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Potential Adverse Impacts of the Lack of Diversity of African American Women on Business Operations: Diversity and the Competitive Advantage

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Walden University

College of Management and Technology

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Leilani J. Evans

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Walden University
2022

Abstract

Potential Adverse Impacts of the Lack of Diversity of African American Women on

Business Operations:

Diversity and the Competitive Advantage

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MBA, University of Phoenix, 2018

BS, University of Phoenix, 2016

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Business Administration

Gender Equity: Diversity and Inclusion

Walden University

March 2022

Abstract

Senior organizational leadership lacks diversity, with African American women elevating to senior executive positions to contribute to the competitive advantage. A lack of diversity in leadership could impact profitability and an organization's competitive advantage. Grounded in cognitive diversity theory, the purpose of this single qualitative case was to explore strategies African American women executives used to increase diversity with other African American Women in their ranks to ensure profitability and maintain a competitive advantage. The participants were five African American women senior executives in the District of Columbia who implemented strategies to increase diversity with other African American women and maintain a competitive advantage. Data were collected using semistructured phone interviews and reviewing organization employee handbooks and public policies. Data were analyzed using a thematic analysis process with three emerging themes: (a) mentoring, (b) barriers, and (c) strategic planning, diversity, and the competitive advantage for African American women in corporate America. A key recommendation is for senior business leaders to lend a critical lens to their promotion and hiring practices that marginalize African American women within an organization. The implication for positive social change is the potential ability for corporations to attract culturally diverse applicants to include African American women, expanding the workforce to a diversified market competitively, and elevating a company's perception as fair.

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Business Operations:
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by

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Dedication

“It’s not about supplication, it’s about power. It’s not about asking, it’s about demanding. It’s not about convincing those who are currently in power, it’s about changing the very face of power itself. “

- Kimberle Williams Crenshaw

I dedicate this study to all African American women who aspire to become leaders to diversify the face of corporate America, expanding equity and inclusion. To my mother Laura T. Evans, I dedicate this work to the strength and resilience you have shown in support of who you are, a mother, a wife, a friend, and a phenomenal WOMAN. You are my foundation for continuous growth. I love you! To my heart beats: My daughter Kalani, rise and keep rising. This world is for you to lead the change! It is your time! My sons, Steven, and Kyle, walk in the light of your truths and be an example for your sons and nephews. To my granddaughters, Kaleia, and Carter, you are the future, the brightest stars in the universe. This poem is what I want for you.

I AM the Ocean

“... I am your future

When the waters embrace me ...when the moon glows down...you clearly,

See me shining...

I...Am...A Jewel...I shine

I am Priceless ...Incomparable...Undeniable...Wonderful Me”

-Nikki Giovanni

Acknowledgments

“It is not our differences that divide us. It is our inability to recognize, accept, and celebrate those differences.” -*Audre Lorde*

This academic journey took an insurmountable amount of sacrifice, passion, and perseverance. First and foremost, I could not have completed this journey without the grace of God and the blessings for sustainability to finish. I am extremely humbled by the willingness of the African American women participants of the Delta Sigma Theta who unequivocally dedicated their time and support as participants for this journey. Your support has forged a bond of sisterhood with synergistic alignment and purpose. Your strength, determination, and fortitude are beacons that light the way to a brighter future for women in all walks of life. To the Briley Boys for giving me a peaceful haven to complete the final stages of this study and unrequited support. To my sister friend Tracy Hudson, who listened to my diatribe of angst and tears during this process.

Additionally, I am thankful for my committee members, Dr. Jaime Klein, Dr. Sylnovie Merchant, and Dr. Jamiel Vadell, who were instrumental in my completing the doctoral journey. Thank you to Dr. Kim Critchlow, who was my role model in pursuit of bringing light to this study from my first residency. And to my classmates Doctor Charles Johnson, III and Pamela Manuel, thank you for bringing levity, comradery, and positive energy during times of despair. You have kept me grounded and consistently said we would finish. And lastly, to my Muse thank you! Now it is your turn!

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Section 1: Foundation of the Study

Background of the Problem

Senior organizational leadership contributing to the competitive advantage has a lack of diversity with African American women elevating to senior executive positions to contribute to the competitive advantage of African American women to executive positions. While women have collectively broken the glass ceiling, African Americans continue to struggle with achieving senior executive elevation. According to Roberts et al. (2018) there are only 32 women leaders in Fortune 500 companies and only three African American men. In 2015, 8.2% of management positions (e.g., vice presidents and higher) in the business sectors of the workforce were African Americans (Bureau of Labor Statistics 2015). According to Beal (2008), African Americans remain underrepresented in corporate America. Based on the statistics the question remains about what strategies African American women (AAW) use to elevate to senior leadership.

In corporate America, the element of diversity is absent at the senior level, specifically with the presence of AAW. This topic has a significant impact on workplace diversity and leadership prevalent with impacting the competitive advantage. With the political climate changing towards a gender and racial inclusion dichotomy from what was, it is critical to understand leadership through the experiences of AAW leaders.

Problem and Purpose

In 2018, 43% of the workforce was made up of women, 12% as senior executives, and 4% of the top corporations having women as chief executive officers (CEOs);

(Moreno-Gómez et al., 2018). The face of corporate America, however, is synonymous with White men. While women make up 40% of managerial positions, they remain as midlevel managers or in less influential positions (Sánchez & Lehnert, 2019). The general business problem is that a lack of diversity in leadership could impact profitability and diminish an organization's competitive advantage. The specific business problem is that some corporate leaders lack strategies to increase diversity in their ranks to ensure profitability and maintain a competitive advantage.

The purpose of this qualitative single case study was to explore strategies that AAW executives use to increase diversity with other AAW in their ranks to ensure profitability and maintain competitive advantage. The participants consisted of five executive-level managers with 10 years of experience who have successfully implemented strategies to increase diversity in their company within the District of Columbia. The implication for social change is the ability for corporations to attract culturally diverse applicants expanding the workforce to a diversified market competitively. Diversity could be a tool by which corporations ensure they are meeting the needs of society. Progressive organizations must show sensitivity to upholding social, cultural, and ethical values of the employed and serve diverse communities, which will result in more opportunities and promote social impact by allowing diversified workforce's ascension to leadership positions (Saxena, 2014).

Nature of the Study

I selected qualitative methodology for this study. A qualitative researcher collects data from individuals actively engaged in the context studied and can discover unexpected insights (Hill & Kemp, 2018; Lyons et al., 2015). The researcher gains a deeper understanding of the phenomenon of interest by obtaining and conveying the participants' experiences from a participatory position. Qualitative researchers collect data and pursue objectivity with minimal influence (Saunders et al., 2019). By contrast, the quantitative research methodology uses standardized measures and statistical analysis to identify the relationship between variables (Hammarberg et al., 2016). Thus, quantitative research did not apply to this study. The focus of the research was not to examine the connection between variables. Mixed-method researchers collect quantitative and qualitative data into a single study for data integration to tightly assimilate a response to the research question (Taguchi, 2018). This method was not applicable, as the research question was answerable using a standalone qualitative method.

I used a single case study design to explore strategies that African Americana women executives used to increase diversity with other AAW in their ranks to ensure profitability and maintain a competitive advantage. Conventional alternatives for qualitative designs are phenomenological, grounded theory, and ethnographic. A phenomenological approach is appropriate if addressing individuals with similar experiences (Stainton, 2016). However, the phenomenological design was not a practical

option given that the intent was to obtain an in-depth understanding of strategies leaders used to diversify ranks. A grounded theory approach is applicable for developing theories (Tavakol & Sandars, 2014), not the objective for examining strategies used by leaders to increase diversity and ensure profitability. An ethnographic approach is suitable when a researcher pursues a description and interpretation of shared patterns of the entire group's culture over a significant period (Wood & Mattson, 2019). An ethnographic approach was not appropriate as I sought to obtain data from exploring strategies AAW executives used to diversify with other AAW to increase diversity in their ranks for profitability and competitive advantage. Researchers use a case study design to explore present-day phenomenon when there is ambiguity with the boundaries of the phenomena (Ridder, 2017). A single case study is appropriate to study a specific group or community (Yin, 2018). A multiple case study was not appropriate for the study as the objective was to explore a more in-depth understanding of strategies related to diversification and profitability of one, geographically bound phenomenon.

Research Question

What strategies do AAW executives use to increase diversity with other AAW in their ranks to ensure profitability and maintain competitive advantage?

Interview Questions

1. What strategies do you use to increase diversity within your ranks?
2. What strategies have been the most successful in increasing diversity within your organization?

3. What strategies have failed to increase diversity within your organization?
4. What metrics do you use to assess the strategies implemented to increase diversity within your ranks?
5. How is the career ladder structured within your organization to ensure diversity?
6. How are mentorship programs used within your organization to increase diversity within your ranks?
7. What else would you like to share about your experience with increasing diversity to ensure profitability and maintain competitive advantage?

Conceptual Framework

The framework for this study was the cognitive diversity theory (CDT) conceptualized by Hambrick in 1994. The CDT identifies the differences in the preferences and beliefs of decision makers regarding strategic goals (Meissner & Wulf, 2017) and their inference etic framing of their perception of strategic decisions (Meissner & Wulf, 2017; Mohammed & Ringseis, 2001). Theoretically, one examines the element of diversity on the surface: that which is visible, such as demographics and gender. Miller et al. (1998) defined cognitive diversity as the differences in beliefs and the upper echelon executive beliefs within an organization.

With organizational environments constructed within a collaborative climate, Meissner and Wulf (2017) posited that cognitive diversity has proven to contribute to positive outcomes in the workgroup by minimizing debiasing decision making to the

extent that cognitive diversity, as suggested by Miller et al. (1998), is an influence on indirectly linking diversity and profitability. Organizations considering diversifying upper executives could prosper from CDT to implement a distinctive workforce. This connection between diversity and profitability is new. Therefore, in this study, I aimed to explore in what ways profitable corporations promote discourse that connects workforce diversity to appeals for competitive marketing. Conversation around diversity is a type of racial discourse (Berrey, 2015), and, at the same time, often disregards the structural inequalities that continue to marginalize groups. Studying this discourse from a corporate perspective in a qualitative method provides lived experiences and diminishes the potential for bias. Organizations that consider diversifying upper executives could prosper from CDT to implement a distinctive workforce.

Operational Definitions

African American: Denotes individuals dispersed from the African homeland to the United States due to the slave trade or immigration; constitutes a significant number of persons based on economic, political, and social status (Galperin et al., 2018).

Cognitive diversity theory: Differences in the preferences and beliefs of decision makers regarding strategic goals and their inference etic framing their perception of strategic decisions (Meissner & Wulf, 2017; Mohammed & Ringseis, 2001).

Glass ceiling: A metaphor denoting an element of obstacles preventing the advancement of women and minorities in corporate leadership (Federal Glass Ceiling Commission, 1995)

Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations

Assumptions

Assumptions are beliefs without critical thinking (Detmering & Johnson, 2011); an acknowledgment of a position that relates to a necessary condition of the study and a procedure of the study that is not controlled by the researcher and without the research is irrelevant (Leedy & Ormrod, 2016). There were several assumptions in this research study. The first assumption was that the participants would share their experiences of strategies for elevating to executive leadership positions with full transparency. The participant selection considered were AAW in senior leadership positions. The second assumption was that barriers prevent AAW from ascending to senior leadership positions. The literature provided evidence for this assumption by highlighting the marginalization experienced by AAW in pursuing senior leadership positions (Pace, 2018). A third assumption was that AAW are viewed as supporting staff and not as senior business leaders. Supporting literary evidence stated that African Americans facilitate change and transformational leadership with a broader view, verifying the diversity value in senior leadership positions (Pace, 2018). The fourth assumption was that AAW, as senior leaders, impact a company's competitive advantage. The literature has provided evidence for this assumption through the lens of perception (see McDowell et al., 2018). One significant assumption in the research was purposeful to business and society, more pointedly to gender, race (AAW), cultural diversity, particularly crucial to corporate executives responsive to diversity, developing a more comprehensive competitive

advantage. The fifth assumption is that the results of the research could affect positive social change.

Limitations

Limitations refer to the elements that may impact the outcome of the study (Sarmiento et al., 2015). This study was limited to AAW with a sample size of five in senior leadership positions. In the District of Columbia, therefore, the limited number of AAW in senior leadership positions restricted the number of available participants. Second, the qualitative nature of the study was a limitation. The research participants self-reported their lived experiences through virtual interviews, absent any other data sources extracted to validate the participants' responses. The verification and validation of the interviews relied on the transcripts and member checking. Member checking was the means of inviting participants to verify the interpretation of their responses as a meaningful and correct viewpoint (see Iivari, 2018).

Additionally, the study was limited to positions in a mix of industries, both federal and commercial. This study's limitations could present weaknesses beyond the researcher's control and correlate to the specific research design, funding circumspection, and other elements (Theofanidis & Fountouki, 2019). The limitation was relative to AAW in executive positions and the direct correlation to increasing competitiveness. The research contained a small sample size of five participants with the minimum of a bachelor's degree, potentially restricting generalization of data to all women facing obstacles for advancement. Paramount to the study was the literature gap concerning

women in corporations' governance positions, understanding the barriers to rising to senior-level leadership, and the financial impact for competitive advantage. Further, the findings were generalized to the number of participants in this qualitative study because the data process were deemed for generalizing a larger population. Lastly, my own biases as an African American woman who served in a senior executive position was a limitation.

Delimitations

I aimed to explore the lived experiences and strategies of AAW who have attained senior leadership positions in corporate America out of an interest to advocate for promoting diversity and inclusion in leadership positions to widen the competitive advantage. Excluded were individuals from demographics who were not AAW. Additional excluded participants included participants from neighboring areas, African American participants located outside of the contiguous United States, and overseas participants. Under normal climate circumstances, the research is delimited to interviews, field notes, and memos. However, in the United States' current pandemic state, the research was delimited to five females' virtual interviews. The population also delimited the study to only women who worked in commercial corporations and the in federal sector in senior-level leadership positions. An additional delimiter was geographical location; participants were from the District of Columbia.

Significance of the Study

The findings from this study may provide additional insight into strategies that organizations embrace to increase diversity within their ranks. By exploring the lived experiences of a diverse body of executives using the CDT lens, I intended to capture their career development path and corporate strategies used to elevate their positions to senior executive positions. The uniqueness of this study was relevant to furthering the research of strategies used for elevating a diverse population in the corporate workforce and career decision-making strategies for competitive advantage.

Maintaining a competitive advantage is an integral component of corporate success (Bouma et al., 2017). Corporate leaders develop strategies to elevate their competitiveness within their market. To maintain a competitive edge, strategies to diversify are essential in expanding to various demographics. Findings from this study may provide additional insight into what strategies AAW executives use to increase diversity with other AAW in their ranks. The data collected may be an asset to corporations seeking to diversify their leadership profiles as barriers to diversification and strategies to overcome them are presented in the analysis.

Contribution to Business Practice

One of the significant initiatives in the 21st century has been that of diversity and equality. Corporations have realized that this is the most critical factor in maintaining a definite competitive advantage (Robinson & Dechant, 1977). This study, and the data collected, are significant because of the dearth of empirical research on diversity and the

potential impact it could have on a corporation's competitive advantage. Additionally, the study is significant in that it identifies barriers that prevent career progression in organizations as senior executives and the impact on a corporation's revenue. Furthermore, this study may expand the body of knowledge about a corporation's career decision-making strategies. The study could serve as a foundation for additional researchers to similarly explore this phenomenon with other disparate impacted groups and industries. It could also provide a scheme for the accession of a diversified workforce. By promoting the worth and development of cultures of communities, corporations could strengthen their competitive advantage by filling the diversity gap (Cletus et al., 2018).

Implications for Social Change

Workforce diversity is trending with businesses reviewing their executive suite through an optic lens of cultural mix, ethnicity, and skillsets (Huang et al., 2019). The construct of the change foundation is the buy-in of stakeholders, both internal and external, for environmental transformation. In an ever-evolving global environment, the course of business was built upon the direction of leadership—leadership with a disposition to implement diversity innovation for sustainability.

Diversified organizational leadership facilitates ample problem--solving encompassing network resources, information sharing, and creative innovation (Glass & Cook, 2017). This approach fosters the competitive advantage within the industry. The strategies expressed in this study may help corporations remove culturally identifiable

barriers to elevate senior leadership positions within a diversified workforce, thereby promoting and sustaining a competitive advantage.

Literature Review

The literature review contains an in-depth review of seminal work and subsequent research on the topic of workforce diversity or lack thereof and its impact on corporate competitive advantage. The purpose of the literature review is to present knowledge about the topic related to the business problem, address questions from existing research, and blend or summarize key literature related to the research topic (Wilson, 2017)

The introduction covers which search vehicles were appropriate for the research topic, followed by an in-depth dive into the literature regarding diversity (gender, cultural, and ethnicity – AAW's), impact on AAW, and how diversity contributes to a business's competitive advantage. Throughout the literature review process, researchers connect and intersect existing theories using data triangulation to validate and expand the study (Wolcott, 2002). The primary goal of the current academic review and professional literature was to evaluate, explore, and recap the most recent information related to exploring strategies that AAW executives have used to increase diversity with other AAW in their ranks to ensure profitability and maintain competitive advantage. The chapter concludes with a summary of the existing literature, and how it relates to the research problem.

Methods of Searching

The review of literature began with a comprehensive search of the Walden University Library to obtain relevant peer-reviewed and seminal articles. The search included business and management databases such as ABI/INFORM Complete, Academic Search Premier, and Emerald Management Journal. An additional search included multiple online databases in Google Scholar, ProQuest, Sage, ScienceDirect, and other databases.

In some instances, the BOOLEAN was used to identify prevalent content. Search terms included but were not limited to *African American women in corporate America*, *competitive advantage*, *cognitive diversity theory*, *diversity*, *diversity and America*, *diversity and competitive advantage*, *diversity and culture*, *diversity and gender*, *diversity and race*, *diversity in the workplace*, *equal opportunity*, *gender diversity and financial performance*, *gender inequality in leadership perceptions in corporate America*, and *mentoring*. Additional methods used to target research consisted of the following: entering a data range to obtain data within the last 5 years, reviewing “peer-reviewed” or “scholarly articles” when presented, limiting magazines and newspaper publications, limiting the usage of books for seminal research, and limiting the inclusions of journals or databases irrelevant to the subject. I reviewed the existing literature for evidence of evolution. I discovered limited information on CDT within the databases. As I continued to explore these databases and subsequent others, several themes repeatedly emerged. I searched for articles with the terms mentioned above in conjunction with *African*

American women corporate leadership, corporate strategies for diversity, barriers and obstacles of African American women, gender and racial bias, CDT and corporate strategies, and C-suite and disparity. Additionally, I searched keywords such as *corporate strategies for diversity, blue ocean strategies, competitive advantage, diversity in corporations, and diversity in the federal government.* Finally, I organized the literature review by describing the conceptual framework first and then presenting a thematic analysis of the literature in the following categories: C-suite disparity; barriers, opportunities, and strategies; gender and racial bias; glass ceiling; and culture and diversity. Subcategories included contextual factors relative to diversity and issues from an organizational perspective, AAW in government, and AAW in corporate America.

Historical Background

Diversity is the quality or practice of various social and ethnic backgrounds of gender, culture, and racial orientation. It is the means to elevate personnel to executive positions, increase a competitive business advantage, and speak to cultural engagement internally and externally. The corporate executive level's lack of diversifying executive faces restricts a company's competitive advantage, limiting its ability to grow and compete. Organizational strategies have engaged in a bottom-up path through mentoring and education (Brondyk & Searby, 2020).

CDT

Cognitive diversity has a compelling relationship with knowledge prevalent in team innovation. Rahmi and Indarti (2019) argued that the teams' climate moderates the

connection between cognitive diversity and knowledge sharing. In the principle of management, Miller et al. (1998) inferred that cognitive diversity genesis is the culmination of cultural differences between various groups that emanates in innovation and creative problem-solving. The term cognitive diversity refers to the distinctions of group members in experiences, expertise, and perspectives. To further expound on this idea, cognitive diversity (a low impact) for leaders is visible through self-image recruitment, straying corporations from competitive success (Bapat, 2018; Canaday, 2017;). Canady (2017) stated that commonly linked with diversity are gender, race, and age, which have no interrelationship to a team's results. Instead, the differences in perspectives and knowledge base are the catalysts promoting diversity.

The framework for this study was the CDT, conceptualized by Hambrick in 1994. The CDT identifies the differences in the preferences and beliefs of decision makers regarding strategic goals (Meissner & Wulf, 2017) and their inference etic framing their perception of strategic decisions (Meissner & Wulf, 2017; Mohammed & Ringseis, 2001). Theoretically, the element of diversity appears on the surface: that which is visible, such as demographics and gender. Miller et al. (1998) defined cognitive diversity as the differences in beliefs and the upper echelon executive beliefs within an organization.

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Historical Barriers for African Americans

African Americans are not new to historical structural barriers, such as educational inequities in academics and schools, poverty, and employment (Vegas et al., 2015). In predominantly White institutions, the barriers of prejudice, discrimination, and promotions are prevalent (Dinh et al., 2014). Angel et al. (2013) posited that African American woman are faced barriers such as discrimination and social and cultural acceptance, limiting access to resources and mentorship. For example, AAW often have limits on their earnings and promotions and are limited in their career pathway decisions due the views of stereotypical patterns that make their beliefs and practices unconventional in business processes (Angel et al., 2013). Angel et al. further stated that AAW, despite the importance of mentorship, lack formal information networks, thereby limiting their access to information. These same limitations are prevalent in academics

(Frazer, 2018). The content of this review is supportive in developing the background and identifying barriers that impact AAW in corporations and the effect on the competitive market.

C-Suite Disparity

AAW's pathway of experiences to elevate to executive-level positions is a subject of discussion (Alexander, 2010; Beckwith et al., 2016; Wolfe & Dilworth, 2015). The elevation of women to executive positions increased in 2015 from 17% to 21% in 2019, according to the output of a survey of 329 United States and Canadian companies consisting of 685,000 workers (Brooks, 2019). However, the numbers have not increased for AAW, who represent only 4% of senior executives. Fraser (2019) posited that women of color lagged White men, men of color, and White women. According to Jagannathan (2019), there remains a significant underrepresentation of women at all levels, with one in five executives in the C-suite. The glass ceiling known to thwart ambitious women from climbing the corporate ladder is far from the problem, suggesting that the "broken rung" and depicting the flaw from entry-to-manager-level roles is instead the culprit (Jagannathan, 2019); Brooks (2019) suggested that the lack of face time with senior leaders prevents the elevation up the corporate ladder, preventing relationship building.

Historically, corporate directors have been White and male amidst the country evolving with gender, racial, and ethnic compositions as the leaders of capitalism. Firms began to shift, paying more attention to diversity with a push from the Sarbanes-Oxley

Act of 2002, breaking up old networks and demanding independent directors (Reed, 2019). In 2009, the Security Exchange Commission demanded companies to disclose within their proxy statement whether, and if so how, a nominating committee considers diversity in identifying nominees (as cited in Reed, 2019). However, U.S. companies are spending millions on corporate diversity but are not retaining African American professionals or promoting them to C-suite positions. African Americans account for 12% of the U.S. population, with only 3.22% of the senior executive roles in large companies and 0.8% of all Fortune 500 CEO positions, according to the analysis by the Center for Talen Innovation, a think tank in New York City (as cited in Brooks, 2019). A report published in 2014 posited that African American woman aspired three times more than White women to positions of power with an esteemed title; however, White women were twice as likely AAW to attain one (Marshall & Wingfield, 2016). Davis (2016) suggested that the progress achieved by women in the workplace remains inadequate for AAW in senior and executive-level positions.

Barriers: Opportunities and Strategies

In recent years, the amount of literature on women's leadership has increased; however, few researchers have explored leadership development of AAW (Davis & Maldonado, 2015). Much of the literature has been limited to the traditionally defined views of leaderships; that is, most of the research has concentrated on leadership and managerial aspects adopted by White males in the corporate world. However, there have been an increasing number of studies conducted on female managers and leaders that

have attempted to identify key success factors or pitfalls. Most of the research has been done with women at lower levels or in small organizations (Angel et al., 2013; Davis & Maldonado, 2015). According to Waring (2003), the existing research on leadership development relative to women has been confined to studies of women's history or feminist literature that views women through a narrow lens and fails to address how race and gender impact leadership development.

Historically, women and minorities have been legally excluded from several professional occupations (Muzio & Tomlinson, 2012). Today, AAW continue to experience many forms of discrimination within the workplace due to their gender and race. Worsley and Stone (2011) highlighted that ethnic minorities face a variety of barriers to upward mobility in organizations, such as being marginalized in employment promotions, not receiving salary raises, and having limited access to mentors and role models. Three years following Worsley and Stone, O'Brien et al. (2014) demonstrated that AAW are still encountering the same barriers by stating that AAW have reported various organizational barriers, including lack of support, devaluation of their work, and few, if any, role models or mentors.

Additionally, Ortiz and Roscigno (2009) revealed 33,202 discrimination case files demonstrating that Black women are more likely to experience discrimination in promotion than White women and that Black women reported encountering discrimination pertaining to being fired and race-related harassment. Although O'Brien et al. (2014) provided pertinent information regarding the barriers and experiences AAW

face in the workplace, a noticeable flaw in their research was the lack of subgroups of women of color. Barriers to leadership opportunities are a global phenomenon where women, when compared to men, are disproportionately concentrated in lower-level and lower authoritative leadership positions (Northouse, 2019). These barriers are generally perceived as being against women but to a larger extent are against AAW executives. According to Parker (2004) the silencing of some groups of women and men while privileging others has resulted from the theoretical perspectives that frame an understanding of gender, discourse, and organization.

Black feminists have theorized that the understanding of race, class, and gender requires researchers to view the identities as characteristics that are embedded within one another and need to be studied simultaneously instead of separately (Acker, 2012; Vannoy, 2001). Black feminist theories have emphasized that in many contexts, race and gender cannot be separated (Collins, 1990; Hooks, 1984). AAW have reported that racism, rather than sexism, is the greatest barrier to opportunities in dominant culture organizations (Edwards, 2013). Furthermore, only a few studies have addressed how race impacts leadership in dominant culture organizations (Hooks, 1984, Parker, 2005; Parker & Ogilvie, 1996). Scholars have suggested that attitudes towards women continue to be profoundly affected by past and current racial oppression (Davis & Maldonada, 2015; Feagin & Elias, 2013; Moore, 2013). Additionally, invisibility plays a large role in AAW being given the opportunity to climb the corporate ladder. According to Sessler-Bernstein and Bilimoria (2013), women of color have reported feeling invisible due to a lack of

respect and feeling as though they are not valued by the organization. Furthermore, according to Lewis and Neville (2015), another challenge that AAW face is marginalization in the workplace. The marginalization is accomplished through feelings of invisibility in the form of silence and being made to feel less significant and organizationally suitable based on gender and race (Lewis & Neville, 2015).

Leadership

Leadership positions in higher education has few AAW (Irby, 2014). In 2007, 17% of the professional staff in American higher education were people of color (National Center Education Statistics, 2009). In a study consisting of AAW holding leadership positions in universities across the United States, Irby (2014) posited that those AAW guard their personal full authentic expression in the workplace to achieve leadership status.

African American challenges are race and gender in comparison to their European American colleagues. According to Montgomery et al. (2014), AAW have three main barriers to gain promotion and tenure in the academic arena: (a) lack of socialization to faculty life, (b) lack of meaningful mentoring, and (c) the inability to articulate a sustainable research agenda. Davis et al. (2011) suggested factors that may contribute to the success of AAW in academia: the completion of a dissertation, consistent performance criteria, and successful tenure and promotion. Although a slight difference exists in the direct backgrounds of the women in the group, the views of how African Americans perceived their career advancement were similar with the participants

Byrd and Scott (2018) ascertained that working a leadership position is an authoritative role that includes a certain amount of power or influence. Predominately European Americans hold these types of positions (Byrd, 2014). Byrd inferred that those AAW believed leadership positions based on their gender, race, and social class were biased. European Americans have undermined AAW in leadership positions in the workplace.

AAW and Mentoring

A key factor of success for African American women traversing to obtain a senior executive leadership position is mentoring. Garvey et al., (2014) suggest that mentoring is a resource that can help someone build his or her career. Garvey et al. highlighted the variety of purposes of a mentor to include the development of managers or leaders, change of positions in the workplace, promote people to senior positions, support change, and improve performance.

Various scholars define mentoring using different words and phrases. According to Clayton et al., (2013) mentoring is a term identifying how protégé assist individuals with development of their professional career path. Leck and Orser (2013) defined mentoring as a relationship between a younger, less experienced individual, such as a protégé, and an older, more experienced individual, who is considered the mentor. Hu et al. (2014) further supported Leck and Orser (2013) by stating that mentoring is an interpersonal relationship developed and cultivated between a senior, more experienced employee (the mentor) and a junior, less experienced employee (the protégé) enhances

the junior employee's career development. Rutti et al. (2012) provided an expanded definition of mentoring by defining it as a nurturing process in which a more skilled or experienced person serves as a role model and teaches, sponsors, encourages, counsels, and befriends a less skilled and experienced individual. Allen and Butler (2014) chose to define mentoring as a process by which an individual of superior rank, high performance, and prestige counsels, coaches, and facilitates the intellectual and career development of a junior employee within the same organization. There are over 40 definitions of what a mentor is, but those definitions share the view that mentors are individuals who provided various personal and professional support to junior or protégé employees (Ghosh & Reio, 2013).

Mentorship is a critical and historical technique that prepares African American women (AAW) for leadership positions. Choosing to prepare and coach other aspiring AAW leaders for organizational leadership success helps to ensure that aspiring AAW leaders are ready for the senior leadership workforce. In terms of influencing aspiring AAW leaders of the future, AAW leaders have historically used mentorship to prepare, influence, and encourage other AAW who have leadership potential (Mullings, 2014). A critical element of mentorship prevalent in the African American community is the concept of "other mothering." Ospina and Foldy (2009) implied "other mothering" is a survival technique that began during slavery in which mothers take responsibility for the children of other mothers. This concept can be used within an organizational context, as well. AAW leaders tend to mentor other AAW within organizations when the mentee

expresses the potential to elevate (Museus, 2014). According to Dominquez and Hager (2013), mentoring programs have shown to increase personnel retention, reduce organizational attrition, increase career satisfaction, accelerate the development of leadership, and reduce the learning curve in today's organizational markets. Rutti et al. (2012) suggested that when mentoring includes the overall professional development of employees, both parties, 49 the mentor and the mentee, seek something positive from the mentoring relationship and mutually benefit from the exchange. Furthermore, Craig et al. (2012) reiterated the impact of mentoring by stating that the strong link between career mentoring and positive employee outcomes include extrinsic success, such as increased compensation, promotion eligibility, and overall career mobility.

Aside from promotion eligibility, increased compensation, and career mobility, Dzickowski (2013) asserted that benefits derived from mentoring include reduction in stress, improved self-esteem, increased professional skills, increased insight, and greater awareness of different approaches. Clayton et al. (2013) corroborated Dzickowski by stating that mentoring benefits both the mentor and the mentee. Also, mentor/mentee relationships provide the opportunity for mentees to share their experiences, provide feedback, and increase their levels of confidence in their leadership abilities (Clayton et al., 2013). Also, support behaviors, such as mentoring, are associated with positive work attitudes and outcomes, greater career success, and increased likelihood of upward mobility (Eby et.al., 2013). As Leck and Orser (2013) reported, mentoring enables women to overcome career obstacles, gain information and insight, seize power,

understand organizational politics, obtain feedback, and gain access to resources.

Dworkin et al. (2012) further supported the positive effects of women's mentorship by stating that organization has a strong mentoring program for women, it increases the likelihood of women rising to senior management level career roles. Leck and Orser (2013) and Dworkin et al. (2012) reported positive outcomes when women are involved in mentoring relationships. Germain, Herzog, and Hamilton (2012) asserted that in some professional male-dominated workplaces, women experience a lack of female mentors, role models, and networks, resulting in isolation and low self-efficacy, creating professional barriers. However, Skaggs et al. (2012) concluded that if more women represented executives and board-level roles, the female managerial representation, in turn, would increase mentorship, access to better social networks, and reduce, if not eliminate, negative gender stereotypes. The mentoring of women, in general, has been shown to increase a woman's marketability and increases the likelihood of women acquiring senior-level leadership positions (Dworkin et al., 2012)

In general, mentoring women has shown to increase a women's marketability and increase the likelihood of acquiring senior leadership positions (Dworkin, et al., 2012). Pittman (2012) posited those women who are categorized as part of the double jeopardy rule, female and African American, face issues of pressure to be symbolic role models unlike White women. Jones et al. (2013) suggest mentoring African American women have positive effects. For example, Jones et al. (2013) stated that mentoring Black women, especially in 51 predominantly White organizations, mitigate the challenges that

Black female professionals' experience. However, it is essential to note that Jones et al. asserted that the literature suggests that Black women experience invisibility, social exclusion, and poor mentoring, resulting in an organization that can effectively provide support and mentoring networks that aid in organizational leadership success

Diversity in Corporate America's Workforce

Diversity in the workplace is essential to an organization. The term diversity in the United States workforce is subjective for identifying qualified men and women of various races, ages, ethnicities, and sexual orientations (Byrd & Scott, 2018). The similar and dissimilar characteristics of diversity are not limited to gender, race, color; ethnicity; age, socioeconomic status; religion; culture norms and customs, professional work experience, and professional adaptability (Scott, 2018). Diversity programs are positioned in organizations to ensure equality, fairness, and opportunities for all races and gender. Buttner et al. (2016) focused on employees of color in U.S. organizations and the causes and effects of the underrepresentation of African American leaders. Additionally, Buttner et al. (2016) discussed the importance of strategic diversity initiatives in organizations. European Americans endorsed qualified African American leaders and supported equal opportunity, but racism exists (Buttner et al. 2012). According to Frey (2018), the United States is experiencing a diversity explosion expounding various individual attitudinal changes, organizational practices, and the norm of American politics.

According to Hunt et al (2018) based on 346 participating companies between the United States and the United Kingdom, the average gender representation in executive

leadership positions increased by 2% points to 14% with cultural and ethnic diversity showing increase of 1% point to 13% (Hunt et al., 2018). According to Hunt et al (2018) the plight of how to effectively leverage inclusion and diversity for value creation remains uncertain. However, Page (2019) offers logic with a model of diversity based on an individual's ability, knowledge, and culture. This creates a unique tool linking cognitive collection and identity diversity as an essential ingredient to develop a diversity bonus.

The persistent disparities of underrepresented women in management positions affect their career and performance. Conducting a study using 81 publicly traded firms out of 2,000, Graham et al. (2017) examined the influences of gender diversity in executive positions impacted by two management structures. Differences were absent in identifying an association of a top HR executive in the proportion of women executives—an envisioned structure in a corporate hierarchy in promoting diversity, one that symbolically operates. In 2004, wage earnings for African American women were 86 percent of Caucasian women's earnings based on a significant body of research (Key et al., 2012). The study results identified that Caucasian occupied positions were in high regard than the positions held by African Americans. Achieving senior-level positions is a significant milestone in career progression. The researchers' findings identified the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) perceptions of an ineffective infrastructure, making it challenging to influence gender diversity.

According to Graham et al. (2017), there is a litany of factors influencing women as executives. A collection of evidence across economics, industrial relations, sociology, psychology, and human resource (HR) industries on management literature supporting labor demand and labor supply-related, exemplifies women's low representation in management (Graham et al., 2017; Orser and Leck, 2010). Graham et al (2017) posited the importance in understanding the impact of labor demand and labor supply in women's attainment of senior leadership positions and equally significant understanding a company's progress or lack thereof with gender diversity in management.

Diversity and Business

Diversity in the broadest definition is championed by companies in a fast-paced global market which encompasses gender, race ethnicity, age, and sexual orientation inclusiveness. Often diversity is not at the top of business priorities due to the unidentified evidence of the payback on investment submitting less predictable and tangible benefits (Robinson & Dechant, 1997). Instead, the argument hosted by corporate human resource executives is diversity is the right thing to do with the hope that management will support and promote a diversified environment (Robinson & Dechant, 1997).

A major conundrum for corporations is to identify the criteria for gender equality and corporate governance in modern management in both the private and public sectors (Baez et al., 2018). One such issue is answering the question of why so few women in executive leadership positions. Two complementary principles of consideration: the first

is social justice, providing the same opportunities for women that are offered to men, including senior executive management, systemically creating positive discrimination remove previous detriments. The second is exponential support provided by academic and business literature that showcases how gender diversified teams at the senior executive and board level promotes compelling business enhancements (Báez et al., 2018).

The elevation of women to executive leadership positions has increased within the last decades of the twentieth century (Gamble & Turner, 2015). With a rise in women professional advancement, there was a narrowing in the gender wage gap, and a decline in sex segregation and a slow trek of women to management ranks (Stryker, 2018). From zero percentage of women as senior executives in Fortune 500 companies; with 11.0 percent women representing senior leadership positions in 2001. In general, women hold 52 percent of the professional ranks, but still trail behind male executives. However, African Americans fair worse, holding 3.1 percent of the board seats of Fortune 500 companies in 2010, in contrast to 12.7 held by Caucasian women (Evans, 2011; Stryker, 2018). Still, they face the same hiring discrimination. According to Fan (2018) an economist from the University of Chicago and Stanford University, submits that less than one-fifth of C-suite executives at large publicly traded U.S. companies are women, with 24 of the CEOs at Fortune 500 companies are women which three of those African American women. Further noted, 50 years of economic history proves that inclusive workplaces make everyone more prosperous. Additionally, if access to equal education

across groups and the disappearance of discrimination is prevalent, the U.S. GDP per capita would grow by another 15 to 20 percent. An inclusive culture removes dependence on existing sustainability and expands market growth. Studies conducted by the Center for Talent Innovation analyzed the impact of diversity on innovation and performance, comparing a national survey of 1,800 professionals, 40 case studies, and a host of interviews and focus groups (Hewlett et al., 2003). The results of the study identified that companies with leaders possessing inherent and acquired diversity were more competitive than other companies.

Comparatively, analysis of diversity in leadership with market outcomes espoused that diversified companies excelled in out innovated and outperformed other companies (Stryker, 2018). Fan (2018) suggest strategy failure is impacted by margin or growth choice. Margin choice, revenues, focuses on short term needs toward incremental change. A decline in the diversity numbers intensifies a company's recruitment ability to buy diversified workforce. Whereas growth choice concentrates on investing on the existing workforce through deliberate talent development and supporting diverse advance talent through a supporting ecosystem (Fan, 2018)

Diversity: Boardroom

Diversity is a trendy subject gaining attention form scholars and policymakers (Moreno-Gomez et al., 2018). Referred to as a double-edged sword, the benefits of diversity promote creativity and quality performance. Hsu et al. (2019) explored the norm of gender, age, tenure, and skillsets of board member's attributes into a comprehensive

diversity index, with data output articulating positive operating performances on boardroom diversity. However, in larger firms, the impact of strategic change presents a negative correlation with operating performance and board diversity. Whereas, with smaller firms, there was a positive correlation.

The Crain's list of public companies shows 103 women serving on the board of 40 largest companies in 2019 (Daniel, 2019); yet 2014, there were only 74. In corporate Chicago percentages of female directors make up 24 percent of the board members of the top 40 companies with the previous year's national average listed at 24 percent, according to Spencer Stuart's recruitment firm. Minorities make up 16 percent of directors locally, shy of the federal 17 percent in 2018 for the top 200 companies by revenue in the S&P 500 (Daniel, 2019).

In Illinois, on March 29, the House passed a bill 61-27 vote requiring a board of each public company to have at least one woman, African American, and one Hispanic. However, Daniel (2019) posited the status quo is not working for minorities and women, while opponents are raising reverse discrimination. There is a growing wave of diversifying with minority women understanding the value diversification promotes in elevating business. The largest 200 S&P 500 companies by revenue have benefitted in market expansion with an increase of 9 percent of directors seated with African Americans, and 4 percent were Latino (Daniel, 2019). The slow elevation of younger African American executives does not include women. Younger minorities cultivate meaningful relationships through their roles on the board and vouches for other

minorities creating a virtuous cycle (Daniel, 2019). Additionally, the growing wave of diversity has expanded tentacles into the business expansion of areas otherwise limited to the norm of the white male-dominated environment, stifling the big and small corporations' potential marketing reach.

Evolution of Diversity

To understand the current state of diversity, one must understand its history. The history of race and gender relations in the U.S. shaped the political, social, cultural, and economic environment and ideology within the United States (Pérez Huber & Solorzano, 2015). This historical, ideological perspective manifested in behavior, reflecting the thought of superiority over non-European/White groups (Nkomo & Hoobler, 2014; Pérez Huber & Solorzano, 2015). Historically, researchers demonstrated that African Americans continually are impacted by such ideologies in the workplace (DeCuir-Gunby & Gunby 2016). This superiority ideology carried over into the workplace and created an environment of workplace discrimination for African Americans (Nkomo, 2009). This resulted in practices that excluded access to knowledge relative and networking opportunities that could assist with navigating the workplace political landscape (Angel et al., 2013; DeCuir-Gunby, & Gunby 2016; Johns, 2013).

There were many points in history that impacted the African American worker and the HR strategy. World War II marked a period in history that heightened the need for production workers and required HR to formulate a strategy to create an environment of diversity for the inclusion of African Americans in the workforce (Nkomo & Hoobler,

2014). Managing this new group of workers, while being cognizant of the European/White male racial ideology, was the focus of this HR diversity strategy (Nkomo & Hoobler, 2014). This consisted of creating a position and employing African Americans to oversee this new group of workers and provide the necessary education and training for both groups of new African American workers (Delton, 2007). Although this new group of workers was the start of organizational diversity, there still existed the racial ideology of negativity that would later ignite racial tensions and mark the 1960's as the start of the Civil Rights Movements, as well as the institution of several legal remedies towards equality and diversity (Lindsey et al., 2013; Nkomo & Hoobler, 2014). Regarding this new model, this may have also been the start of professional or career segregation, which was when African Americans steered towards a specific career path versus having a career of choice (Cook & Glass, 2013). Even in today's organizations and possibly ingrained as an ideology, there tends to be a heavy presence of African Americans in the urban or community development or diversity and inclusion type departments and careers (Cook & Glass, 2013) versus science, technology, engineering, arts, and mathematics (STEAM) careers.

Gender and Racial Bias

The concept of diversity is not as simple as black and white. There is a level of complexity resulting from historical events and experiences (Bond & Haynes, 2014; Davis & Maldonado, 2015). Historically, in the United States the depths of diversity coincide with differentiating resources inclusive of gender race, ethnicity, culture, and

sexual orientation, leaving impressions upon society, the workplace, and generations of African American women (Bond & Haynes, 2014; Brown & Segrist, 2016; Byrd, 2014). One impression upon society and the workplace is the characterization of leadership and who should be in that role. There are individual perceptions of African American women that may hinder their ability to gain a senior-level position. These perceptions include the inability of this group to perform the role as a function of being a woman, where society deems men to have leader characteristics, and African American, where some have the ideology of this group being lazy and unmotivated (Angel et al., 2013; EEOC, n.d.; Johns, 2013; Kameny et al., 2013; Ratcliff et al., 2015). With the number of degrees and experiences ascribed to African American women, who function at a high level, a lack of preparedness for a senior-level position is hardly a fair assessment of their ability to perform the job (Angel et al., 2013; BLS, 2015). Society has historically determined that the qualities of a leader or someone in a senior-level position are traditionally someone that is European/White and male. From a workplace perspective, societal norms of what a leader looks and behaves like (traditionally European/White and male) may impact an organization's recruitment and outreach practice. Impacting the number of African American women in the talent pool and minimizes the number of African American women in senior-level positions (Davis & Maldonado, 2015; John, 2013).

Leadership development programs within organizations must include organizational and HR leaders to promote an ideological structure of diversity and inclusion (Johns, 2013). There could also be 39 instances of unconscious bias, where

White/European males in senior-level positions continue to advance or mentor like candidates as traditionally perpetrated without thought for diversity (EEOC, n.d.; Johns, 2013). From an African American group perspective, this characterization of leadership contributed to conflicting messages from birth to adulthood. At an early age, African American girls learn at home or school that they can become anything in terms of their role in the world or workforce. (Lent & Brown, 2013; Watts et al., 2015). As they progress to adulthood, they experienced differences in how society and the workforce treat them versus other racial and gendered groups; their perception changes about their self-efficacy, mainly when underrepresentation in specific roles or careers is evident (Rosette & Livingston, 2012; Watts et al., 2015). This history of societal and workplace norms may impact behavior, such as decision-making strategies regarding submission for employment in an organization, pursuit of a senior-level position, or election to retain employment. To counter the negative impact of history on a disparate group, the federal government established laws at an attempt to mandate organizations and provide equal opportunities for African American women (Graham et al., 2016; Nkomo, & Hoobler, 2014).

AAW

In the United States, African Americans historically were mandated to work both homes and fields as slaves for their masters. Women and men worked in many capacities, but women, on the other hand, were less valued than men (Reinhart, 2016). Enslaved women were maliciously beaten and dehumanized. Forced into physical and sexual labor,

labeling as socially and economically underprivileged. Over the years, it is evident that the same discrepancy in value continues between African American men and African American women. Stewart (2012) suggested that African American men prospered from equal opportunity laws more than African American women. African American men elevated with employment opportunities, whereas African American women suppressed into lower positions. The scarce number of African American women in corporate executive leadership positions is demonstrated by the same phenomenon.

African American women are affected by gender stereotypes, coupled with the effects of racism. Racism and discriminations are elements familiar to African American women and differentiate the treatment of women of another ethnicity. Perry, Pullen, and Oser (2012) stated that African American women fall into a nuanced category of the oppressed, impacted negatively by an acceptable level of disenfranchisement socially because of race, gender, and social class. African American women not only given fewer advancement opportunities; they statistically earn lower wages and not revered in a positive light (Key et al., 2012).

Ursula Burns, in 2009, became the first African American woman CEO of a Fortune 500 company. In 2017, the resignation of Rosalind Brewer, CEO of Sam's Club, meant there were no African American women in high-level corporate positions. Vanderbroeck (2010) posited there are specific challenges women face when attempting to climb the corporate ladder. There is a vast array of obstacles ranging from the

assumption that men and women need to have the same leadership competencies, suggesting that women need to pattern their behavior to those of men" (pp.756-766).

AAW in Government

There is little research on how African American women (AAW) perceive opportunities in the federal government; the research conducted suggests the reality of subjective discrimination (Kennedy & Bielefeld, 2002). Naff (2019) purports to provide missing data on whether the same opportunities to climb the corporate ladder are available for women and enlist in the policymaking process like Euro-American males. The federal government established the Civil Service Reform Act of 1978 (CSRA) to achieve democracy in the federal government to exemplify the actual demographic fabric of understanding and representing a diversified workforce's values and diverse needs.

Between 1991 and 2009 the Government Accounting Office (GAO) reported on the lack of diversity at the Senior Executive Service level for women with focus on minorities (Stalcup, 2008a). The data presented identified the low percentage of African American women in government-wide SES appointments compared to positions in the civilian labor force (CLF) (Rezendes, 2003 & Stalcup, 2008a). Further disclosed in the GAO report was a total of 6,555 SES appointees with 3.5 percent of AAW and 6.1 percent in CLF positions (U.S. Department of Labor, 2007). This disparity reflects a representation rate of 3.5 percent as a valid representation of AAW in SES positions.

The lack of diversity has elevated to the top of the agenda in both public and private sectors. Top executives are acknowledging the essentiality of diversity in

innovating, developing, and maintaining a quality, and inclusive workforces in the government (Marquis et al, 2008 & Stalcup, 2008a). In 2003, President George W. Bush acknowledge the Supreme Court decision highlighting the benefits of diversity and the foundation of America's strength (Bush, 2003).

AAW in Corporate America

African American women are among the fastest growing populations of college graduates, not reflected in corporate American's executive management. Malveaux (2013) infers those African American women are at the bottom of the economic income reports. Until 2009, there "were no African Americans who led Fortune 500 corporations" (p.14). Those African American women that we can penetrate the barriers of gender and race confronted with a significant "pay gap between their earnings and those of White women, Black men and White men" (p.15).

African American women in corporate American find themselves in stagnant middle-management positions. According to the statistics reported by African American women make up 7.4% of employees in S&P 500 companies, but they only represent 0.2% of CEOs of those same companies. Most of the African American women in these companies are in first or mid-level management positions, representing 3.8% of employees. The boards of S&P 500 companies are also primarily composed of white men. According to the 2016 Board Diversity Census of Women and Minorities on Fortune 500 Boards, white men make up 69.2% of board members, while African

Americans make up only 7.9%. More specifically, African American women sit in only 2.2% of total board seats of S&P 500 companies (Deloitte,2016).

Cultural Diversity and Firm Performance

Cultural diversity is the culmination of a mix of individuals. In existing literature cultural diversity is theorized as a tradeoff of strategic tasks and creative problem solving. Within the literature review, diversity emerges as cultural differences between individuals (Corritore et al., 2018). However, the researcher dissects diversity as a contrast of an individual's element that parses into interpersonal and intrapersonal forms. Corritore et al., (2018) presents a stance of cultural heterogeneity impact on innovation and execution as a vehicle inciting creativity to propagate positive market valuations. Organizational culture influences members through motivation and commitment and group creativity and innovation. Barth (2018) posited cultural diversity as an instrument for business sustainability and competitive advantage. Hernandez (2014) suggested recruitment diversity is a business and social necessity that can garner unexpected benefits by embracing generational, gender, socioeconomic differences, and cultural perspective. However, laws mandating diversity, has had little regard for improving strategic decisions through cognitive diversity.

Recruitment strategies for inclusion hiring is anchored to 20th century solutions based on external appearances regardless of difference in perspective (Hernandez, 2014). Barth (2018) presented a case study aimed to identify the immigrant workforce's integration and the challenges a diversified population presents for business sustainability

and the competitive advantage. Hernandez (2014) inferred that a *Harvard Business Review* article reported that a brand-new breed of CEO can construct a new community for competitive advantage by framing corporate objects with common vision and values, and diversifying the workforce linked to business and organizational metrics to expand the competitive advantage. A greater organizational capacity is achieved through a wide range of cultural resources for creativity and innovation for change and firm profitability (Corritore, et al., 2018).

Further contended by Hernandez (2014) a competitive advantage is achievable by framing corporate objectives common vision and values, linking business and organizational metrics, aligning social initiative to energize the organization, and incorporating diversity as a source of competitive advantage. A successful diversity management is the ability to be supported profitably by an organizational culture that embraces diverse values and supports culturally diverse backgrounds (Hernandez, 2014). References to the balance of a sustainable business model of financial health, environmentally conscious and social factors are likely opened to diversity. Furthermore, there is a direct link between diversity and profit and revenue when a company champions a diverse workforce (Hunt et al.,2018).

Gender Diversity and Financial Performance

The impact of gender diversity, specifically the female gender, on business, is a constant debate on whether a company is more productive and experiences a competitive advantage increase (Galbreath, 2016). Researchers have identified that homogenous

boards were contributors to company failure and poor governance (Larkin et al., 2020). Researchers further inferred that a board with a closed mindset hinders solving a corporate problem when the board lacks diversification (Burgess & Tharenou, 2002; Larkin et al., 2020). A diverse board projects an increase in moral and ethical compass in decision making (Arfken et al., 2004). Researchers have indicated through studies that diversity restricts myopic decision-making while increasing positive and innovative ideas, improved problem solving, and strategic planning (Larkin et al., 2020).

In a study conducted by Professor Zhang, consisting of 1,069 top firms across 35 countries and 24 industries, gender diversity was akin to increase corporate productivity measured by financial health and market value (Turban et al., 2019). Galbreath (2018) presents a case study on diversity on the board of directors and financial performance and the potential direct link of the two. The conformity of evidence of the study correlated to women on boards of directors' impact to a positive financial performance yielded neutral or negative results (Galbreath, 2018). However, Galbreath (2018) codified three ways his study advances on the impact of women's influence on boards. One example, women serving on the board, are effective in developing personnel policies. Boulotta, (2013), Harjoto et al. (2015), and Jain and Jamali (2016) inferred those women on the board link to corporate social responsibility (CSR) influences the ratings of CSR promoting market competitiveness Chen et al. (2016) suggests that women on the board intensify corporate acquisition promoting an increase in financial performance.

Based on comparative studies, gender diversity drives improved financial performance by projecting an attractive work environment for talent acquisition (Turban et al., 2019). Some researchers contend that gender diversity promotes innovative thinking alerting investors that the business is competitively run. Turban et al., 2019). The conjecture of diversity and financial performance correlation is not a simple formula but a complex context of dependency on industry norms for gender inclusion (Zhang, 2019).

Gender Inequality in Leadership Perceptions in Corporate America

Societal norms grade women's abilities as a leader against the characteristic of men as leaders (Patterson et al, 2012). Women are often known as managers of the home and family, none which equates to effective leadership in the workplace thus, leadership is not synonymous with matters of the family as the consumption of time prohibits career elevation and minimizing women's earning power, leaving women with little to no time for after-hours socializing, networking and corporate functions which often are required in senior positions (Patterson et al., 2012). Women have a propensity for focusing on the advancement of the people around them instead of their own professional elevation (Galbreath, 2016). Their focus tends to lean towards their husbands, personal and educational development of their children and as caregivers to elderly parents (Cheung & Halpern, 2010). However, none of these elements equate to experience for corporate elevation but as a barrier to organizational advancement.

Women in postindustrial society have an advantage over their counterparts because of likeable leadership style. (Lammers & Gast, 2017). Lammers and Gast (2017) found the empathetic and gentle nature of women leaders promoted more production than the aggressive dominant and directive leadership style of men. However, with the desirable leadership style of women, there is no evidence that women's leadership styles garner access to leadership positions. Further, Lammers and Gast posited that discussion of the notion of women's leadership being preferred over men in corporations hinders the chances that women would be chosen for leadership positions. Women focus is on their lack of opportunity and the perception of themselves by others. Instead, their attention should turn toward the work and best way to productively engage. This can be counterproductive as it can create a barrier where none existed and prevents an optimistic outlook.

Diversity and Competitive Advantage

The concept of the competitive advantage is the impetus of forging new markets and expanding on the existing markets with innovative strategies to remain competitive (Išoraitė, 2018). Korasikiene (2012) posits that positional and performance advantage is an inclusive element of competitive advantage based on the resources and business acumen of the organization. The definition of competitive advantage is an extreme market advantage over competitors solely on cost allocation and the operational strategy. According to Gareche et al., (2019) competitive advantage is the compilation of capabilities enabling a company to exhibit exceptional performance amidst their

competitors. For sustainability, organizations are focus on corporate growth or strengthening the company's position in market performance. Conceptually, Işoraitè (2018) identifies the competitive advantage as defined by various theorist such as Porter (1980) suggesting that the heart of a company is the ability to perform competitively with low cost differentiating the advantage and a strategic plan. Porter (1980) further states the competitive advantage is a fundamental growth birth from a firm's value to attract customers and excel the creation cost. Whereas Urbancová (2013) infer that an organization considerably influences competitiveness based on the innovative activities built on inimitable skills and abilities. Innovations is the tool to achieving greater competitiveness with minimal product cost and greater product quality.

There is a significant correlation between diversity and the competitive advantage (Hunt et al., 2018). In a study conducted by Li and Zhou (2010) on how to attain a competitive advantage, they identified that market trends and management integrity establishes competitive advantage through debilitating costs, differentiation, and market diversity. Strengthening a company with a diversified and inclusive workforce increases creativity and innovation to homogenous groups and attract a diverse customer base increasing profit (Henderson & Rank-Christman 2016) According to Hunt et al., (2018) delivering through diversity impacts the growth of a company and business performance. Furthermore, in extended research Hunt et al., (2018) postulated the global relevance of the interrelationship between diversity of leadership in large companies and financial outperformance. A dataset of 1,000 companies spanning 12 countries were measured on

financial performance and value creation (economic profit margin). Companies representing gender diversity in the executive roles outperformed on profitability by 21% with 27% increase in value creation.

Glass Ceiling: Federal Government

There is a disparity of African American women in Federal Senior Executive Service (SES) positions with a 3.5 percent representation validating underrepresentation of the group (Jackson et al., 2014). The absence of sufficient representation of African American women and minorities in the SES thwarts the reflection of diversity of the communities (Zellar, 2003). Northouse (2010) suggest women are disproportionately concentrated in lower authoritative leadership positions attributed to a glass ceiling barrier (Meyerson & Fletcher, 2000). The glass ceiling is an invisible barrier preventing advancement based on biases of attitude and organization. The glass ceiling epidemic forced the federal government to create a Federal Glass Ceiling Commission focused on the barriers to executive-level positions in the U.S. institutions and organizations for women and people of color. According to Patton & Haynes (2014), the Federal Glass Ceiling Commission published four reports documenting the existence of barriers for the labor force of women, racial and ethnic minorities.

As a metaphor, the glass ceiling specifies the concealed barriers which prevents individuals from upward mobility in organizations (Cotter et al., 2001). As suggested by Jackson and Bouchard (2019) the glass ceiling is misunderstood and is mostly measured through the inequality of minorities and women in business and public organizations.

Patton and Haynes (2014) inferred that the glass ceiling perspective historically focuses on white women and that future is required to identify the intersectionality of white women, control and intersect. The usefulness of this review exemplifies the government's complicities in creating barriers to prevent women to elevate to executive level positions.

In a competitive global market, companies are noting the impact that barriers, the glass ceiling, have on the advancement of African American women and the detriment to the organization (Davis & Maldonado, 2015). The impact of such a barrier for African American women who feel stonewall in their career can adversely affect productivity and increase organizational cost in terms of turnover and salaries (Ragins & Sundstrom, 1990). Moreover, as advanced by Collins (2000) identifying the power structures constraining African American women and how to eliminate these structures is imperative to empower them for successful leadership.

The Glass Ceiling: Culture and Diversity

As more research was conducted on the glass ceiling experience, Hideg and Wilson (2014) stated that scholars realized that women were not the only disadvantage group but so were minorities. Hideg and Wilson (2014) further inferred most positions were filled by executives who share the same culture who are white men. Furthermore, Hideg and Wilson (2014) suggest the white male organizations are the elite group holding executive leadership positions. The dominant group uses its superiority to obstruct the rise of the lesser dominant group. According to Bruning and Cadigan (2014) a diverse management in organizations has become one of the biggest challenges with

HR management because leaders do not understand the dynamics of a diverse workforce and the impact on the competitive market.

Kulik and Roberson, (2008) stated in the United States, 74% of Fortune 500 companies use some type of diversity training. Jones et al. (2005) implied for management diversity is about the bottom line which is leadership motive for implementing training. Doherty et al. (2010) stated diversity is popular in an organization and a highly recognized objective that purpose is to balance demographic changes and economic pressures. However, some organizations do not subscribe to diversifying their business until they realize their consumer base is waning due to their noncompetitive workforce. In some cases, organizations remain steadfast in not diversifying until profitability decreases.

The Inclusion of Race and Gender in the Leadership Literature

Implementing better diversity strategies and incorporating a strategic diversity selection process within organizations has been long talked about and supposedly “implemented” into recruitment and promotion strategies. In fact, more than 25 years have passed since the focused study of gender and diversity in organizations began in management and related fields (Berry & Bell, 2012). However, as mentioned by Gündemir et al. (2014), although organizations have since begun considering the significance of ethnic team and organizational performance, society’s need for recruiting and selecting the most qualified individuals for leadership positions, and preventing unnecessary loss of ethnic minority talent, it is very surprising that the number of

research studies on this subject is limited. Though Gündemir et al. (2014) conducted research to address the lack of literature regarding ethnic minority leaders; a major limitation to the research was the use of males only. Therefore, the results cannot be generalized to female targets. Essentially, this presents an even smaller range of research regarding AAW leaders within organizations and their experiences with obtaining leadership positions. As asserted by Holvino (2010), in the field of organizational studies and organizational change there is little evidence of the importance that race and gender intersections is acknowledged, which is exacerbated due to the understanding of intersectionality being underdeveloped.

Transition

Section 1 pinpointed the specific business problem: some corporate leaders lack strategies to increase diversity in their ranks to ensure profitability and maintain a competitive advantage. The results of this qualitative research study could provide additional insight into strategies that organizations could embrace to increase diversity within their ranks and expand their competitive advantage. Other components in Section 1 included the significance of the study and literature review. Topics discussed in the literature review were in-depth reviews of seminal work on workforce diversity encompassing gender, culture, ethnicity, and corporate competitive advantage. After a brief explanation of appropriate search vehicles relative to the research topic, a discussion on diversity (gender, culture, and ethnicity – African American women), the impact of cognitive diversity theory on African American women, and competitive advantage

ensues. This study's conceptual framework was the cognitive diversity theory (CDT) conceptualized by Hambrick in 1994. Section 2 included the Purpose Statement for this research study, specific guidance on the researcher's role, and the research methodology and design. As the principal researcher, I defined the data collection and analysis data, processes, and responsibilities relative to ethical compliance boundaries for the qualitative research and the required reliability and validity metrics.

In Section 3, I present the study's findings relevant to professional practice and recommendations for social change. Section 3 also covers suggestions for implementing strategies and future research to expand workforce diversification and the related impact on a company's competitive advantage. I present the study's outcome on business practices, positive social change recommendations and propose future research and action on business diversification reflection and the impact on the competitive advantage. Finally, in Section 3, I concluded the study and reflect on my doctoral research journey.

Section 2: The Project

In this section, I discuss the qualitative research methodology for the study; qualitative research explores an issue and empowers individuals to tell their stories and experiences (see Creswell, 2012). Ultimately, qualitative research concentrates on the perceptions and experiences that have molded a human situation's intricacies. There is a thematic methodology drawing conclusions based on identifiable themes from data collection and analysis. Qualitative research commences with identifying a pattern or problem and is exploratory in a conclusion. In this section, I review the research methodology used to evaluate AAWs' experiences holding executive leadership positions. I also elaborate on issues surrounding trustworthiness and ethical procedures implemented for the participant selection; the techniques used to identify, contact, and recruit participants; the instrumentation; data collection procedures; and how categories aided data analysis.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative single case study was to explore strategies that AAW executives use to increase diversity with other AAW in their ranks to ensure profitability and maintain competitive advantage. The participants consisted of five executive-level managers with 10 years of experience who have successfully implemented strategies to increase diversity in their company within the District of Columbia. The implication for social change is the ability for corporations to attract culturally diverse applicants, thereby expanding the workforce to a diversified market

competitively. Diversity could be a tool by which corporations ensure they are meeting the needs of society. Progressive organizations must show sensitivity to upholding social, cultural, and ethical values of the employed and serve diverse communities, which could result in more opportunities and promote social impact by allowing diversified workforce's ascension to leadership positions (Saxena, 2014).

Role of the Researcher

The researcher's qualitative role is the vehicle of data collection (Fusch et al 2018). Researchers use three standard qualitative data collection methods: identified interviews, observation, and focus groups (Moser & Korstjen, 2018). Typically, interviews are semi structured. The interviewer develops the questions based on comprehensive knowledge of the study matter with the flexibility to modify as needed to maintain the integrity and the data collection (Moser & Korstjen, 2018). My role as the researcher for this qualitative single case study was to meticulously design the exploration to ensure the collection, organization, and interpretation of data supported the research question (see McCusker & Gunaydin, 2014).

I have over 15 years of experience as a senior executive and a management consulting firm owner. Most of my executive leadership experience is with medium to large companies servicing the Department of Defense and other federal agencies and commercial businesses, providing streamlined processes and logistics for reorganizing to expand services to a broader market, both internal and external. I have participated in meetings with the decision-makers, mainly White males, and have often been the only

person of color and always the only woman. My participation, usually by invitation, provided me with an understanding of the lack of diversity at the executive level and its inability to expand its reach to a firm's internal and external base for an expanded market.

The United States government commissioned the Belmont Report to identify the basic ethical principles researchers should follow while conducting investigations with voluntary participants (National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research, 1979). As the researcher, I was responsible for following a protocol to ensure the data's accuracy and maintain participants' confidentiality (see Bromley et al., 2015). Participant and companies' names were changed to maintain confidentiality.

In all research, there is personal bias (Fusch & Ness, 2015). Personal bias is prevalent when a researcher uses a case study design to understand the underlying research questions' issues beforehand (Yin, 2018). Haven and Van Grootel (2019) posited that bias could threaten the integrity of the research. Qualitative researchers must recognize that there is a potential existence of bias and circumventing such can be difficult (Fusch & Ness, 2015). I averted bias by being cognizant of all prejudice and being open to information that contradicted my views, and I documented these findings in the study accordingly (see Yin, 2018). Conducting interviews allowed me the opportunity to collect data opposing my perspective and to achieve an in-depth understanding of the strategies obtained from individual participants (see See-to et al., 2017).

Participants

In this study, I explored strategies that AAW executives used to increase diversity with other AAW in their ranks to ensure profitability and maintain a competitive advantage. Participants provided data to me through interviews (see Yin, 2018). The participants consisted of five executive level AAW with a minimum of 10 years of experience who have successfully implemented strategies to increase diversity in their company within the District of Columbia. Each participant had been or still was an active executive within a corporation in the District of Columbia region and was selected based on business directories, networking panels, and business introductions. Researchers are responsible for explaining the participants' eligibility criteria for the study and the process of selection (Baillie, 2015). The research question is the focal point of the study to a specific population of individuals (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Therefore, as a management consultant, I maintained an ethical stance and a homogenous platform while interacting with the participants.

One crucial factor in qualitative research is the data collection method and technique used to gather participants' interview responses. Confidentiality is essential in maintaining the participants' identity and ethical compliance to ensure the researcher's integrity and participants' information and relationship. According to Halbritter et al. (2012), subscribing to video cameras and microphone usage impacts the standard human interaction with the participants. The otherwise human connection of trust garnered when physically with participants is potentially strained with the use of technology.

Establishing an affinity with the participants was critical to promoting an open and forthright communication level to garner participants' responses. Adhering to the principles of *The Belmont Report* promoted earnest, harmless, and forthcoming information from each participant.

Research Method and Design

Research Method

The purpose of this qualitative single case study was to explore strategies that AAW executives used to increase diversity with other AAW in their ranks to ensure profitability and maintain a competitive advantage. In a qualitative research method, there is a time constraint with producing measurable results to develop metrics with measurable data (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Moser and Korstjens (2017) suggested that the researcher should focus on intricacies of the collected information as opposed to the data collection process. The foundation of qualitative research is built on following a detailed and astute outline of interview questions, pure data collection, and information reporting of knowledge with minimal influence and extracting the meaning and the participants perceptions (Bansal et al., 2018, Saunders et al., 2018, & Sidaway et al., 2019). According to Fusch et al. (2018), the purpose of using a qualitative method is to establish the meaning and translation of the information obtained from the interview process; thus, the qualitative method was most appropriate for use.

I considered the quantitative and mixed methods for this study. The basis of a quantitative method is numerical data and statistical analysis that brings logic to the

relationship between variables (Gibson, 2016). The quantitative research methodology uses standardized measures and statistical analysis to identify the relationship between variables (Hammarberg et al., 2016). Therefore, the quantitative research was not applicable for this study. Mixed method is a hybrid study when the researchers collect quantitative and qualitative complementary data and counterpart analysis into a single study for data integration to tightly assimilate a response to the research question (Gibson, 2016; Taguchi 2018). This method was not applicable, as the research question was answerable using a standalone qualitative method.

Research Design

In this study, I used a single case study design. Case study research is an extensive scientific investigation into a real-life experience within the context of its environment (Ridder, 2017). According to Smith (2018), a qualitative case study is a particularistic, descriptive, and heuristic study of a bounded case system. A single case study's intricacy can answer *how* and *why* research questions in specific situations where the researcher does not control observable events (Yin, 2018). Using a case study design could promote a deeper understanding of a conglomerate of experiences (Woo et al., 2016). The purpose of this study was to explore strategies that AAW executives used to increase diversity with other AAW in their ranks to ensure profitability and maintain a competitive advantage.

I used a single case study design to explore strategies that AAW executives used to increase diversity with other AAW in their ranks to ensure profitability and maintain a

competitive advantage. Conventional alternatives for qualitative designs are phenomenological, grounded theory, and ethnographic. A phenomenological approach is appropriate if addressing individuals with similar experiences (Stainton, 2016). However, the phenomenological design was not a practical option given that my intent was to obtain an in-depth understanding of strategies leaders used to diversify ranks. A grounded theory approach is applicable for developing theories (Tavakol & Sandars, 2014), not the objective for examining strategies used by leaders to increase diversity and ensure profitability. An ethnographic approach is suitable when a researcher pursues a description and interpretation of shared patterns of the entire group's culture over a significant period (Wood & Mattson, 2019). An ethnographic approach was not appropriate as I sought to obtain data from exploring strategies AAW executives used to diversify with other AAW in their ranks for profitability and competitive advantage. Researchers use a case study design to explore present-day phenomenon when there is ambiguity with the boundaries of the phenomena (Ridder, 2017). A single case study was appropriate to study a specific group or community (Yin, 2018). A multiple case study was not appropriate for the study as my objective was to obtain a more in-depth understanding of strategies related to diversification and profitability of one, geographically bound phenomenon.

The multiple case study design is appropriate for comparing more than one case and is more robust in designing more compelling evidence (Yin, 2018). In a multiple case study design, the researcher employs various approaches, with a positivist epistemology

due to the design to pursue challenging explanations and to contradict hypotheses (Harrison et al., 2017). For those researchers seeking to explore several adduce of the same exploration, the multiple case study is a perfect choice (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Nonetheless, I was not investigating a phenomenon nor seeking compelling commentary between cases. Therefore, the multiple case design was not appropriate for this study.

A neophyte researcher should select a design that appropriately answers the research question, acquiesces data saturation, concludes the study in a reasonable time frame with fair cost (Fusch et al., 2018). A qualitative researcher regularly uses the case study design due to the researcher's ability to focus on context and vigorous interaction (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). A single case study design was appropriate for this study (see Woo et al., 2016). As this study was an exploratory study focused on the experiences of a specific group of individuals, senior leadership in corporate America, a single case study design was the best option.

One crucial concern to researchers using a qualitative case-study is achieving trustworthiness so their study could sustain the audit of published works. However, against concerns with credibility and limitations, the case study design advances as the design of choice amid students (Smith, 2018). Intrinsically, researchers who select the case study design should address the quality concerns throughout the research process.

Shaping qualitative research quality is a researcher's ability to attain data saturation.

Data saturation is defined as the repetitiveness of reoccurring themes and patterns or an absence of new information from the data collection (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). There is no formula to help determine the appropriate sample size for qualitative research, which makes selecting the proper sample size essential to ensuring efficient data collection. An initial sample size of 12 participants was the targeted number for invites to secure a final sample size of three to five or until data saturation was sufficient, which could be the point of reoccurring themes and where responses become redundant (see Fusch & Ness, 2018).

I did not conduct this study within my organization, delineating the need for additional ethical concerns regarding internal research. However, with the current COVID-19 pandemic, the interview settings were telephonic. With restrictions on social interaction, teleconferencing with the participants from their home limited their privacy.

The data collection was conducted via interviews and member checking. To achieve data saturation, I conducted phone interviews with a sampling of cross sections of the agreed participants to achieve a full range of views. Albeit from the sampling population of three to five participants, data saturation is achieved when the responses do not yield differently. Aldiabat and LeNavenec (2018) posited that triangulation via multiple data collection methods augments the broad description of the data, promoting faster data saturation. Methodological triangulation activities provided data saturation for this study.

Achieving data saturation is the pinnacle of qualitative research sampling (Saunders & Townsend, 2016). Data saturation was relative to ensure qualitative

research's trustworthiness during the collection period (Morse, 2015). As inferred by Marshall and Rossman (2016), when the researcher recognizes the same repetitive pattern and identifies that no additional data will sway the pattern, data saturation is reached. The primary data collection occurred through semis structured interviews via Zoom, WebEx, or a selection that was conducive for the participant due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Population and Sampling

The sample contained five AAW in senior executive positions in the District of Columbia regions from various federal and private industries. Based on the lack of AAW in a senior executive position within the region, there was a limited number of potential participants. The case's foundation rested on AAWs' disparity as senior leadership in the federal and private industries.

According to Moser and Korstjens (2017) and Charles et al. (2015), the process of sampling is the quest for rich data of situations, context, and participants with information of the subject of interest with a deliberateness in sampling. There were several qualitative sampling strategies for consideration: purposive sampling, criterion sampling, theoretical sampling, convenience sampling, and snowball sampling. Purposive sampling centers on the researchers' ability to select what participants potentially are most informative (Moser & Korstjens, 2018). I employed a purposeful sampling method as my study was intended for AAW in leadership positions who were limited in numbers. Purposive sampling strategies allow the researcher to identify the most informative participants (Moser & Korstjens, 2018). This process included research through

networking events, LinkedIn Premium, and professional directories. The targeted population was AAW in senior leadership position who have explored strategies to elevate to senior executive positions

The sample size for a qualitative single case study is small, as inferred by Yin (2018). However, data saturation is the most compelling aspect of qualitative data collection (Fusch & Ness, 2015). Saunders and Townsend (201) suggest a homogenous sample population could achieve data saturation with less than 12 participants. Purposive sampling techniques is intended to achieve a sample of participants sharing similar characteristics such as occupation, and gender (Saunders & Townsend, 2018). This range should provide three to five ideal participants. The single case study design consisted of three to five participants.

The primary data collection occurred through semi structured interviews via Zoom, WebEx, or a selection that is conducive for the participant due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Due to the confidentiality of participants' identity, phone interviews are most appropriate for audio recording eliminating facial recognition. The intended settings were based on the comfort level of each participant as telework is trending as a response to COVID-19 pandemic.

Ethical Research

In business and management research, human participation is indispensable to the process requiring researchers to protect their participants responsibly. In the construct of a research proposal, there was the factor of the ethical matter when humans are the data

source for the study and that ethically delicate research, including data collection, is guided with specific rules preempting ethical challenges further into the research (Marshall & Rossman, 2016; Sroka et al., 2018; Gomes & Duarte, 2018). *The Belmont Report* authors encapsulate three ethical principles relevant to research with human participation: respect for individuals, beneficence, and justice (National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research, 1979). Due to human participation required for the research, it was essential to receive Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval before recruiting participants and safeguard participants (Henry et al., 2016). Additionally, complying with Walden University's IRB provided a guideline of government regulations, ethical standards, and institutional parameters. Upon approval from the IRB, participants received a letter of invitation and consent form outlining the study's scope and relevance with a right to withdraw without prejudice and the approval number 08-03-21 0987722.

There was a low risk to the participants in the research. There were no protected classes involved in the proposed research. The researcher did not engage in coercion to gain access to participants, and the study conducted was with full transparency. Additionally, I acquired informed consent from all participants emphasizing their right to withdraw from the study at any time. Furthermore, all participants identity remained confidential while simultaneously allowing participants to review the transcribe notes of their interviews for content and accuracy. All data remains in a safe place for five years protecting the rights of the participants.

In this study, the researcher was responsible for identifying African American women participants. In a qualitative research, coding is represented by a word, phrase, or sentence capturing the nature of the data (Clark & Veale, 2018). Based on five participants, the coding representing African American women ranges from AAWL1-AAWL5 identifying and maintaining confidentiality. Conducting meetings were not done in the traditional manner of physical face to face due to the current COVID-19 pandemic but relying on technology presented a face value to the interview process. All data remains in a safe place for five years protecting the rights of the participants. At the end of the storage period, all electronic data will be purged from the hard drive and subsequent electronic devices. All hard copies of the data collection notes to final member checking will be cross-cut shredded and placed in a burn bag. There were no incentives offered for this study.

Data Collection Instruments

The primary data collection consisted of a comprehensive semi structured interview. In a qualitative study, interviews construct the spine of data collection. Dissimilar to a quantitative study, a qualitative study's premise correlates to exploring and justifying the research's purpose (Adhabi et al., 2017; Stewart et al., 2008). As a necessary tool, an interview method is compatible with an experimental or research paradigm (Aliyu et al., 2014).

I used semi-structured interviews to collect data. A semi structured interview is the most common type used by qualitative researchers. Like structured interviews, semi

structured identifies the researcher's topics and questions without austere deference (Adhabi et al., 2017; Stuckey, 2013). A well-constructed protocol for the interview process can increase the collection process's quality and promote the study's trustworthiness (Adhabi et al., 2017; Castillo-Montoya, 2016; Kallio et al., 2020). In a qualitative study, the researcher is the primary data collection instrument (Yin, 2018).

The key to the data collection process is the alignment of the research question and the interview protocol. Castillo-Montoya (2016) suggests it is essential to develop a compelling interview protocol to obtain rich and substantive data to capture the participants' experiences using the Interview Protocol Refinement (IPR). The IPR consisted of four phases: Ensuring the alignment of the interview question to the research question; Developing an inquiry-based conversation; Obtaining feedback on interview protocols; and piloting the interview protocol. Each phase is paramount in assisting the researcher in constructing the appropriate research instrument congruent with the research's focus (Jones et al., 2014). In a semi structured interview, the researcher had the flexibility to adjust questions to drill down to a level of relevance. I completed the interview process using a standard interview protocol (Appendix B) and I communicated the protocol to the participants. The interview protocol provided an outline of the critical questions that the researcher used to explore the phenomenon.

Strategies to ensure reliability and validity of qualitative case study research included member checking and methodological triangulation (Yin, 2018). According to Vance (2015) member checking improves the reliability and validity of the collected

data. Member checking requires that the research results be sent back to the participants to validate accuracy and resonance with their experiences (Birt et al., 2016). Additionally, Birt et al. (2016) provided two additional member checking approaches. The first approach was to return the transcribed interviews to the participants for accuracy. The second approach was to use synthesized member checking; sending both the raw data and the interpreted data for the interviewee to review. Synthesized member checking is used in semi structured and in-depth interviewed to improve the credibility of results.

As asserted by Birt et al., (2016), I made the interview transcripts and my interpretations available to the participants to review and confirm, thereby enhancing my analysis validity. Furthermore, I used synthesized member checking, sending the raw my interpretations of the interview to the participants to validate and then used the results of this process as a basis for follow up discussions to verify participants experience symmetry (Harvey, 2015). Upon completion of member checking, the participants verified the accuracy of the interpretations of the responses.

As the primary researcher for this single case study, I had diverse responsibilities to ensure a quality, comprehensible and accurate delineation of the phenomenon regarding strategies implored by African American women to obtain senior leadership positions. According to Fusch and Ness (2015), the qualitative study researchers are the primary data collection instrument. The researcher's fundamental responsibility in the data collection instrument was the collection and analysis of information gathered from the participants and conducting triangulation of supplemental documentation.

Triangulation enables data comparison with those from other sources, such as published reports (Hussein, 2015). During the semi-structured interviews, the researcher observed a participant's values, attitudes, and opinions. Researchers can learn a significant amount of information about a topic by applying open-ended interview questions (Kallio et al., 2016). Face-to-face interviews with open-ended interview questions are the most common way to collect information from participants. Additionally, face-face interviews allowed the researcher to deep dive into the participants' responses by asking follow-up questions. Overall, semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions facilitate consistency during data collection. I used semi-structured interviews for this study.

An additional data collection method involves reviewing current and archived documents. For this study, the document review included reviewing past studies and peer reviews related to African American women in senior leadership positions and strategies used by African American women to increase diversity for competitiveness. Further, I conducted an in-depth review and analysis of supportive policy documents provided to me by the participants. A thorough analysis of the collected interview data and documentation obtained from the participants will increase the validity and reliability of this study and increases the researcher's knowledge and provides helpful insights into the study (Yin, 2018).

Researchers should enhance the reliability and validity of the study using various methods. Besides the interview protocol, an audio recording of the interview ensures the researchers can accurately articulate the participants' responses during transcription. For

the interview, I presented the same questions and try to restrict the timeframe to the same for each participant. I used all the methods at hand to address the reliability and validity of this study.

Data Collection Technique

A qualitative researcher must organize collected data to support the analysis, protect the participants, auditing the data, and overall case organization. Yin (2018) echoed the criticalness in creating and maintaining an organized case study database. The database content included formal and raw data from the interview recording and sidebar notes from observation with a definitive separation between the raw data and the reports to further analysis such as triangulation (Smith, 2018). Thus, the requirement to further analyze by creating an electronic database as an audit trail of the organized data.

The researcher should provide time, date, location, participants, and other relevant qualifiers as identifiers (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). The database's significance was to identify a clear correlation of evidence to the discovery of the findings. I captured the oddity of the data through journaling to ensure accurate capture. The database has labels and cataloged recordings with African American Woman Leader 1 (AAWL) coding schematic.

Data collection commenced with obtaining the Internal Review Board (IRB) of Walden University's approval for the proposal. The perspective participants received an introductory level providing an in-depth overview of the research's objective; the IRB approved informed consent form (see Appendix A) the approval number, and the

timelines of interviews and questions. I adhered to the participants' schedule of convenience to secure participation and goodwill (Yin, 2018). I archived all audio calls to ensure confidentiality, offered my contact information and availability to respond to possible questions, and address all concerns. The collected data was instrumental in creating a holistic picture of the business problem and potential strategies.

Paramount in the study was confidentiality and protection of the participants and the data to remain ethically sound. The researcher's responsibility was to protect the rights and anonymity of the participants and data (Marshall & Rossman, 2016; Twining et al., 2017). Researchers should adopt formal and informal strategies to protect their participants. As stated in the Ethical Research section, participant identities will consist of codes (i.e., AAWL-1 – AAWL-5) with companies coded as “case organizations”.

A variety of qualitative data techniques exist; however, researchers often select interviews to explore participants' perspectives and expertise (Nesensohn et al., 2016). Fusch et al. (2018) postulated that qualitative researchers collect data through various means, but interviews are a standard data collection method in the case study model. Semi structured interviews comprised of open-ended questions were the primary data collection vehicle in the proposed study. An advantage to face-to-face interviews is the personal interaction researchers afforded to study participants (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). However, the expenditure required to travel may be cost prohibitive (Yin, 2018). Due to the COVID-19 pandemic interviews were restricted to audio only. In-person interviews may pose health risks to all participating parties.

A disadvantage of interviewing as the primary data collection method is that researcher bias or misrepresentation may affect data quality (Feiler & Powell, 2015). Sohn et al. (2017) offers that bias occurs when a researcher, despite of proof to the contrary, chooses evidence supporting the researchers' underlying beliefs. Bias free research is impossible due to the researcher's interpretation of open-ended questions used in quantitative studies (Tavory, 2020). Researchers must avoid substituting prior knowledge or their perceptions of the topic during data collection or analysis. Tavory (2020) focus on how even a researcher's verbal presentation of findings can create a bias if their cadence, inflections, and overall tone provide unfounded support for their study. I sought participants with whom I have no personal or professional relationship. To mitigate bias, I did not interact with the prospective participants before conducting the proposed study.

Data Organization Technique

Data collection is intrinsically essential to the researcher in enforcing all aspects of the research study, such as the organization of data, data assessment, and the participants' information. Included in the data are the interview transcriptions and secondary documents provided by the participants. I organized related information in Excel project tracker file and Microsoft data file. Utilizing a coding system such as AAW1, AAW2, and AAW3 will protect the broad discretion and privacy of the participants' information. Researchers must articulate data gathering and data to guarantee the case study's reliability and validity (Morse, 2015). The researcher must

maintain the organization of data and have accessibility (Sutton & Austin, 2015). NVivo software enables the researcher to store data for coding purposes. I secured all data labeled and accessible to me. As the researcher, I kept hard copies of documents in a locked file cabinet. I housed electronic files, including recordings of interviews, transcripts, and all notes on an encrypted passworded hard drive. Five years from the conclusion of this study, I will cross-cut shred all documents and place them in a burn bag for disposal and purge all electronic data and subsequent material from the encrypted hard drive.

Data Analysis

A qualitative data analysis encompasses identifying themes, comparisons, replication, inductive and deductive reasoning, and interpretation of experiences to construct meaning. The strength of the qualitative research articulates and associates meaning to data for a specified purpose (Reissman, 1999).

During the qualitative research process, the researcher collects an immense amount of data for analysis (Anderson, 2010). The data is protected to prevent modification, disclosure, access, and uphold the confidentiality, integrity, and availability required to support its claims (Harris & Maymi, 2016). The lack of credibility of the data analysis process questions the researcher internal validity, and the results are debatable (Amankwaa, 2016).

The first step in the data analysis process is coding associating a description, categorizing, and interpreting it (Weston et al., 2001). For the study, each interview was

recorded and transcribed and submitted to the participant for accuracy, and then coded to correlate to recurring themes (Hancock & Algozzine, 2006). Immersing into the data was critical for accuracy and coding to provide relevancy to the intended audience. Primary coding for the study was extracted from the literature review and ultimately from the data during the analysis process.

NVivo11 software is a resource that aids the researcher with data management throughout the qualitative data analysis process (Zamawe, 2015). According to Fossey et al. (2002), the researchers' ability to frame and decipher the data is imperative to the data analysis process. Throughout the analysis process, the researcher can compartmentalize the data segments and uncover clusters (Lofland, 1995). The clustering approach reduces data to articulate the phenomenon under study (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Clustering identifies data elements with similar meanings. The meaning of clustering refers to the process of sorting and classifying data. When identifying data, the researcher audits the data to determine clusters of data.

Each participant's transcript underwent a review for accuracy by comparing it to the audio recording. The NVivo11 software has a component for assigning a number to each recording, consisting of no more than 60 minutes. Notes taken were transcribed and correlates to the audio. All data was presented in written form, identifying the common themes revealed from African American women leaders' experiences in the District, Maryland, and Virginia (DMV) related to the strategies they employed to ascend to senior leadership.

Reliability and Validity

Reliability and validity are essential components that scholars adopt to identify the qualitative study's condition and are considered a necessary part of this research (Saunders et al., 2016). Noble and Smith (2015) posited that reliability and validity could augment a qualitative study's credibility. The researcher developed strategies to secure reliability and validity. Reliability invokes replication and consistency, where validity attributes how appropriate the measure use is the veracity of the analysis of results; and the degree of generalizing the findings (Saunders et al., 2016).

Reliability

Some key strategies to achieve research reliability consisted of (a) member checking, (b) triangulation, (c) data saturation or thick description, (d), prolong engagement, (e) reducing research bias, (f) peer debriefing, and (g) external audits. In this research study, I adopted member checking, methodological triangulation, participant prolong engagement, and clarifying researcher bias to attend reliability as suggested by Morse (2015). Member checking was validated by sharing my transcription of the interview with the participants for accuracy of their input and identifying accuracy of their contributions depicting their strategies of implore in obtaining senior leadership and the competitive advantage, thus strengthening the credibility of the results of this study (Birt et al., 2016).

Notably, Birt et al. (2016) recommended using synthesized member checking to enhance reliability. Pursuing Birt et al., (2016) recommendations, I used the synthesized

result of member check with the first two participants as metrics to restructure with subsequent participants' interviews. Additionally, I used methodological triangulation by comparing the data collected from the semi structured in-depth interviews with those from sources through literature reviews and policy documents provided by the participants (Fusch et al., 2018). Zamawe (2015) infers using software such as NVivo, could promote more reliability and accuracy with the data results. Additionally, NVivo enabled transparency data analysis to champion creditability, dependability, and transferability authenticity of the research; standardized interview protocol reducing the chance for bias or errors in the data analysis (Sandelowski, 2015). I used the standardized interview protocol (Appendix C) to establish a pattern for all participants to follow for consistency during the interview.

Validity

Qualitative research's validity is access using credibility, dependability, transferability, and authenticity (Elo et al., 2014). Strategies used to achieve validity in this study include member checking, methodological triangulation, prolonged engagement with participations, and clarifying the researcher's bias (Morse 2015; Yin, 2018). The use of methodological triangulation elevates confidence and strengthens study validity through rich data and unbiased results (Joslin & Muller, 2016). Data saturation is the combination of thick and rich data that reaches the pinnacle of not producing new data (Fusch & Ness, 2015). Data saturation is a critical strategy for enhancing the qualitative study's validity (Fusch & Ness, 2015). Credibility attainment occurs by

safeguarding that the analysis results reflect the participants' live experiences (Birt et al., 2016). Credibility enhancement results from establishing the relationship between the original participant's data collected and the researcher's interpretation (Munn et al., 2014), achieving credibility through research validity and qualitative research reliability (Nobel & Smith, 2015).

There is an assertion that reliability and validity are concepts equally applicable to a qualitative quest (Spiers et al., 2018). Dependability and conformability as related to validity is a term related to reliability and validity (LeCompte & Goetz, 1982). Morse et al. (2002) argues that reliability and validity have subtly been replaced by criteria depicting evaluation standards of significance and relevance in a qualitative inquiry. There is a long-established link between dependability and confirmability evidenced by data from similar studies remain consistent over time (Anney, 2014). According to Munn et al. (2014) confirmability refers to data that is impartial and correct. Hussein (2015) asserted that the qualitative study's confirmability demonstrates that research data truly represents participant voices and is free from the researcher's personal bias. Spiers et al. (2018) suggest validity relates to data appropriateness, which allows for an accurate account of participants' experiences beyond the immediate context. Lincoln and Guba (1985) espoused that "conformability is in preference to objectivity" and that it creates a level of neutrality to the finding shaped by the narrative of the respondents unbiased, motivation, or interest of the researcher. Methodological triangulation is used by qualitative researchers to attain rich, robust, and a well-developed comprehensive data

collection. Combining methodological triangulation and qualitative analysis software can aid in confirmability, transferability, reliability, and validity of data (Hussein, 2015). I intended to use Cluvio, Nvivo, or SAP Analytics Cloud software to establish confirmability by running the data and understanding the frequency of words or themes, and establishing relationships with the research questions, literature, and the conceptual framework of the study. Marshall and Rossman (2016) pointed out that collected data from a single case study may be tightly bound to the specific study and impossible to transfer to another study. Qualitative researchers enhance transferability by engaging in sharing their interpretations of collected data with the participants (Yin, 2018) and ensure data saturation is achieved (Fusch & Ness, 2015). Readers of qualitative research determine transferability based on their decision to accept the study's research process and results; the applicability of previous research falls within future researchers' purview (Hess et al., 2014; Marshall & Rossman, 2016).

Transition and Summary

In section 1, I described the foundation of the study, identified the research topic and specific business problem that a lack of diversity in leadership could impact profitability and diminish an organization's competitive advantage. The discussion continued in section 2, with details regarding the study's approach, which involved reiterating the study's purpose, my role as the researcher, identifying and sharing criteria used to identify research participants, the methodology, and the participants' contribution. Section 2 wraps up by expounding on the data collection, data analysis, and procedures to

secure the study's reliability and validity. Section 3 commences with a detailed analysis of the study results and how the results could influence social change. Finally, I will discuss how the results may apply and make recommendations for future studies.

Section 3: Application to Professional Practice and Implications for Change

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative single case study was to explore strategies that AAW executives use to increase diversity with other AAW in their ranks to ensure profitability and maintain competitive advantage. While women have collectively broken the glass ceiling, AAW have struggled with achieving senior executive elevation. Roberts et al. (2018) inferred that there are only 32 women leaders in Fortune 500 companies, and there are only three African American men. According to Beal (2008), African Americans remain underrepresented in corporate America. The sample size for this study included five African American women executives with 10 years of experience in the District of Columbia who have successfully implemented strategies to increase diversity within their company. Each participant articulated their answers to seven open-ended and follow-up interview questions specific to strategies to elevate other AAW.

I conducted detailed phone interviews with five AAW executives who met the eligibility requirements to understand the phenomenon deeply. I used multiple data collection methods to analyze participants' responses, including company policies and phone audio recordings. I engaged in member checking to ensure I accurately captured the participants' responses. I completed methodological triangulation by conducting a careful review of the submitted supporting documents and the review of the participants' data. Additional data were extracted for review through literature related to the research topic to achieve methodological triangulation. I performed an in-depth analysis of the

participants' information and supporting documentation, identified three major themes, and correlated the themes to the conceptual framework of the study, Hambrick's (1994) CDT. I achieved data saturation based on the duplication of the participant's responses to the seven open-ended interview questions.

Presentation of the Findings

In this qualitative single case study, I explored the strategies engaging AAW leaders use to increase the diversity of other AAW in their ranks to ensure profitability and maintain competitive advantage. The overarching research question for this study was as follows: What strategies do AAW executives use to increase diversity with other AAW in their ranks to ensure profitability and maintain competitive advantage? To acquire a deeper understanding of the study's participants' strategies used to increase diversity, I used Yin's (2018) 5-step process, which included (a) compiling, (b) disassembling, (c) reassembling, (d) interpreting, and (e) summarizing data. I selected CDT as the conceptual framework for this study. CDT was instrumental in achieving a deeper understanding and appreciation of the significance of the positive outcomes in the workgroup by minimizing debiasing decision making.

Additionally, the participants were amenable to clarifying all follow-up questions and furnished public company documents. Each participant articulated the strategies used to diversify the ranks with AAW successfully. The three primary themes that emerged from an analysis of the interview data and participants' business documents included (a)

mentoring, (b) strategic planning for diversity growth, and (c) networking and resource sharing.

As advanced by Miller et al. (1998), CDT is an influence on indirectly linking diversity and profitability, and organizations considering diversifying could prosper from CDT to implement a distinctive workforce. The conversation around diversity is a type of racial discourse (Berrey, 2015) and often disregards the structural inequalities that marginalize groups. The five participants, CEOs of consulting businesses with prior experience in corporate America or the federal sector as senior executives, each specializing in different industries, met the criteria of having worked in the District of Columbia as a senior executive with a minimum of 5 years of experience and were AAW. To maintain the anonymity of the participants' identities, I assigned pseudonyms, AAWL1, AAWL2, AAWL3, AAWL4, and AAWL5, where AAWL represented AAW leaders, and the numeric value indicated the order of the participants' interviews. I followed Yin's 5-step process to analyze the participants' responses to the seven open-ended and follow-up questions and review supporting public policy documents. Submitted documentation consisted of employee handbooks, mission statements, human resource recruitment policies, and strategic plans that supported the policies of diversity and the platform of strategies to ensure diversity within the executive levels.

Emergent Theme 1: Mentoring

The first theme I identified was mentoring. Each study participant profoundly expressed the significance of mentoring AAW to increase diversity within the ranks. As

defined by Clayton et al. (2013), mentoring identifies how the protégé assists individuals in developing their professional path. Further expounded by Leck and Orser (2013), mentoring is an interpersonal relationship developed and cultivated between a senior, more experienced employee (mentor) and a junior, less experienced employee (mentee). Zeller (2003) inferred that the lack of sufficient representation of women and minorities, specifically AAW, impedes the ability to reflect the diversity of the people it serves. AAW would benefit from mentors who share their similarities of lived experiences that could influence the mentoring relationship and exchange knowledge (see Mondisa & Adama, 2020).

Mentoring is considered an essential aspect of facilitating promotion to senior management positions. Mentoring relationships are typically formed through interpersonal exchanges between mentor and mentee, substantially making an impact over time (Eby et al., 2013; Montgomery, 2017). AAWL3 and AAWL4 articulated the same sentiments, relating the professional growth of AAW to higher management to successful mentoring. AAWL1 expressed that the lack of mentoring during her rise was a push to seek support outside the workplace. AAWL2 stressed the importance of having a core group of women for support, pushing to keep moving, commiserate with, and share strategies and visibility. According to AAWL5, "We as African American women must seek other African American women even if it is outside of the company outside support group or organization, where we can digress our issues and obstacles to be each other's, support group." AAWL2's elevation was etched in determination to succeed in a

predominantly homogenous environment and implementing a mentorship program to assist with future elevation. According to AAWL2, "It is important for African American women to identify with a network of like sisters to widen the level of support and fill each other's tool bag with resources to elevate both professionally and personally."

All participants stated that their success in senior executive positions would have been fluid if there had been a mentoring program. One key factor agreed on by the participants is that in their experience as mentors, there is a responsibility to build confidence, credibility, competence, and visibility. Montgomery (2017) posited that mentoring is a learning partnership, a two-way learning process with an interconnected identity. A mentor's access, influence, and ability to provide career guidance and visibility can be crucial to an AAW's professional trajectory. Mentorship is a critical and historical technique that prepares AAW to successfully influence and mold their readiness to step into senior leadership roles successfully.

All participants said that achieving senior executive status was a mindset of challenges to rise above the predominately White male occupied positions. Navigating double bias of race and gender continues to be a significant barrier to AAW pursuing senior executive positions, not excluding the isolation and the absence of similar ethnic-gender support systems. Additionally, AAWL4 espoused that AAW also had to overcome stereotypes depicting them as incompetent or with limited intelligence. AAWL3 said that AAW are resilient and driven, working harder than most while compromising their overall psychosocial well-being. AAWL5 expressed that society's

perception of AAW, and their professional contribution is a disconnect that creates a cognitive dissonance facilitating a struggle as AAW navigate walking in their truth and negating societal expectations. AAWL5 further posited that in a world of rising AAW, mentoring is a required infrastructure for cultivating unique experiences by the intersection of race and gender, contributing to any business. AAWL stated,

“Mentorship is a reciprocal relationship nurturing and inspiring both the mentor and mentee. We need more African American women mentors to create a core sisterhood like the Divine Nine to uplift and support each other. I would not have achieved organizational success had I not had the support of my sisterhood of supporters. Having that level of camaraderie is priceless. “

AAWL4 inferred,

“My lack of support when I travel upward on the executive ladder pushed me to hone my knowledge and experiences to broaden networking with and for my company and others like me. I continuously work at creating opportunities for us through mentoring individually and collectively.”

Relation to the Literature

Theme 1 depicts mentoring, which is a trusted leadership relationship between mentor and mentee. Mentoring in the workplace is a relational process in which a more experienced individual, preferably a senior, guides mentees by offering three distinct types of support: psychosocial support, career-related support, and role modeling formulated to assist in leadership development and career advancement (Bova, 2000;

Dunbar & Kinnersley 2011). Mentoring is to assist the mentee directionally with problems and career paths. Patton and Haynes (2014) posited that mentoring is a means to building self-esteem and confidence. As suggested by all participants, AAWL1, AAWL2, AAWL3, AAWL4, and AAWL5, mentoring increases the ability to connect to networks and a plethora of resources and provides a sense of visibility elevation of one's self-esteem.

Dworkin et al. (2012) inferred that mentoring woman is known to increase a women's marketability and increase the likelihood of acquiring senior leadership positions. Participants in my study noted a direct correlation between job performance and employee elevation, specifically with AAW, when mentored. However, Johnson (2017) suggested that women have limited mentorship opportunities due to gender inequalities in the workplace. According to Pittman et al (2020), AAW feel pressured to be symbolic role models, categorized as part of the double jeopardy rule, unlike White women. AAW have been ineffective with cultivating mentorship because of the double jeopardy and gender bias. All participants in my study further posited that AAW are invisible and are therefore invisible for potential elevation. Jones et al. (2013) asserted that AAW often experience invisibility, social exclusion, and minimum at best mentoring. Mentoring as presented by each AAWL participant was seen as a necessary vehicle to engage women akin towards elevation successfully. All the participants expressed that mentoring educates AAW with information and practices to overcome career obstacles, understand organizational politics and resources, and provide resources

and networking. Dominquez and Hager (2019) suggested that mentoring programs increase personnel retention, reduce organizational attrition, increase career satisfaction, accelerate leadership development, and minimize the learning curve in the competitive markets. When mentoring includes the overall development of employees, both the mentor and the mentee receive positive outcomes from the relationship with mutual benefits. Craig et al. (2012) further reiterated the impact of mentoring by stating that the vital link between career mentoring and positive employee outcomes includes extrinsic success like increased compensation, promotion eligibility, and overall career mobility. Researchers have noted that the "glass ceiling" concept denoting obstacles to career advancement is often considered the "concrete wall" for AAW (Nkomo & Bell, 2011). Bell and Nkomo (2011) coined the term concrete wall as a pernicious phenomenon where the top jobs are invisible for AAW to obtain due to the lack of awareness or the inability to see promotion opportunities.

Mentoring relationships are systemically designed to provide gratifying and dynamic experiences but thrive based on both parties' commitment to the relationship and goals. Tichy (2012) posited that mentoring assists organizations that require a solid mentoring foundation to build and retain upcoming leaders and develop a diversified workforce. Choosing to prepare and coach other aspiring AAW leaders for organizational leadership success ensures that aspiring AAW leaders are ready for the senior leadership workforce. According to Edwards and Turnbull (2012), developing mentoring relationships can influence an organization while benefitting the mentee. Cayleff et al.

(2011) further suggested that mentoring programs are a means to cultivate self-esteem and self-actualization by providing individuals to strengthen their skills and develop a healthy identity. In qualitative research, Bower (2008) conducted a study with 480 female mentors, articulating identifiable changes experienced in the organizational culture. The outcome of content analysis showcased those observational changes, including increased leadership opportunities, productive teamwork, and increased employee morale. AAW leaders have used mentorship to prepare, influence, and encourage other AAW who have leadership potential to rise (Mullings, 2014).

There is a lack of literature articulating the availability of mentorship support, especially in government policy and implementation. There is even less efficacy on mentorship regarding AAW in business. However, Williams (2011) revealed that out of 1,000 women in the United States, 82% concurred that having a mentor was essential to their career trajectory. One of five participants never had a mentor due to their inability to find appropriate matches. In addition, for AAW, mentoring was absent in the early part of the participants' career journey, indicating that double bias played a role in the type of mentorship once received.

Relation to the Conceptual Framework

Hambrick (1994) conceptualized that the CDT identifies the differences in the preferences and beliefs of decision makers regarding strategic goals based on diversity as aesthetics such as demographics and gender (as cited in Meissner & Wolf, 2017; Mohammed & Ringseis, 2001). To that extent, as suggested by Miller et al. (1998),

cognitive diversity influences a link between diversity and profitability. Organizations seeking a diversified workforce understand the significance of having a cadre of belief differences and mentoring as the tool to achieve diversity at the senior executive levels, thus minimizing, if not eliminating, racial and gender discourse to appeal to competitive marketing.

Globalization and the community impact from immigration have transformed the cultural makeup of society and subsequently in business. The norm of companies was homogenous; now, they comprise a diversified mix of race, religion, and ethnicity. Early and Ang (2018) asserted that companies that have expanded cultural diversity have become multicultural creating cross cultural competency and mitigating stereotypes and bias. Offered as an intricate tool, mentoring massages a culturally diverse organization in knowledge transfer and cultural intelligence to reach a broader body of professionals and networks. Early and Ang suggested that germinal mentoring dyads differ significantly in cultural backgrounds to ensure cultural reciprocal mentoring to initiate mutual knowledge transfer capitalizing on the pool of cognitive diversity. Lastly, a mentoring relationship can harness other variables of diversity are a mentoring relationship.

Emergent Theme 2: Strategic Planning, Diversity, and Competitive Advantage

Theme 2, strategic planning is essential for business and diversity for company growth. According to AAWL1, AAWL2, and AWWL 4, the absence of diversity within a strategic plan is an element of failure crippling a company's ability to ensure profitability and maintain competitive advantage. AAWL1 infers that a company's growth is relative

to the market it attracts, and the faces used to lure the attraction. The complexity of diversity and business is the unwillingness of executive leadership to construct a foundation of diversity, specifically for African American women's elevation. AAWL3 articulated that strategic plan which encompasses expanding diversity are placeholders appearing to support diversity but operate as obstacles. The unintended obstacles identify qualified personnel with a minimum of three years in experience as a senior manager, typically diminishing minority candidates eliminating minority candidates, specifically African American women.

All five study participants expressed a firm conviction in preplanning and long-term preparation for their business as a strategy to increase the chances of success. *Strategic planning* is an evolving process that changes as the business requirement changes in conjunction with the environment. Kwon and Yang (2016) identified areas such as neglecting to develop business strategies, lack of resources, and bad leadership experiences, resulting in business failure. AAWL5 asserted that in her experience, diversity is an element not included in strategic planning. However, according to all the study participants, an effective strategy must include diversity, specifically targeting AAW to ascend to senior leadership, impacting a broader demographic. The business of the participants spans to markets, reaching a cadre of stakeholders from various ethnicity. Expressed by each study participant, companies need to have faces like those of the clientele market they are attracting for competitive advantage.

Pickens (2017) opined that a business must constantly define and validate the market opportunity, offerings, business model, go-to-market strategy to deliver the services and products offered to the market, providing profitability and sustainability. Formulating strategies for the business goals and identifying the business's capabilities and the company requires initiating strategies to remain competitive. All participants expounded on the importance of strategic planning as a constant mind mapping of internal and external factors to mitigate loss and what is not working and implement strategies to increase profitability. In their cases, this includes the elevation of AAW for a diversified workforce.

Relation to the Literature

Cultural diversity is the culmination of a mix of individuals. In the existing literature, cultural diversity theorizes as a tradeoff of strategic tasks and creative problem-solving. Corritore et al. (2018) assert that diversity emerges as cultural differences between individuals within the literature review. On the other hand, diversity contrasts an individual's element that parses into interpersonal and intrapersonal forms. According to Barth (2018), cultural diversity is an instrument for business sustainability and competitive advantage. Hernandez (2014) infers that recruitment diversity is a business and social necessity that can garner unexpected benefits by embracing generational, gender, socioeconomic differences, and cultural perspective.

Larkin et al. (2020) posited that researchers have identified that homogenous boards contributed to company failure and poor governance. Furthermore, a board with a

closed mindset hinders solving a corporate problem when the board lack diversification (Burgess & Tharenou, 2002; Larkin et al. 2020). According to Arfken (2004), a diverse board projects an increase in moral and ethical compass in decision making. Furthermore, Larkin (2020) suggested that studies show that diversity restricts myopic decision-making while increasing positive and innovative ideas, improved problem solving, and strategic planning.

Galbreath (2018) presented a case study on diversity on the board of directors, financial performance, and the direct connection. The conformity of evidence of the study correlated to women on boards of directors has a positive financial impact with negative results. Women serving on a board correlate to corporate social responsibility (CSR), promoting market competitiveness, and intensifying corporate acquisition promoting competitive advantage (Boulouta, 2013; Harjoto et al. 2015; and Jain & Jamali, 2016). Turban et al. (2019) suggested that comparative studies show gendered diversity drives improved financial performance by projecting an attractive work environment for talent acquisition. The conjecture of diversity and financial performance correlation is a complex context of dependency on industry norms for gender inclusion (Wu & Zhang, 2019).

As the nation becomes culturally diverse, companies need to develop strategic plans to meet the melting pot of the competitive marketplace. As a result, organizations realize the need to develop a workforce that represents and responds to the diverse customer base through innovation. Strategic planning for diversity relies on innovation

capability. Thus, executive management influences the strategic plan. There are two considerations for strategic plans 1.) diversity within the resources within the control of the executive team to encourage or discourage; and 2) an increase in diversified workplaces (Kanchanabha & Badir, 2020). According to Ruona and Gibson (2004), human capital is an essential component of the competitive advantage supported by the employees' innate skills that provide value as a source of an organization's competitive advantage.

According to Helton and Soubik (2004), strategic workforce planning aligns an organization's human capital with its business direction. Therefore, using Porter's Force analysis of the environment encompassing driving forces, assessing their impact on the industry, and determining necessary to mitigate negative impact. This phenomenon can force the repositioning of companies to compete with a strategic workforce plan. Richard and Johnson (2001) suggest that companies should utilize a mix of human capital, adding value to the organization to create a sustainable competitive advantage. Richard (2000) posited that cultural diversity adds value and contributes to the competitive advantage of organizations.

Relation to the Conceptual Framework

The cognitive diversity perspective in strategy ascribes casual importance to structure and processes of cognition in the means of strategy and the competitive advantage. According to Narayanan et al. (2011), cognition highlights how cognitive structures and processes generate business definitions and corporate and business

strategies, leading to significant strategic initiatives; thus, developing strategic change and implementation. As defined in the conceptual framework, cognitive diversity theory identifies the differences in the preferences and beliefs of decision-makers regarding strategic goals and the perception of strategic decisions (Meissner & Wulf, 2017; Mohammed & Ringseis, 2001). Enhancing an organizational innovation capability is a strategic issue influenced by the top management team (TMT). With an intentional focus on diversity, TMT's have the flexibility or resources to encourage or discourage diversity precisely due to an increase in diversified workplaces (Kanchanabha & Badir, 2020).

In senior executive management, cognitive diversity is their variation of beliefs of a cause-and-effect relationship and the variation in preferences relating to organizations' various strategic goals. Kanchanabha and Badir (2020) posited that cognitive diversity has positively impacted team performance, specifically in the infant strategic planning stage. As related to strategic decision making, cognitive diversity is inviting in the context that decisions are vague, complex, and at times laden with uncertainty. A diversified team could lead to multiple perspectives, engender well-thought-out alternatives, and ultimately better decision making, leading to a competitive advantage. A cohesive team's positive impact is the degree of homogeneity in salient attributes across team members to perform positively (Van Knippenberg & Schippers, 2007; Van Bratten, 1991). Furthermore, the development of cohesiveness requires a mix of demographic and cultural variance to enhance social attraction among members (Braaten, 1991; Lott & Lott, 1965).

Emergent Theme 3 Barriers

All five study participants echoed the lack of networking and resources offered to African American women to assist their career paths are significant barriers for career elevation. Furthered stated by each that racism is a primary barrier to executive opportunities in a homogenous environment. Additionally, AAWL1, AAWL4, and AAWL5 conjectured that AAWs are marginalized in the workforces, making them invisible, stifling them as valued contributors. Lewis and Neville (2015) reiterated that achieving marginalization is through feelings of invisibility. Therefore, diminishing one's ability to contribute substantially based on gender and race. The invisibility of African American women emerged with all five participants. AAWL 4 articulated that AAW is progressing and present in senior leadership positions without continuous obstacles. As AAWL4 stated, "Although we have a seat at the table, we are usually one in a sea of white males. The irony, although we are visible, we remain invisible. Our voices drowned by the majority sitting at the table."

Beckwith et al. (2016) expressed a dearth of African American women in executive positions compared to their male counterparts and Caucasian women. Divergent from AAWL4's belief, 4 participants posited that while women have elevated senior executive positions, African American women remain absent from such positions. Summarized by Sesko and Biernat (2010), African American women are less visible in leadership positions in the workplace than other groups. According to Barnes (2017), those African American women who hold leadership positions are more visible since few

exist. In a recent study conducted by Smith et al. (2018), African American women executives interviewed revealed that while they were physically visible, they felt cognitively invisible. Meaning their underrepresentation in leadership was evident in the workplace.

AAWL5 passionately articulated the lack of accessible human networks, training, and resources has hindered African American women from adequately preparing for career elevation. AAWL5 suggested, "We have reached out to other organizations, usually outside of the workplace, to seek support and resources to elevate to the next level. More importantly, we as African American women who have arrived need to extend the reach-back and pull others up the ladder as we climb." AWWL1 further expounded that when resources on all levels are limited, African American women are often left stagnant due to the lack of preparation and tools to elevate. As suggested by AAWL1, "When resources are not easily available to us, we become complacent in the job and discouraged from hitting a brick wall. We must create a network of resources to elevate each other in every facet of our lives."

The inability to access professional networks prevents African American women from capitalizing on resources to prepare for career elevation. Additionally, executive management's tunnel vision restricts a broader view of potential candidates for elevation; thus, maintaining a homogenous executive team. AAWL2 expressed that the lack of "PR Managers," a resource needed to groom African American women to prepare them for an

executive role, equipping them with the required persona, is absent in its human resource infrastructure. We need guidance on expectations."

AAWL4 inferred that she went outside of the confines of the job to seek support and resources during her journey. Because of her journey, it was a priority to include elevation tools and resources in the strategic plan, encompassing strategic growth for African American women. AAWL3 and AAWL5 expounded on the great lengths of the intangibility of the glass ceiling and the chains African American women have anchored to the concrete wall. The glass ceiling is the invisible barrier African American women face, preventing career advancement (Chisholm-Burns et al., 2017). At the same time, the concrete wall is unique to African American women specifically (Beckwith et al., 2016).

Relation to the Literature

Barriers to leadership opportunities are a global phenomenon, where women, compared to men, remain disproportionately concentrated in lower-level and lower authoritative leadership positions (Northouse, 2019). These barriers, although perceived as being against women, are primarily against African American women executives. One such barrier, the glass ceiling, limits the success of female and minority executives. According to Cotter et al. (2012), There are four specific criteria measurement that must be present for the glass ceiling effect:

1. The inequality representing gender or racial difference that is not explained by other job-related characteristics of the employee

2. The inequality of the glass ceiling is represented by gender or racial difference that is greater at higher levels of an outcome other than at a lower level of an outcome.
3. The inequality of the glass ceiling is represented as gender or racial inequality in the chances of advancement into higher levels, not merely the proportions of gender or race currently at those higher levels.
4. The inequality of the glass ceiling represents a gender or racial inequality that increases throughout a career (pp.657-661).

The glass ceiling continues to prevent women from elevating to their highest potential despite anti-glass legislation, litigation and social movements, and other support mechanisms.

In addition to the glass ceiling identified as a significant factor to women of color ascension to executive positions, the concrete wall is an identifier unique to African American women's inability to penetrate barriers; constituting a career-limiting factor affecting not only the ability to elevate in an organization but the ability to coexist. In addition, the concrete wall, this phenomenon is sometimes referred to as a "black ceiling" (Sepand, 2015) or "concrete ceiling" (Catalyst, 1999). A comparative discussion of the concrete wall versus the glass ceiling revealed that the latter is an obstacle that is almost unbreakable and adds another level of complexity to elevation (Catalyst, 2004b).

Accordingly, in a Catalyst survey, *Advancing African American Women in the*

Workforce: What Managers Need to Know, the unique crucible faced by this demographic group reiterated.

Even though African American women represent a crucial growing source of talent, they currently represent only 1% of corporate officers in Fortune 500 companies. They experience a double outsider status – unlike White women or African American men – African American women report exclusion from informal networks and conflict relationships with Caucasian women among the challenges they face (Brown, 2004, p. 46).

African American women are subject to double jeopardy biases, race, and gender. For African American women race and gender are inseparable, meaning experiencing race and gender discriminations go together (Davis, 2012, Davis & Maldonado, 2015). However, African American women placed in executive positions are often alone in their race and gender, thus isolated in their role with no peers. This alone impacts obtaining influential mentors and sponsorships were typically, women whom women mentor (Sahai, 2015).

The typical networks, such as the "good old boy" (Vasiliou & Adams, 2018 pp 62-64), continue to exclude women from the circle of power within the business realm (Kanter, 1977). Women perceive, as articulated with all the study participants, that existing barriers prevent them from obtaining mentors to provide psychological and social support and career development and resources and the parsimony for elevation (Kong et al., 2016; Guynn, 2017). In response to the exclusion of accessible networks,

women have formed their networks (Knapp, 1986). This statement aligns with the actions inferred by all the study participants.

Relation to the Conceptual Framework

Constructing a diversified work environment requires eliminating barriers for African American women to elevate to senior leadership positions. Von Bergen et al. (2005) assert that diversity is economically beneficial to top managers and employees. The perception of diversity is positively related to perceived performance benefits of organizations (Kundu & Mor, 2017) and evidence on companies with workplace diversity policies being likely to perform better than those without such policies (Hossain et al. 2020).

Elevating a diverse workforce allows companies to blend the characteristic of various individuals in distinctive ways. Thus, creating a unique combination of human resources (Wong & Karia, 2010) creates capabilities to take advantage of specific market opportunities or eliminate potential competitive threats (Barney, 1991, 2001; Hitt et al., 2001; Sirmon et al., 2007). There is evidence of a positive direct correlation between workforce diversity and overall performance (Pedrini, 2018; Hossain et al., 2020; Farmanesh et al., 2020). An organization's resources comprise workforce skills, knowledge, and behaviors required to sustain competitive advantage (Colbert, 2004; Barney, 1991, 2000).

Diversity is the distribution of differences in an attribute common among individuals (Harrison and Klein, 2007). In contrast, cognitive diversity is constructed

based on group-level knowledge, ideas, perspectives, and a cadre of beliefs coexisting within a unit. Early literature suggested that heterogeneity of ideas and perspectives will produce a vast spectrum of alternative perceptions of reality, thus impacting how units will interpret complex realities and what organizational decisions will be made (Weick 1995; Cyert et al. 2013). Furthermore, Miller et al. (1998) posited that cognitive diversity benefits in the context of information acquisitions, and groups with high cognitive diversity could capitalize on a wide range of related information for the problem. Additionally, higher cognitive diversity impacts a company's ability to innovate effectively on a company's potential absorptive capacity. Moreover, it should expand a unit's stocks of pertinent knowledge and increase the scope of new emergent ideas incoming from exogenous sources to broaden the competitive advantage and diminish racial discourse.

Applications to Professional Practice

The results of this research may provide pertinent insight for organizations that want to diversify their senior-level positions. Understanding perceptions and experiences of AAWL could aid in organizations examining with critical lenses their practices for hiring and promoting African American women to senior executive positions within the company. According to Alston (2012), the AAWL must be examined and placed in the center of discourse to discredit or discount organizational leadership's double jeopardy bias of African American women. Additionally, this research study may be instrumental

to companies understanding the benefits of having African American women in senior executive positions.

Diversification of the senior executive workforce reduces identity threat concerns and increases its ability to perceive fairness and relations to its market base (Emerson & Murphy, 2014). Debebe and Reinhart (2014) and Holvino (2010) concur that growing a diverse workforce within an organization can benefit from a diverse clientele, organizational growth, competitive advantage, and the overarching quest of managing diversity within the organization.

Implications for Social Change

By imparting an understanding of the lived experiences of the participants (executive African American women) from this study, leadership may be able to use the results of the findings to reconsider the effectiveness of their strategies on recruitment, the in-house elevation of African American women, and implementation of diversity and inclusion policies and programs. With improving organizational strategies in conjunction with HR and financial projections, there is a possibility of positive social change to the career advancement experiences of African American women from the perspective of the individual. Therefore, upsurgung the organizational competent candidate pool to expand the competitive advantage and resolving the lack of diversity in senior executive positions.

It is essential to embrace diversifying leadership roles to sustain competitiveness in Corporate America. According to Cortina et al. (2019), gender and race are catalysts

for social change within an organization. This study was to provide real-life experiences of AAE leaders. This study is a vehicle to echo their voices to extend dialogue on the double jeopardy biases and change the perceptions of African American women in the workforce. Davis (2016) postulated the emergence of African American women leaders in the United States represents an assay for emancipation from oppression and a vehicle for raising the community of African Americans from the depths of racial, educational, and economic subjugation. Bolstering a healthier diverse workforce where African American women visibly are heard in senior executive positions can broaden the organization's reach due to the organization perceived as diverse. The good ol' boy network is those who hold power and status in an organization are still a part of many organizations maintaining barriers to exclude women and minorities (Davis, 2016). With an increase in senior executive positions with African American women, there is a probable shift in the paradigm in beliefs, thoughts, and traditions. From the perspective of the workplace and societal ideas of what a leader maybe can expand past the inclusion of a homogenous environment to include African American women.

African American women traverse a fine line in the managerial field (Combs, 2016). They continue to shuffle between the double jeopardy of race and sex and the myriad of stereotypes associated with these. The far-reaching implications to African American women restrict diversity, limit the ability for various points of view based on divergent experiences in the workplace and repress growth. Ultimately, society

remains stagnant with this group and organizations dispossessed of a wealth of experiences and insight related to senior leadership.

A positive societal change includes the accretion of equal opportunities for African American women to senior executive positions (Cook & Glass, 2013). Achieving this goal requires employers to stop discounting problems and provide resources such as mentoring for African American women. Furthermore, Cain (2015) argued this action is required to shape the cultural attitude in the organizations that value and embrace African American women's capabilities. African American women in senior executive may better contribute. To a society based on their lived experiences. Thus, mentoring may increase the opportunities for African Americans to elevate to senior executive positions (Khosrvani & Ward, 2011). An implication for not providing mentors equates to unqualified African American women ready for senior leadership positions. The far-reaching implications cross over from business to government. Davis (2015) posited that barrier to executive positions is a global phenomenon and is perceived to be against women. Adding the color for double jeopardy is most demoralizing (Sims & Carter, 2019; Parker & Ogilvie, 1996). Racism, not sexism, is expressed by African Americans as the most significant barrier to their upward mobility (Parker, 1996; Tally-Ross, 1992).

Overall, organizations remised that not having African American women in senior executive positions inhibits benefitting from a diverse perspective. Diversity is pivotal to the growth of organizations in a competitive global environment. If organizations

continue to mask their lack of culturally diverse intelligence, they could lose their competitive edge and relevancy (Forbes, 2011).

Recommendations for Action

Understanding the lived experiences and perception of African American women's reality in business could assist senior leaders to lend a critical lens to their promotion and hiring practices that marginalize African American women within the organization. According to Alston (2012), examining the lived experiences of African American women is essential to place a focal point of discourse to disparage organizational leadership fallacy and beliefs based on race and gender. Furthermore, this study may serve as a vehicle for organizations to discern the benefits of diversifying senior executive positions with African American women. Populating senior executive positions with a diverse body to include African American women reduces identity threat concerns and elevates the company's perception as fair (Emerson & Murphy, 2014). Incorporating a diverse workforce can attract a diversified customer base, expanding market competitiveness and organizational growth (Dehebe & Reinhart, 2014).

Recommendations for Further Research

The main limitation in this study was the circumspection of African American women who held or held senior executive positions—securing top African American women leadership participants excluded African American women who hold positions below the senior executive level. Additionally, the participant pool was regulated to the District of Columbia, limiting the participating demographic pool.

Therefore, I recommend conducting a similar study concentrating on a broader platform of African American women in positions lesser than the senior executive leadership. Additionally, I recommend expanding the geographical area to larger cities and inviting multiple marginalized groups for participation. Conducting an extensive study engaging other minority women may enhance the existing body of literature exponentially focusing on the experiences of a variety of ethnic minority groups to include Latinas and Asians, to name a few, to find the commonality expressed from their life experiences,

Reflections

This study reinforced and expanded insight on the barriers and lack of resources African American women contend within corporate America for career elevation. The impact on society is critical to maintaining a competitive advantage. Diversity at the executive level brings a breadth of cultural differences, knowledge, ideas, creativity, and knowledge innovation for growth and financial health. This study focused on the value African American women have on a company's competitive advantage. The importance of the emergent themes disseminated through the study is significant to promote a positive social impact.

At the beginning of this study, the faculty challenged me on the potential bias of using the identifier of African American women in the title. Moreover, as a subject matter of the study as opposed to women in general. This study conducted was in the light presented to impart significant issues regarding the disparities of African American

women's elevation to executive positions and their impact on the competitive advantage. The premise of the study is not specific to Caucasian women as their elevation statistically is removed from the obstacle's African American women face. Furthermore, the implicit double jeopardy bias is critical enough for extending research in hopes of shedding light that will change the fabric of racism and sexism to level the playing field of African American women in corporate America.

Conclusion

African American women continue to represent a marginalized group suffocated by double bias, racism, and sexism in the workplace. Attempting to ascend the corporate ladder continues to present obstacles and challenges in corporate America's executive network. This study superscribed the empirical literature gap in the unique experiences of African American women within corporate settings. The interviews conducted answered the research questions and intensified the argument for the study. The women who interviewed provided paramount acumen into African American women's perception of working within corporate America. Although additional research is required, this study adds to scholarly literature regarding the adverse impacts of the lack of diversity of African American women on business operations and the competitive advantage.

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Appendix A Interview Protocol and Questions

Participant Pseudonym: _____ Participant _____ Time of Interview: _____
Code _____

Interview Date: 00.00/2021 Total Time: 60 – 90 minutes

Research Question – “What strategies do African American women executives use to increase diversity with other African American women in their ranks to ensure profitability and maintain competitive advantage?”

What you will do.	What you will say – script
1. Introduce yourself and the interview session.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Good morning Ms. XXX, I am Leilani Evans, a doctoral student at Walden University conducting a study on what strategies do African American women executives use to increase diversity with other African American women in their ranks to ensure profitability and maintain competitive advantage. b. Thank you for your time to respond to the invitation in consideration to participating in this study. c. . If there are any additional questions or concerns, I am happy to address it before we begin.
2. Engage the recording device.	

-
3. Introduce the date, time, and participant with coded identification.
 4. Commence interview with question #1 with follow through to subsequent questions to the end.
 5. Present additional questions as required.
 6. End the interview sequence; introduce member-checking with participant(s).
 7. Thank the participant(s) for contributing their time to this study. Reiterate contact numbers for follow up questions and concerns from the participants.
 - Watch non-verbal language
 - Paraphrase as needed
 - Follow-up with probing questions for in-depth content.
1. What strategies do you use to increase diversity within your ranks?
 2. What strategies have been the most successful in increasing diversity within your organization?
 3. What strategies have failed to increase diversity within your organization?
 4. What metrics do you use to assess the strategies implemented to increase diversity within your ranks?
 5. How is the career ladder structured within your organization to ensure diversity?
 6. How are mentorship programs used within your organization to increase diversity within your ranks?
 7. What else would you like to share about your experience with increasing diversity to ensure profitability and maintain competitive advantage?

Wrap up interview, thanking participants.

Thank you for volunteering your time to impart your experiences with me on the study. I will transcribe the interview audio and provide you with a copy of the transcript to review for accuracy within the next 3 days.

Schedule member-checking interview and set the environment.	I would like to schedule a follow-up meeting with you to review the results of my analysis and interpretation of the findings at your convenience for about 30 minutes.
---	---

Follow-up Member Checking Interview

What you will do.	What you will say – script
Introduce a follow-up interview session and set the environment	<p>Good morning Ms. XXX, Thank you once again for your participation in this a study. This follow-up is in response to the analysis and interpretation of findings from the first interview on what strategies do African American women executive use to increase diversity with other African American women in their ranks to ensure profitability and maintain competitive advantage. Please allow me to record this follow-up interview, so I may accurately note the information shared.</p>
Provide a copy of the succinct synthesis for each Question. Introduce probing questions correlating other information discovered to the study and IRB approved.	<p>1. What strategies do you use to increase diversity within your ranks?</p>
Articulate each question and the interpretation of the findings and ask if anything were missed. Or is there anything you would like to add?	<p>Succinct synthesis of the interpretation in one paragraph as required.</p>
	<p>2. What strategies have been the most successful in increasing diversity within your organization?</p>

Succinct synthesis of the interpretation in one paragraph as required.

3. What strategies have failed to increase diversity within your organization?

Succinct synthesis of the interpretation in one paragraph as required

4. What metrics do you use to assess the strategies implemented to increase diversity within the ranks?

Succinct synthesis of the interpretation in one paragraph as required

5. How is the career ladder structured within your organization to ensure diversity?

Succinct synthesis of the interpretation in one paragraph as required

6. How are mentorship programs used within your organization to increase diversity within your ranks?

Succinct synthesis of the interpretation in one paragraph as required

7. What else would you like to share about your experience with increasing diversity to
-

ensure profitability and
maintain competitive
advantage?

Interview Questions

1. What strategies do you use to increase diversity within your ranks?
2. What strategies have been the most successful in increasing diversity within your organization?
3. What strategies have failed to increase diversity within your organization?
4. What metrics do you use to assess the strategies implemented to increase diversity within your ranks?
5. How is the career ladder structured within your organization to ensure diversity?
6. How are mentorship programs used within your organization to increase diversity within your ranks?
7. What else would you like to share about your experience with increasing diversity to ensure profitability and maintain competitive advantage?

Appendix B: Ethics Certificate



Completion Date 17-Mar-2020
 Expiration Date N/A
 Record ID 35212633

This is to certify that:

Leilani Evans

Has completed the following CITI Program course:

Not valid for renewal of certification through CME.

Student's
 (Curriculum Group)
Doctoral Student Researchers
 (Course Learner Group)
1 - Basic Course
 (Stage)

Under requirements set by:

Walden University

CITI
 Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative