For instance, Participant #1 mentioned their coach provided them with a view of handling a leadership issue: “gives them more true perception of how you should handle certain things.” Participant #7 shared: “It really challenged me to think outside of the norm.”

The third sub-theme, *compatibility*, emerged from codes that share the narratives of the participants in the hiring of the executive leaders and in their progressive coaching scenarios the participants had lived. The codes “knows to embrace race,” “no chemistry,” “incompatible beliefs,” and “understanding of the plight of race” described how compatibility between a coach and coachee play a significant role in the coaching relationship. While these participants had varying degrees of priorities when selecting a coach, they all agreed that their coach should share a similar background which includes ethnicity, leadership career path, field of practice, and gender. Participant #6 summed up this sub-theme in a statement: “one of the things that was important as far as identifying a coach to work with me was finding someone that looked like me.”

The fourth sub-theme, *structured*, emerged from the codes “planned,” “scheduled,” “objective-based,” and “goal-oriented” that described the coaching approach the participants desired in a coach. Seven participants described structured coaching as an effective method that facilitates a systematic approach in preparing and executing coaching activities by beginning with observations on them and going on to determining the desired behavioral goals for the coachee. Participant #3 expressed this sentiment in the following narrative: “I like that he asked me what was it that I wanted to accomplish. Good. Okay. So we actually had like a school of work with timeframes and how much time everything is kind of planned and organized.”

The fifth sub-theme, *transparency*, emerged from the codes “open,” “honest,” “confidentiality,” “trust,” “coaching process,” “conflict,” and “genuine interest.” These codes describe transparency as an ethical value the participants are looking for in a coach.

Among the narratives shared by the participants include the professional coaching history of their coach, the value of the service they would be getting, the coaching process, any potential conflicts of interest, and confidentiality. Participant #1 expressed the value of being transparent in the coaching process in the following statement: “It's really about creating the synergies between what the, the value-based work that you're doing in your sessions with the person's you know, career-oriented goals more directly.” Participant #2 also expressed her need for transparency in terms of the working interest of the coach. She said: “I am quite certain of it. OK. Other than to create more business, you know, for herself. So I have to be realistic about that. I'm not so slow that I don't get that. But being able to raise that bar for me would be to say, Hey, when I started, this is where I was.”

Being open and honest about everything provides a sense of ease. It clears the space to fully focus on the participants and what is best for them. It enables the coach to stay out of the participants' way and actually empower them. When a coach is truthful in a coaching relationship, the coachee gains more trust in coaching and in the coach. This has a subsequent effect on the coaching relationship, as it is the basis or framework for establishing trust. Given that rapport between the coach and client is the primary measure of success in a coaching relationship, trust is crucial for a productive engagement.

Theme 3: Qualities of an Effective Coach

Following the phenomenological description of an effective coaching relationship, axial coding suggested there were specific qualities of coaches that contributed to the African American leader's perceived effectiveness of a coaching relationship. The deduction of this theme yielded five sub-themes which the participants

viewed to be the qualities of an effective coach. These sub-themes are: (a) relatability, (b) qualities of a mentor, (c) offering of diverse thoughts, (d) skills and experience navigating in mainstreamed leadership, and (e) structured. The following will discuss the sub-themes with evidence emerging from all participants' transcripts. Table 2 illustrates these themes.

The first sub-theme, *Relatability*, refers to the quality of a coach who was able to form social or emotional connection with the participants. In addition to the earlier description discussed in theme 1 that described these forms such as “connection,” “chemistry,” “compatibility,” “ability to understand without explanation,” and “flexible,” relatability described a coach who understood the plight of African American leaders in the mainstreamed world of leadership. The codes “knows to embrace race,” “no chemistry,” “incompatible beliefs,” and “understanding of the plight of race” described compatibility factors in the coaching engagement between a coach and a coachee. Participant #10 described this person as: “[I] don’t have to explain when I walk in a room...[someone] I don't have to explain black lives matter. I don't have to explain what it's like to be in the federal government at the level that I am as an African American woman.”

The second sub-theme, *Qualities of a mentor*, emerged from codes where participants described a dissonance between a mentor, they are compatible with versus the coaching service they agreed upon. The codes that depict these narratives include “identity of a mentor,” “coaching versus mentoring,” “no chemistry,” “incompatible

beliefs,” “knowing the mentee,” “empowering,” and “navigation of microaggression issues.”

All these participants shared positive coaching experiences from coaches who were willing to “take off their hats” from coaching and become a mentor, especially those who could share their leadership knowledge and experiences as a man, or a woman of color surrounded by mainstreamed White leadership environment. Participant #4 captured one of these scenarios in this statement: “He has admitted that he sometimes straddles the line between coach and mentor.” Participant #10 also offered similar scenario: “This was someone who gets the difference between mentoring and coaching. And sometimes we'll take off their coaching hat when I need more of the guidance around leading.”

The third sub-theme, *Offering of diverse thoughts*, emerged from the codes that illustrate the participants view concerning the valuable insights they gained from hiring coaches that are not within their preferences or do not look like them. These codes include “White,” “Other race,” “knows ins/out of leadership,” “diversity of thoughts,” “race is not relevant,” “wide opportunity of learning,” and “wide learning goals.”

Participant #8 shared this perspective: “hearing more shared experiences from other women around my age, women of color in particular was very helpful. Especially when you want to follow a path.” Participant #4 shared that despite the ethnic difference, their coach brought “something different that I don't have into my sphere of thinking.”

The fourth sub-theme, *Skills and experience navigating in mainstreamed leadership*, emerged from open codes that describe effective coach as having tactics that

concentrate on enhancing an individual's abilities and performance in leadership in the context of the mainstreamed leadership culture. These codes include “diversity of thoughts,” “experiences in mainstreamed leadership,” “improved brand in mainstream,” “knows ins/outs of leadership,” “experiences in racial microaggression,” “empowering,” “unbiased leadership opinions,” “knows to embrace race,” “no chemistry,” “incompatible beliefs,” “understanding of the plight of race,” and “process development.” Eight of the participants’ narratives claimed that coaching skills for leaders who handle African American coachee should involve assisting individuals in identifying their objectives, assessing their present skills and abilities, and developing improvement plans that matters within the mainstreamed leadership world. Understanding microaggression issues and the plight of African American leaders is an important tool in developing coaching session that can help these leaders strengthen their relationships with team members and enhance organizational performance in a world dominated by leaders of different colors.

The fifth sub-theme, *structured*, emerged from the codes “planned,” “scheduled,” “objective-based,” and “goal-oriented” that describe the coaching session the participants desired in a coach. Seven participants described structured coaching as an effective method that facilitates a systematic approach in preparing and executing coaching activities by beginning with observations on them and going on to determining the desired behavioral goals for the coachee. Participant #3 expressed this sentiment in the following narrative: “I like that he asked me what was it that I wanted to accomplish. Good. Okay. So we actually had like a school of work with timeframes and how much time everything is kind of planned and organized.”

Theme 4: Role of Ethnicity in Leadership Coaching

The role of ethnicity in leadership was an axial code that emerged through analysis of the data. The deduction of this theme yielded four sub-themes which the participants perceived as the role of ethnicity in leadership coaching. These sub-themes are: (a) Relatability of African American Coaches to the plight of African American leaders, (b) Caucasian coaches offer diverse learning opportunity, (c) Inclination of African American Coaches for mentorship, and (d) Caucasian coaches' knowledge and experiences in mainstreamed leadership.

The first sub-theme, *Relatability of African American Coaches to the plight of African American leaders*, emerged from lived experience scenarios that demonstrated the social and emotional connection of participants to coaches who “look like” them and shared social and political difficulties in an environment dominantly led by Caucasian or mainstreamed leadership. The codes “knows to embrace race,” “no chemistry,” “incompatible beliefs,” “understanding of the plight of race,” “compatibility,” “experiences in mainstreamed leadership,” “improved brand in mainstream,” “knows ins/outs of leadership,” “experiences in racial microaggression,” “empowering,” “knowing the mentee,” “identity of a mentor,” and “coach versus mentor” illustrate this theme.

All of these participants used the phrases or meant similar sentiment: “understand without further explaining.” Participant #2 shared that hiring an African American coach would mean: “I don't get to tell people it's a struggle to be me.” Participant #6 described this phenomenon as:

African American coach, you can let your guard down, you can take off your coat, you can walk into a room with no guard on and there's comfort in being able to be your true self. We talk a lot about what does being authentic and bringing your full, authentic self to work.

The second sub-theme, Caucasian coaches offer diverse learning opportunity, was illustrated from the codes “diversity of thoughts,” and “wide learning opportunity.” These codes emerged from the scenario where participants recognized that while an African American coach gives them a comfortable coaching relationship, coaches of a different ethnicity could be beneficial to their leadership growth. Participant #1 offered this perspective.

I would also work with probably a white male because I'm not always the minority in the room when you think of it in the context of male and female. What their perspective was because by combining the two perspectives, I believe that it will make me a better leader, better manager. I also would love to get the perspective of what the white male who has been the majority all of the time throughout, you know, working his street, what their perspective was because by combining the two perspectives, I believe that it will make me a better leader, better manager. Mm. Hopefully a better person.

Additionally, Participant #10 viewed having someone that does not look like them as beneficial in events requiring navigational strategies that mainstreamed leadership has more knowledge of.

The third sub-theme, *Inclination of African American Coaches for mentorship*, emerged from codes where participants described the racial identity as an important factor for someone that could understand the plight of an African American leader in their transition to the mainstreamed leadership role. The codes that depict these narratives include “knows to embrace race,” “understanding the plight of race,” “identity of a mentor,” “coaching versus mentoring,” “no chemistry,” “incompatible beliefs,” “knowing the mentee,” “empowering,” and “navigation of microaggression issues.”

Nine participants shared positive coaching experiences from coaches who were willing to “take off their hats” from coaching and become a mentor, especially those who could share their leadership knowledge and experiences as a man, or a woman of color surrounded by mainstreamed White leadership environment. Participant #4 captured one of these scenarios in this statement: “He has admitted that he sometimes straddles the line between coach and mentor.” Participant #10 also offered similar scenario: “This was someone who gets the difference between mentoring and coaching. And sometimes we’ll take off their coaching hat when I need more of the guidance around leading.”

The fourth sub-theme, *Caucasian coaches’ knowledge and experiences in mainstreamed leadership*, emerged from open codes that describe the benefits of hiring a Caucasian coach who is seen as having the competency and working leadership knowledge about the mainstreamed leadership culture. These codes include “diversity of thoughts,” “experiences in mainstreamed leadership,” “improved brand in mainstream,” “wide learning opportunity,” and “knows ins/outs of leadership.” Nine of the participants’ narratives claimed that White coaches possessed a shared leadership culture

that could be learned by Africa-American leaders by assessing their present skills and abilities and developing improvement plans that matters within the mainstreamed leadership world.

Imaginative Variation of the Lived Experiences of African American Leaders

Imaginative variation begins with changing one or more of an object's dimensions and then looking for how that change affects the whole. In Giorgi and Giorgi (2003) method, if the thing "collapses" when a crucial dimension was taken away, then the variable in question must be necessary for the item to give the impression of being entire. Changes to experiential dimensions that are not fundamental but nonetheless allow for its identification are termed incidental than essential. In this section, the researcher will demonstrate how themes discussed in the previous section remain relevant when specific criteria are introduced.

Leadership Coaching as a Strategy to Integrate African American Leaders into Mainstreamed Leadership

Some participants shared their organizations had a leadership development strategy to integrate them into mainstreamed leadership and the strategy included leadership coaching. These participants all agreed they were surrounded with leaders who do not look like them, which made leadership challenges more difficult to navigate without the help of the coach. This was evidently demonstrated in scenarios where they find difficulty hiring African American coaches.

Those participants who were satisfied with their coaching experience were able to compare how leaders of various ethnicity responded to a particular scenario and how

mainstreamed leadership reacted to it. Coaching exposed them to different strategies for integrating within their leadership environment. Participant #7 described coaching as an added value to the leadership brand they embraced. Participant #9 explained this scenario as: “mainstreamed leadership would view his leadership as a Black male first before people would get to know the person behind the leadership.”

Cognitive Dissonance on African American Leadership Coaching

African American leaders have inconsistent thoughts and attitudes over the relevance of ethnicity to coaching leadership particularly their decisions as it pertains to hiring an executive coach. All participants agreed that ethnicity matters in the context of relatability, which was essential in building good rapport and establishing effective coaching relationship. An African American coach was beneficial in terms of “being culturally sensitive and aware of the dynamics of everyday life” (Participant #9). A trustful working relationship was easy to establish among African American coach who can understand you even without further explaining the situation.

While ethnicity was significantly important in an effective coaching relationship with African American leaders, this benefit did not outweigh the overall leadership goal of integrating themselves within a leadership system where many of the leaders were not of their own ethnic background. The research participants all agreed that while relatability factor was beneficial, coaching was more beneficial when diverse perspectives were offered that positioned them to navigate effectively in their leadership system. Other participants viewed the importance of ethnicity and confirmed it became

an irrelevant factor when compared with the knowledge, skills, and experiences of coaches with different ethnicities.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

The intention for trustworthiness of the research results was discussed in chapter three. The researcher kept the trustworthiness of the results and analysis of the research.

The researcher of this study leveraged the Descriptive Phenomenological Psychological Method (DPPM) which method of analysis defines the essential elements of the lived experiences. The imaginative variation procedure collapsed all essential key themes and removed the experiences that are inconsistent to the overall experiences the participants. Prior to defining the essential elements of the study, the researcher aggregated the categories and themes that emerged from the 11 interview transcripts that were cultivated as a result of the research process. Through it all, the researcher accounted for reflexivity, credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability of the research study.

Reflexivity was accounted for throughout the research study. Reflexivity advocates for the researcher to perform a practice of self-reflection to critically examine their own biases, assumptions, and perspectives, with the aim to mitigate any influence on the research process and the findings (Walsh, 2003). Ultimately, the goal of reflexivity is to ensure the subjectivity of the researcher does not compromise the validity and reliability of the research.

At the core of the data collection and analysis process, the researcher gained holistic understanding of the participant's lived experience through an invitation to share

authentic reporting of their firsthand experience. Being an African American woman with almost 16 years of experience as leadership coach, the researcher adopted the method of reflexivity as recommended by Walsh (2003). The researcher throughout the process continuously and consciously critiqued, appraised, and evaluated how her own subjectivity and context influenced the direction of the study and with the participants in mind. The researcher critically inquired and further probed shared experiences that have personal, interpersonal, methodological, and contextual meaning to the researcher. The documentation of these critical inquiries in a reflexive journal guided the researcher in qualifying her own biases regarding the collected data (Walsh, 2003). This reflective process can be evidently accounted for in the efforts to ensure the credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability of the research study.

Credibility was confirmed through member-checking. Member-checking entails providing a summary of the interview to the participant to give them an opportunity to confirm accuracy and comprehensiveness (Burkholder et al., 2016). Adhering to the member-checking commitment, the researcher shared the interview transcript with each respective participant. The researcher also asked each participant to review and confirm the transcript accurately represented the lived experience they shared during the actual interview. The researcher received confirmation of approval and alignment from all 11 participants. Furthermore, the researcher committed to provide a summary of the research results to each participant at the conclusion of the dissertation process.

Transferability was a consideration in the study. The researcher included a detailed description of the interviews and the participants involved in the study, along

with anonymized quotes to serve as evidence of the thematic assessments made. The thematic assessments made from the study may be applicable with other minority leaders or for other interventions such as counseling on African American leaders.

Dependability in this study was established through the consistent use of standard questions during the research interviews. Triangulation was used to create credibility, which was useful for dependability. In addition, the researcher used the audit trail method. All decisions made and processes followed during the study were documented in detail.

The method used for confirmability was the use of a reflection journal. This approach called for the researcher to maintain a journal that documented their thought process and reflections about their own values and conceptualization during the research lifecycle (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). An audit trail was also used to keep a log of all steps completed during the research process. In summary, progress was documented by the researcher throughout the research lifecycle.

Research Question Insights

This phenomenological study explored the lived experiences of African American leaders that have worked with a leadership coach and to understand what factors made leadership coaching effective for them. A sub-factor for exploration was their perceived preferences when selecting an executive coach. Crucial to this goal was to answer the research questions: a) What are the lived experiences of African American leaders that work with or have worked with an executive coach? b) What are the coach matching

preferences of African American leaders as it pertains to a coach's ethnicity? This section will summarize the results of the data analysis.

Research Question 1: What are the lived experiences of African American leaders that work with or have worked with an executive coach?

Regardless of background, leaders bring their own identity, values, experiences, and stories to the workplace. Furthermore, leaders of color such as African American leaders have not always been embraced in corporate America (Davis & Maldonado, 2015). Anecdotes of these working experiences in these conditions are widespread, especially among African Americans who strive to be industry leaders. Open codes in this study suggested two relevant themes capturing the lived experiences of the African American leaders who have worked with an executive coach. These themes include a) coaching intention, and b) perceived effective coaching relationship.

The first theme was identified from an open code that suggested an understanding about leader's self-awareness of their leadership environment including their leadership identities. The researcher inferred that engaging with an executive coach was aimed with the intention to learn, develop, change, and improve their opportunities for improvement. This intention in the context of African American leaders focused more on the need to develop their leadership competency. As an example, Participant #2 highlighted this intention in this statement: "there's room to grow and different perspectives and to stay narrow in any vision is going to create need some level of slow growth or no growth at all." Participant #6 viewed coaching as "development opportunities." Participant #3 viewed coaching as a strategy that could address the "disconnect between me and my

staff.” The majority of the participants self-identified a need to develop their leadership competency. These participants emphasized their difficulties navigating a mainstreamed leadership system. They acknowledged that working with an executive coach would contribute to their success as a leader.

In addition to development of leadership competency, eight of the participants highlighted coaching as an integral component of a leadership development program in their respective organizations. As such, coaching was offered for some naturally by way of a program and some were left to request access to an executive coach. All wanted to gain insight on how to strengthen some form of leadership competency such as communication, influence, confidence and / or leadership presence.

Theme 2 emerged from context the participants shared regarding what constitutes an effective coaching relationship. These sub-themes are: a) relatability, b) build self-efficacy, c) compatibility, d) structured, and e) transparency. *Relatability* refers to the quality of a coach who was able to form social or emotional connection with the participants. *Build self-efficacy* refers to the beneficial effects of having effective coaching relationship such as strategies to handle leadership issues that are unique for African American leaders. *Compatibility* refers to matching the qualities of the leader and their coach that cultivates chemistry in the coaching relationship. These participants agreed that their coach ideally would share a similar background which includes ethnicity, leadership career path, field of practice, and gender.

Research Question 2: What are the coach matching preferences of African American leaders as it pertains to a coach’s ethnicity?

The individuated self or those features that distinguish one individual from others in a social context is reflected in one's personal identity (Cilliers, 2018). What leaders think reflects who they are and what they value most about themselves. For instance, African American leaders may share a common racial ancestry and the amount to which their race impacts their identity may differ tremendously. The difference of these personal identities reflects the African American leaders' considerations when choosing the ethnicity of their executive coach. This was apparent in the two emerging themes of the study. These themes are: a) qualities of an effective coach, and b) role of ethnicity in leadership coaching.

The first theme, *qualities of an effective coach*, related to how study participants devalued race as an important quality of an effective coach. While these participants saw their ethnicity as an internal part of their identity, the participants prioritized other aspects as essential in leadership coaches. The sub-themes identified in the study includes: a) relatability, b) qualities of a mentor, c) offering of diverse thoughts, d) skills and experience navigating in mainstreamed leadership, and e) structured.

Relatability as previously presented refers to the quality of a coach who was able to form social or emotional connection with the participants. Relatable qualities of a coach included understanding the plight of African American leaders in the mainstreamed world of leadership. Participant 9 shared "... that person can relate to the journey that I'm going on as a black leader in the industry that I work in.. I think the other positive is that person is very likely to have had some of the experiences, so the lived experiences." Participant 11 commented about relatability saying "...and in the

experience of it, there were things that we both could identify with and we could talk about and he could bring his own lived experiences around being black in corporate America”. Participant 3 shared the importance that the coach looked like them and “understand the challenges that I may face to help me overcome the sticky things that I see, it's helpful when someone has either walked a mile in my shoes”.

Qualities of a mentor showed up as a preferred quality in addition to coaching versus solely offering pure coaching. Participant 1 offered critique of how their coach could have served them better “I guess the one thing that the harshest critic would say is that they never leave that role of coach, that they never even when you're having that tough conversation, they're always coach, it never becomes mentor or, you know, anything like that, that they stay in, in that singular lane. And sometimes you actually want and want them to, you know, change lanes a little bit.” Participant 10 contributed to this them by saying “This is someone who gets the difference between mentoring and coaching. And sometimes we'll take off her coaching hat when I need more of the guidance around leading. I work in the federal government. So, what I really like about this experience, which is different from others, it's actually a blend of mentoring and coaching.”

Many participants shared positive coaching experiences from coaches who effectively balance between mentoring and coaching. At the same time, Participant 4 offered that their coach may offer advice when it is not warranted.

He has admitted that he sometimes straddles the line between coach and mentor and I and in his definition is that will come in and try and solve it where coach is

just going to ask the questions...but I have found that sometimes he will lean in to say, oh, well, I experienced X, Y, Z and I'm like, are you, are we solving, are we, are you giving me examples? ...So know if he said, oh, I'm overstepping into mentor, then I'd be like, yep. Nope. That's not how I want this relationship to work...I want this to be coaching.

Offering of diverse thoughts was found to be an important quality of a coach.

Participant 1 acknowledged the benefit of receiving diverse thoughts from their coach that would help them to consider moments when they are in the majority, with gender being an example. "I think that the next go round that I would work with a male. Okay. So that I can get the opposite perspective. And I would also work with probably a white male because I'm not always the minority in the room when you think of it in the, in the context of male and female. And so it, I also would love to get the perspective of what the white male who has been the majority all of the time throughout, you know, working his street, what their perspective is because by combining the two perspectives, I believe that it will make me a better leader, better manager. Mm. Hopefully a better person".

Participant 4 selected a White male coach and one of the reasons for the choice was their prior business experience at another company. They noted a benefit that "he's bringing something different that I don't have into my sphere of thinking."

Skills and experience navigating in mainstreamed leadership was another finding.

Participant 1 shared the importance of having a coach that could help them navigate while being an African American leader among mainstreamed leadership. "I felt that it was important to have an African American coach. Okay. So that I was at least able to

express openly the trials and tribulations of being a minority in the room in any given conversation. And so I felt that if my coach was aligned with that, or at least had had similar experiences, then it would be a lot easier to relate and a lot easier to have those communications, but also that my coach would also probably have been in a situation similar and would be able to easily, easily help me navigate those situations.” Participant 2 shared a potential limitation of working with an African American coach could be diminished ability to help navigate in a mainstreamed leadership world. They commented “...So it's a benefit and a limit. Which means you understand the struggle, but you're also prevented from getting in some of the same doors that I'm trying to get into. Like one of us has to be somewhere, cause this is where we're trying to go”.

Offering a *Structured* coaching experience was noted as important. As an example, Participant 2 commented “Structuring it. I think for her, for me structuring a little bit better and having, having the offering tangible”. In this comment, Participant 2 critiqued their coach as needing to offer “more resources, like assessments”. Participant 3 explained liking how their coach provided a structured approach to the coaching engagement. Participant 3 noted “I like that he asked me what was it that I wanted to accomplish. Good. Okay. So we actually had like a school of work with timeframes and how much time everything is kind of planned and organized. I really love, I love that”. In this case, the coach effectively offered a planned and organized strategy for the leaders development. Participant 4 shared a request of their coach to offer topics for discussion during coaching sessions at times. They stated about their coach “He should continue giving me space to bring forth topics. What he should start doing though, is if I don't have

anything, I'm not sure that we would talk about anything. So thankfully I have a lot to talk about”.

Theme 2 yielded four sub-themes which the participants perceived as the role of ethnicity in leadership coaching. These sub-themes are a) Relatability of African American Coaches to the plight of African American leaders, b) Caucasian coaches offer diverse learning opportunity, c) Inclination of African American Coaches for mentorship, and d) Caucasian coaches' knowledge and experiences in mainstreamed leadership.

Relatability of African American Coaches to the plight of African American leaders demonstrated the social and emotional connection of participants to coaches who look like them and shared social and political difficulties in an environment dominantly led by White leadership. Participant 10 discussed this when they commented “So, I find that I spend a lot more time with folks that are not of color, trying to explain where my African American coach she gets it. I don't have to go through. We don't have to spend any time with her trying to understand the plight”.

Caucasian coaches offer diverse learning opportunity recognized that while an African American coach may quickly establish a comfortable coaching relationship, coaches of a different ethnicity may offer expanded learning opportunities that could benefit their leadership growth. Regarding diverse learning opportunity from working with a Caucasian coach, Participant 11 offered “... depending on what your networks look like, it might be beneficial to have a white coach who can bring a perspective that you might not be able to so easily access with your networks.”

Table 6 summarizes the themes and categories emerging from the participants' narratives which represent the answer to the research questions of the study. The open and axial codes were the basis for the identification and labeling of themes.

Table 6

Themes and Categories Representing Answers to the Research Questions

Research Question	Themes	Categories
What are the lived experiences of African American leaders that work with or have worked with an executive coach?	Theme 1 – Coaching Intention	1.1 Development of leadership competency
		1.2 Participate in organizational succession planning
	Theme 2 – Perceived effective coaching relationship	2.1 Relatability
		2.2 Build self-efficacy
		2.3 Compatibility
What are the coach matching preferences of African American leaders as they pertain to a coach's ethnicity?	Theme 3 – Qualities of an effective coach	2.4 Structured
		2.5 Transparency
		3.1 Relatability
		3.2 Qualities of a mentor
		3.3 Offerings of diverse thoughts
Theme 4 – Role of ethnicity in leadership coaching	3.4 Skills and experience in navigating mainstreamed literature	
	3.5 Structured	
	4.1 Relatability of African American coaches to the plight of African American leaders	
	4.2 Caucasian coaches offer diverse learning opportunities	
		4.3 Inclination of African American coaches for mentorship
		4.4 Caucasian coaches' knowledge and experiences in mainstream leadership

Summary

This phenomenological study explored the lived experiences of African American leaders that have worked with a leadership coach and to understand what factors made leadership coaching effective for them. Results of the study showed four themes answering the research questions of the study. These were: a) coaching intention, b) perceived effective coaching relationship, c) qualities of an effective coach, and d) role of ethnicity in leadership coaching. The first theme, *coaching intention*, relates to African

American leaders' self-awareness of their leadership environment and identities. Hiring an executive coach indicated a desire to learn and improve their skills and development opportunities. African American leaders' aspirations centered on developing their leadership skills particularly focused on navigating themselves in a mainstream leadership system. They perceived that working with an executive coach would elevate their leadership success.

Theme 2, *perceived effective coaching relationship*, developed from participant responses about effective coaching. Sub-themes included relatability, self-efficacy, compatibility, structured coaching, transparency, and trust. Relatability refers to a coach's ability to connect with participants. Self-efficacy refers to the benefits of successful coaching, such as effectively attending to leadership challenges experienced by African American leaders. Compatibility refers to matching the leader's and coach's attributes to create chemistry. Other minor essential elements in an effective coaching relationship included coaches offering of a structured coaching approach, being transparent to about intentions, and being trustworthy to help the African American leaders in their leadership journey.

Theme 3, *qualities of an effective coach*, developed from the five subthemes that the participants perceived to be the traits of a successful coach. These sub-themes were: (a) relatability, (b) qualities of a mentor, (c) offering of diverse thoughts, (d) skills and experience navigating in mainstreamed leadership, and (e) structured. Relatability referred to a coach's ability to connect socially or emotionally with participants. Relatability constituted a coach who understood the worldview and challenges of African

American leaders in the mainstreamed realm of leadership. Qualities of a mentor refers to the perceived contradiction between a compatible mentor and the agreed-upon coaching service. All the participants expressed having great coaching experiences from coaches willing to "take off their hats" and become mentors as appropriate, especially those who could share their leadership expertise and experiences as a man or woman of color in a mainstreamed White leadership setting. Another important element was the concept of offering varied thoughts, which was developed from the participants' perspectives on the beneficial insights they obtained from employing coaches who did not align to their initial preferences or did not look like them.

Theme 4, *role of ethnicity in leadership coaching*, developed from the understanding of the function of ethnicity in leadership coaching as four sub-themes derived from this issue. These sub-themes were a) Relatability of African American Coaches to the plight of African American leaders, b) Caucasian coaches offer diverse learning opportunity, c) Inclination of African American Coaches for mentorship, and d) Caucasian coaches' knowledge and experiences in mainstreamed leadership. African American Coaches' relatability to the plight of African American leaders emerged from lived experience scenarios that demonstrated participants' social and emotional connection to coaches who "look like" them and shared social and political difficulties in an environment dominated by Caucasian or mainstreamed leadership. Caucasian coaches provided numerous learning opportunities. Participants realized that while an African American coach provided a comfortable coaching relationship, coaches of a different race could be useful to their leadership development by having an inside perspective to offer.

Using the themes of the study, the researcher will discuss in Chapter 5 how these themes, in the context of African American leaders' lived experiences, would improve phenomenological understanding of leadership and ethnicity, which is essential in leadership coaching development programs for African American leaders. Chapter 5 will address how these themes fit into the body of leadership research and how the findings contribute to the existing understanding of African American leaders in corporate American enterprises. The following chapter will also discuss the limits of the current study findings as well as recommendations for leadership practice and future research.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Introduction

As disclosed in Chapter 1, the intended purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore the lived experiences of African American leaders that have worked with a leadership coach and to understand what factors made leadership coaching effective for them. A stated sub-factor for exploration was to understand the perceived importance of working with an African American executive coach versus another ethnicity. The research questions foundationally assigned to this research study were as follows: What are the lived experiences of African American leaders that work with or have worked with an executive coach? and What are the coach matching preferences of African American leaders as they pertain to a coach's ethnicity?

This study was completed with the aim of learning useful context that may inform the use of leadership coaching within leadership development programs for African American leaders. Thematically, key learnings from this phenomenological study included factors that inspire African American leaders to work with an executive coach, perceptions about what constitutes an effective coaching relationship, qualities of an effective coach and the role of ethnicity in the coaching relationship. The purpose of Chapter 5 was to discuss the interpretation of the findings, the limitations of the study, recommendations for future research and implications from this study.

Interpretation of the Findings

This research study aimed to understand the perspectives of African American leaders regarding their experience working with an executive coach. More specifically,

there was interest in learning about the ingredients that make a coaching engagement useful for an African American leader, and subsequently, what their preferences may be when selecting an executive coach. Various insights emerged from interpreting the findings following the completion of 11 interviews. The following section will discuss these findings, along with my interpretation of the findings as they pertain to the research questions.

Research Question 1: What are the lived experiences of African American leaders that work with or have worked with an executive coach?

Of the population interviewed in this study, one finding was that African American leaders enter into coaching engagements because of proactively seeking to develop a leadership competency and/or are offered the opportunity to work with an executive coach as a supplement to an internal leadership development program. For most, the engagement was financially sponsored by the organization. In comparison to research highlighted in Chapter 2, the participants supported the previous research regarding leadership coaching being beneficial for addressing needs such as behavioral modification, upgraded skillsets, mindset shifts, relationship building capability, and other overall leadership effectiveness (Van Oosten et al., 2019; Wittmer & Hopkins, 2018). All the participants were clear about specific leadership competencies they wanted to improve.

Another finding related to the first research question was that African American leaders describe an effective coaching relationship as fostering relatability, compatibility, transparency, trust, and a structured approach to building self-efficacy through both

coaching and mentoring. In comparison to research highlighted in Chapter 2, there was a connection to research found regarding the role of coaches as a trusted advisor. A research study showed that executive leaders appreciate working with an external coach due to their ability to leverage them as a trusted advisor (Rathmell et al., 2019). Another study showed an increase in executive performance as a result of an executive coach serving as a trusted advisor (Wasylyshyn, 2019). Wasylyshyn (2019) further warned coaches to be adequately prepared to serve leaders as a trusted advisor and coach since some senior leaders may present needs for advising or mentoring from a leadership coach to supplement coaching as a service. Many of the African American leaders in this study confirmed their appreciation for a coach that was willing to offer both mentoring and coaching services to them as needed. Mentoring was especially appreciated in the context of learning techniques for navigating in a mostly Caucasian leadership system.

Research Question 2: What are the coach matching preferences of African American leaders as it pertains to a coach's ethnicity?

Components for coach matching were explored with each African American leader that participated in the study. As a result, a finding from this study pertains to the role of ethnicity in the leadership coaching engagement. Context learned from this study includes a perception that African American coaches are better positioned to understand the plight of African American leaders, which contributes to relatability. Furthermore, African American leaders hold a belief they can forego the need to explain their plight and the need to explain culturally based terminology and phrases that may be culturally affiliated when working with an African American coach. At the same time, if a

Caucasian coach has extensive experience working with African American leaders, they may still be positioned to quickly earn the respect and comfort of the African American leader. Caucasian coaches can also earn trust and rapport from their African American coaching clients by demonstrating genuine curiosity about their identity and challenges and by showing up as an active advocate for the leader when possible. Identifying and addressing bias in a leader's system was noted as being a need/expectation for a Caucasian coach working with an African American leader. These specific findings further supported literature research noted in Chapter 2 regarding the importance of coaches being educated on diversity intelligence so they can adequately meet the diverse needs of clients who are not considered mainstream (Wittmer & Hopkins, 2018). If a non-African American coach demonstrates genuine empathy and understanding of the African American leader's world view, the foundation setting process for the coaching engagement may be more fruitful and conducive for a positive experience.

Also pertaining to ethnicity, African American leaders in this study acknowledged the value that a Caucasian coach may offer that an African American coach may not be positioned to do, which was cultivating leadership skills such as influence or communication in a way that was effective with Caucasian leaders. This connects to literature presented in Chapter 2 pertaining to White male leaders being deemed as the prototype or desired version of a leader (Flores & Matkin, 2014). This notion explained the motivation for the African American leaders in this research study who expressed a desire to understand how to better navigate a system in which they tend to be the only leader of color at the decision-making table.

Subsequently, the findings suggest that African American leaders may benefit from a dual coaching relationship, depending on their goals from coaching. In other words, if working with a coach to address internal needs such as confidence, imposter syndrome, or building immunity to micro-aggressions in the workplace, an African American coach may serve best due to the relatability. On the other hand, if the African American leader's expressed need from coaching pertains to elevating effectiveness within a mostly Caucasian leadership system, a Caucasian coach may serve best for this need.

Theoretical Framework

I compared the results from this study to the theoretical framework identified in Chapter 2. The theoretical framework discussed in Chapter 1 and Chapter 2 was self-discrepancy theory, which seeks to explain a disconnect between how a leader may perceive the expectations of how they perform versus how they prefer to perform (Barnett et al., 2017). A leader may feel internal conflict with external pressures to show up as mainstream. Implications from this conflict can manifest as emotional distress, lower productivity, or job dissatisfaction (Higgins, 1987). African American leaders prefer to be their authentic self and perceive a need to suppress their authentic self for the sake of living up to perceived expectations (Barnett et al., 2017). The tenants of self-discrepancy theory contribute to the explanation of why the participants in this study acknowledged benefits and distinctions of working with an African American coach versus a Caucasian coach. The African American leaders felt they could be their authentic selves with an African American coach. At the same time, they perceive

working with a Caucasian coach may better position them to show up as the leader they perceive they ought to be that more aligns with mainstream leaders.

Limitations of the Study

As with any research, limitations of a study may emerge in retrospect. As indicated in Chapter 1, the researcher initiated the research study with African American leaders in mind as the target participants for exploration of experiences while working with an executive coach. Chapter 1 also included awareness of the potential for self-selection bias and that verification of participant ethnicity would be dependent on participant admission versus verification. While indicating an identity as African American on the qualification survey, two of the 11 participants indicated they also identify as African Caribbean and African from Nigeria during the research interview. They further explained that they primarily identify as African American since they work and have lived in the United States for a substantial number of years. At the same time, they offered a perspective that was not accounted for by the researcher during the design phase of this study. As an example, one indicated they may not harbor the same degree of insecurities when working among Caucasian leaders because they do not hold the same historical trauma as an African American leader from the United States may hold. More specifically, an African American leader would have references to American history such as slavery, segregation, and other social injustices. Leaders who although spent many years in the United States yet are originally from another country that is majority of African descent, may have a different worldview.

Another limitation of this study pertains to the efficacy of the executive coaches that the participants shared. Some participants shared their coach served them as a coach and a mentor. The intention of the study was to evaluate the lived experience while working with a leadership coach, meaning being coached versus taught. It was questionable whether the research study results would yield differently if the coaches that the participants worked with offered pure coaching services, meaning only asked questions versus consulting. Furthermore, the credibility, certification and credentialing of executive coaches were not validated.

Lastly, length of the research interviews was a limitation. Although each interview consisted of asking all the planned interview questions, the interviews were completed faster than anticipated. The researcher anticipated the interviews would last for the entirety of the reserved time for each interview, which was 60 minutes each. Each interview lasted between 22-45 minutes, averaging 33 minutes. Precedence shows that the duration of qualitative interviews can range between 30 minutes to multiple hours (Jamshed, 2014). Increasing the quantity of structured pre-planned open-ended questions is a recommendation if this research were repeated or extended.

Recommendations

The researcher provided reflections from the research study during the discussion about limitations. Recommendations for future research considerations were inspired by this research study. Prior to this study, there was significant research regarding the efficacy of leadership coaching as an intervention; however, that prior research was generic from an ethnicity perspective. Prior leadership specific research was focused on

White Male leaders (Davis & Maldonado, 2015). With regard to research about leadership development, prior research insufficiently addressed the specific experiences of African American leaders (Smalls, 2019). As such, this research study focused on African American leaders in efforts to expand available research on this population. It is recommended that further research is completed for this population. Additionally, it is recommended that future research expands from just targeting African Americans leaders to leaders of African descent. Doing this would open the population of potential leaders globally and may heighten awareness of how geographic and cultural backgrounds may influence the coaching relationship.

Another recommendation pertains to collecting additional data on this research topic. The stated intention was to interview between eight and twelve African American leaders. I interviewed 11 African American leaders that met the qualification criteria. Continuing this research by expanding to a larger population may be worthwhile. Future researchers on this topic may also consider completing a quantitative or mixed-methods study on this topic to deepen understanding of aspects such as correlation and causality in the coaching dynamic.

The researcher also recommends and advocates for similar research for leaders that identify with other minority populations. Potential considerations include Latino, Hispanic Asian, LGBTQ and others. It would be interesting to learn about the similarities and distinctions in coaching experience from a cultural lens.

Implications for Practice

Purposeful research yields more than just new insights. Ideally, purposeful research outcomes contribute to implications for practice and positive social change. This researcher aspires to contribute to implications for practice by increasing the caliber of culturally informed leadership coaches.

The original desire from this research was to inspire coaches in the coaching community to consider how identity can influence a coaching relationship and their role in that. This was especially pertinent for Caucasian coaches that support African American leaders. Leadership coaches should have adequately informed diversity intelligence and should be equipped to meet the diverse needs of their clients (Wittmer & Hopkins, 2018). Ideally the context learned from this study will equip coaches serving African American leaders and other minority leaders for that matter. Incorporating the importance of relatability, providing exposure to different ways of thinking, and helping African American leaders to build up their immunity to leading in a mainstream leadership system was ideal. In summary, equipping leadership coaches to assist in the elevation of African American leader's leadership competency may contribute to an increase in equitable representation of African American leaders in leadership positions.

Implications for Positive Social Change

Implications for positive social change was another intended focus for this research study. Scholarly doctoral research can be a powerful catalyst for positive social change. More specifically, scholarly doctoral research on executive coaching for African American leaders can potentially lead to positive elevation in the representation and

demonstration of value-add performance of African American leaders in various industries and organizations.

A potential residual outcome from the elevation of African American leaders through this research may be greater understanding of the unique challenges and strengths of African American leaders. As forementioned, this research may lead to the development of more culturally sensitive and effective coaching methods, which can benefit most if not all leaders from underrepresented groups. Another potential positive social change outcome could be enhanced diversity of perspectives and ideas in societal decision-making processes, which can lead to innovative solutions that can progress society forward. Future generations of upcoming leaders may be inspired by increased visibility of successful minority leaders and perhaps may benefit from their mentorship.

Lastly, another hopeful positive social change outcome from this research could be a reduction of unconscious biases and stereotypes that can limit the success of African American leaders in their careers. In summary, this researcher aims to shape a better future for leaders of all shapes, sizes and color and generations through equitable and effective leadership development interventions such as executive coaching.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this research study sought out to explore the lived experience of African American leaders that have worked with an executive coach. An empirical approach under the phenomenological methodology was deployed to guide the research process. The study started with an articulation of the problem to be explored and the purpose. Research questions were defined as Research Question 1: What are the lived

experiences of African American leaders that work with or have worked with an executive coach and Research Question 2: What are the coach matching preferences of African American leaders as it pertains to a coach's ethnicity?

The theoretical framework of this research was self-discrepancy theory and proved to be an appropriate underpinning of the observed phenomenon. Significant research of literature was completed for context prior to designing and implementing the research study. Empirical rigor was applied when designing and executing the study which accounted for the participant selection process, recruitment, qualifying potential participants, interviewing and analyzing the qualitative data resulting from 11 research interviews.

Through the process of completing due diligence as described above including interviewing 11 African American leaders that had experience with an executive coach, it was apparent that leadership coaching was an effective leadership development intervention for this population. Although this was assumed prior to initiating this research study, there was very limited research done specific to leadership coaching for African American leaders.

This researcher hopes to contribute to closing the leadership coaching research gap for African American leaders and other leaders that identify with a marginalized group. This researcher hopes to inspire African American leaders and all leaders for that matter to be mindful and explicit about their needs when working with a leadership coach. Lastly, this researcher hopes to inspire leadership coaches of all identities to apply

the insights gained from this study to heighten their impact in the world, one leader at a time.

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Appendix A: Interview Guide

1. What brought you to coaching?
2. How long was / was your coaching engagement
3. How was your coach determined?
4. What factors were used for choosing a coach?
5. On a scale of 1-10, 10 being the best, how do you rate your overall experience in coaching? What led to that rating?
6. How did coaching serve you well?
7. How could coaching have served you more?
8. What else would you like to share that may be helpful for this study?

Appendix B: Codebook

Open Codes	Axial Codes	Files	References
	Reason for Coaching (Intention)		
Acceptance of need for knowledge		5	5
Aim to development		7	9
Authentic learning		2	4
Develop communication skills		1	1
Effective learning structure		2	4
Improved brand in mainstream		1	1
Organizational supports		5	7
Process development		2	2
Recommendation		4	4
Unbiased leadership opinions		4	4
	Effective Coaching Relationship		
Build self-efficacy		11	13
Celebrate Black African successes		2	2
Creating synergy to build leadership career		1	1
Chemistry		11	16
Diversity of thoughts		4	5
In-person, interaction		1	2
Knowing challenges		3	3
Recognize success		2	2
Offering structured coaching		7	9
Relatability		11	23
Worthy to trust		7	8
Self-awareness		3	4
Transparency		7	9
	Quality of an Effective Coach		
Empowering		3	5
Focused		1	1
Hands-on		1	1
Humble		1	1
Knowing the mentee		5	7
Knows ins/out of leadership		9	15
Identity of a mentor		9	10
Diversity of thoughts		4	5
Knows the identity of marginalized groups		4	4
Listening skill		4	8
Open and receptive		5	7
Rapport		2	3
Relatability		11	25
Structured		7	6
Wisdom offered		1	2
	Influence of race to coaching		
Race is not relevant		1	1
Money VS Skin Colour		3	4
	Perceived Visibility to Coach		
Understanding the plight of race		6	7
	Factors in Coach Selection		
Humility		1	1
Knows to embrace race		1	1
Leadership Prospect preference		5	5
Positive reviews		2	2
Relatability	**Relationship		
Respects confidentiality		3	3
Wide opportunity of learning		6	7
	Coach Matching Criteria		
Credentials		2	3
Relatability	**Relationship		
Structured		5	7
Successful experiences racial microaggression		5	8
Wide learning goals		6	9

Open Codes	Axial Codes	Files	References
	Role of Race in Coach Selection		
Relatability	**Qualities	1	1
Knows to embrace race		6	7
Understanding the plight of race		4	5
Diversity of thoughts		9	10
Identity of a mentor		6	7
Wide opportunity of learning		3	4
Take-aways of coaching		4	4
Ability to navigate microaggression issues		7	11
Building trust		2	3
Coaching VS mentoring		3	3
Effects - No Chemistry		3	5
Incompatible beliefs		1	2
Other direct variables in coach selection			

Appendix C: Qualifying Questions

1. Are you interested in participating in a research study seeking to understand the efficacy of leadership coaching for African American leaders: Yes or No?
2. Do you identify as African American? Yes or no
3. How did you learn about the solicitation of participants for this study?
 - a. Black Chamber of Commerce
 - b. The Executive Leadership Council (ELC)
 - c. National Black MBA Association
 - d. Referral from a Leadership Coaching Firm
 - e. LinkedIn
 - f. None of Above
4. Are you currently working in a leadership position at a for profit or not for profit organization? Yes or No
5. Do you have at least 5 years of leadership experience? Yes or No?
6. Have you worked with a leadership coach within the last two years or are currently working with a leadership coach for at least three months? Yes or No
7. Do you grant consent to the researcher contacting you to schedule a research interview? Yes or No
8. If permissible, what phone number and / or email may the researchers to contact you? Open text response