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Experiences of Black Women in the Workforce

Neferiatiti Lukina Holt
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Walden University

College of Management and Human Potential

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Neferiatiti Lukina Holt

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Walden University

2023

Abstract

Experiences of Black Women in the Workforce

By

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MPhil, Walden University, 2021

MA, Central Michigan University, 2015

BS, Point University, 2013

Dissertation Submitted in Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Management–Organizational Behaviors

Walden University

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Abstract

Black women in America face double discrimination in the workforce. The problem is that Black women experience discrimination in the workforce based on gender and race. The purpose of this qualitative descriptive phenomenological study was to explore Black women's experiences of discrimination in the workforce based on gender and race. The conceptual frameworks that grounded this study were general systems theory and intersectionality theory. Purposive sampling was used to identify participants; data were collected through semi-structured interviews with 13 Black women who work in a large city in central Texas. Thematic analysis based on descriptive phenomenology was applied to reveal themes and explore participants' perceptions of their experiences in the workplace. Five themes were identified from analysis of the data collected through coding and journal notes: (a) Black women's work experiences and intersectionality; (b) the importance of workplace diversity; (c) glass/concrete ceiling and career advancement; (d) representation matters; and (e) coping, support systems, and resources. The results from this study could provide a framework for Black women to experience better work environments that support them on their career journeys. Removing barriers can assist in career advancement among this population, reducing emotional taxation and creating safe spaces, resulting in a positive social change. The study findings could promote positive social change by highlighting the experiences of Black women who face discrimination based on the intersection of race and gender and the coping mechanisms, support systems, and resources that are effective in helping Black women navigate discrimination in the workplace.

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Dedication

I am immensely grateful to my Lord and Savior for the breath that fills my lungs, the radiance in my eyes, the faith that nourishes my spirit, and the determination that fuels my soul. Throughout my pursuit of a doctoral degree, I have encountered illness, the loss of beloved individuals, and various transformations in work and life. Despite these challenges, I persisted and continued to write. This achievement is dedicated to my mother, Louticia Grier, who embodies strength as a Black woman and mother. It is also dedicated to my children, affectionately known as the *Tribe called Nef*, my family, peers, and friends who have provided unwavering support on this journey. Thank you to the love of my life, Shaun, for your steadfast support and encouragement. I want to give a special acknowledgment to all the Black women who bear the weight of womanhood and Black identity in the workplace. Many of you carry this burden with apparent ease, though there are days when it feels as heavy as a ton of bricks. Keep pushing forward, for change is on the horizon!

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The completion of this journey would have been impossible without the presence and support of my colleagues in the workplace, my cherished friends, and my beloved family members. I extend my heartfelt gratitude to my esteemed committee chairperson, Dr. Kazeroony, whose unwavering support and guidance have been nothing short of remarkable since day one. Your contributions have been invaluable, and I am immensely grateful for everything you have done. I would also like to sincerely thank the diligent, responsive, and supportive committee members, Dr. Teresa Lao and Dr. Elizabeth Thompson. Your constructive feedback played a pivotal role in propelling me toward the finish line and molding me into a more adept researcher, student, and writer

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Introduction

Black women in America face double discrimination in the workforce based on gender and race. They also face various obstacles from feeling a lack of sense of belonging to career advancement opportunities and support in their roles in corporate America (Lean In, 2020). Black women receive minimal support the higher they climb the corporate ladder. Lack of support could lead to a greater chance of burnout and failure in a newly appointed position (Thomas, 2021). Despite encompassing over 50% of the workforce, Black women still struggle to achieve senior-level positions (Azevedo et al., 2021; Beckwith et al., 2016).

Black women in the workplace may face complex journeys and an uphill battle based on gender and race. Compared to their counterparts, the challenges faced by the intersection of being Black and a woman could create both visible and invisible barriers during their career span (Townsend, 2021). Gender and race discrimination are prominent in this group, and these experiences can be taxing and adversely affect Black women in the workforce.

Black women also experience higher stress levels and develop adverse coping mechanisms to manage their roles in corporate America (Hall et al., 2012). The stress created by lack of belonging and the need to code switch could heighten stress levels for Black women in the workplace (McCluney et al., 2021). Research has shown that Black women are more likely to become sick and suffer shorter life spans due to heightened stress levels (Griffith et al., 2009). Although various reports, articles, and media coverage

in recent years has highlighted the barriers Black women face in the workplace, there is still a lack of in-depth scholarly exploration of the experiences of Black women in the workforce. Black women can shed light on the phenomenon they experience to illuminate their challenges.

Chapter 1 includes the background of the study, the problem statement, the purpose of the study, the research question, the conceptual framework, the nature of the study, definitions, assumptions, scope, delimitations, limitations, and the significance of the study, and summary.

Background of the Study

The Lean In study (2020) reported that Black women face the most significant challenges in the workplace. The results of the study show that Black women's experiences are exclusive and differ from the experiences of White women and White men (Lean In, 2020). Black women's barriers vary from lack of access to career pipelines that lead to promotion to lack of support in current and future roles. Even if Black women have higher educational levels, more experience, or work harder, many corporations tailor advancement and power toward White people and toward males (Heckler, 2019). These barriers makes it exceedingly difficult to push for the progress of Black women in the workplace.

The gap in this study is based on a survey completed by Crenshaw (1989), who explored the views and experiences of Black women in corporate America. The experiences include discrimination based on gender and race. My study fills the gap by further exploring the views and experiences of Black women in corporate jobs in a large

city in central Texas. Crenshaw (2005) suggested a need to explore the possible perspectives of discrimination against Black women in the workplace based on gender and race.

Numerous surveys, articles, and reports have shed light on the significant disparities in pay, career progression, and treatment faced by Black women. However, firsthand accounts of these experiences still need to be included. This study sought to bridge that gap by providing an opportunity to gain a deeper understanding of the direct impacts Black women encounter. Furthermore, there is a noticeable disparity in promotion rates, career advancement, and representation of Black women in corporate positions. Shockingly, 54% of Black women working in various organizations are the sole Black woman in their respective departments. Lean In (2020) posited that this isolation could result in feelings of exclusion, a lack of belonging, and an emotional burden.

Currently, there is a lack of Black women leadership representation from C-suite to managerial roles in U.S. corporations. As of 2021, only two Black women were CEOs of Fortune 500 companies, Rosaline Brewer and Thasunda Brown Duckett (Smith, 2021). Comparing the same period for female CEOs of Fortune 500 companies total, 37 White women were CEOs—an 81% difference (Catalyst, 2021).

Several factors contribute to the current unfavorable statistics for Black women in the workplace; however, the intersectionality of being Black and female plays a dominant role in the perceptions of Black women in corporate America (Crenshaw, 1989). Some biases correlate to historical stereotypes from television or can come from fear of the

unknown; if decision makers have not interacted with Black women, it can be challenging to manage, promote, or advocate for them. Thomas et al. (2018) posited that the byproduct of negative experiences of Black women could slow career advancement, increase feelings of isolation and more.

Research has been focused on the career advancement challenges for women of color and women overall. When referring to Black women, research shows the stagnant career advancement process for the group as the glass ceiling, concrete ceiling, black ceiling, and glass cliff (Smith et al., 2012). The most popular of the synonymous terms is the glass ceiling; it became common after being used in the *Wall Street Journal* by journalists Hymowitz and Schellhardt in 1986 (Bruckmüller et al., 2014).

Past literature on the experiences of Black women in the workplace discussed the glass ceiling and other related terms. Previous research lacks practical application to assist in dismantling the barriers faced by Black women in the workplace (Crenshaw, 1989; Smith et al., 2012; Thomas et al., 2018). Past research does not forecast the potential new barriers that women may face as they break through the glass ceiling or the effects of experiencing seen and unseen barriers in corporate America. Many times, Black women are offered positions for diversity counts and supporting roles. Especially, when there is instability within an organization with little to no support, Black women are more likely to fail or resign (Roberts & Mayo, 2019). Kulich and Ryan (2017) posited that the term invisible cliff explains this phenomenon.

The results and recommendations from Lean In's (2021) research show various steps to reduce Black women's ongoing barriers. The suggested practical application of

Lean In's study provides more ways to ensure fair treatment, career advancement opportunities, and overall growth for Black women in the workforce. St. Clair (2020) posited that the unique experiences and discrimination of Black women could harm their health and general well-being. This study is needed as Black women generally experience higher levels of discrimination in the workplace, and their experiences are unique compared to their counterparts.

Problem Statement

Black women face higher levels of workplace discrimination, from stereotyping to microaggressions and feeling the need to code switch to the dominant group's norms (McCluney, 2020). Black women often deal with the intersectionality of being a woman and being Black in the workforce (Crenshaw, 2005; McCluney & Rabelo, 2019; Reynolds-Dobbs et al., 2008). Recent research literature highlights discrimination Black women experience in the workforce from psychological safety, lack of belonging, and coping with feeling invisible (McCluney & Rabelo, 2019). Black women also encounter structural barriers that add to the discrimination they face in society (Simms et al., 2015). Iyamba (2020) posited despite their consistent display of career competence, Black women are disproportionately subjected to gender and racial bias, creating additional hurdles for them in the workplace, even when they excel in their performance.

The general problem is that although Black women continue to demonstrate career competency, they are more likely to be subjected to gender and racial bias while being expected to perform well in the workforce (Iyamba, 2020). The specific research

problem is that Black women experience discrimination in the workforce based on gender and race (Crenshaw, 2005; McCluney & Rabelo, 2019; Reynolds-Dobbs et al., 2008).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative descriptive phenomenological study was to explore the experiences of Black women's discrimination in the workforce based on gender and race. Using general systems and intersectional theories allowed an in-depth exploration of 13 Black women in a large city in central Texas. Black women's experiences are often seen as a single framework without identifying or seeking out the entire experiences of both racial and gender-based biases.

Being both Black and a woman may put Black women at a disadvantage because they could experience multiple forms of biases and discrimination in the workforce. Each experience is unique, even when commonalities about gender and race in the workforce are present. Understanding the experience through the lens of Black women may enhance current protocols and career advancement for Black women in a large city in central Texas.

The intent of conducting this research study was to explore the experiences Black women face, such as emotional taxation, the lack of belonging and psychological safety in the workplace. The research design provides a compound account of how participants feel and experience the phenomenon based on gender and race. Phenomenological research enables a researcher to learn from the participants while including their perceptions and understanding of the lived experience (Moustakas, 1994).

Research Questions

How do Black women describe their experiences regarding discrimination in the workforce based on gender and race?

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual frameworks that grounded this study were general systems theory and intersectionality theory. General systems theory is a systemic approach to understanding all parts, not just the sum of all elements (Jones, 2021). The general systems theory approach centers around Bertalanffy et al.'s (1968) research that supports that an organization should have inclusion and wholeness to increase productivity.

Intersectionality research provides insight into Black women's challenges due to gender and race (Crenshaw, 1991). General systems theory and intersectionality highlight that all parts working together may reduce Black women's discrimination and emphasize the intersecting systems (Crenshaw, 1991; Jones, 2021; von Bertalanffy, 1968). The main concepts of general systems theory and intersectionality relate to the research problem of being a woman and a Black woman. General systems theory aligns with the study's concept that Black women's experiences in the workplace are affected by the sum of all parts (Konrad et al., 2014). Intersectionality aligns with gender and race as factors that can create barriers for Black women in the workplace (Crenshaw, 1989).

Applying general system theory could shed light on the various moving parts and the influence of the whole (von Bertalanffy, 1973). *Intersectionality* is an analytic framework that highlights the collision of gender and race (Crenshaw, 1991). This theory highlights the intersecting social categories and interdependent systems. The general

systems theory concept includes multiple parts within a set of systems that intersect while mutually affecting one another (Howard & Renfrow, 2014). The central tenet of systems theory is the concept of one experience involving another experience. In the case of Black women in the workplace, their experience is unique; therefore, their work experience differs from other women and races. Thus, the use of systems theory in this study connects the experiences of Black women based on gender and race, and intersectionality ties the experiences together.

Black women are more likely to experience various traumatic, race, and gender bias experiences in the workforce (Moody & Lewis, 2019). Work, in general, can come with its own set of stresses and expectations; added stress based on gender and race can take a toll on Black women in the workplace. Dealing with discrimination and possible emotional taxation may also cause unforeseen obstacles for Black women in the workforce (Dickens et al., 2019).

McKinsey and Company (2020) found that when Black women receive promotions, they do not receive adequate training and support to succeed within their roles. This lack of support could lead to burnout, resignation, or failure in the position (McKinsey & Company, 2020). Page (2018) posited that many Black women have resigned from their positions due to a lack of career development, psychological safety, career advancement, and sense of belonging.

Black women are underrepresented in leadership roles in corporate America. Typically, Black women in a particular function or team do not wish to be the sole representative of their race, as this can lead to tokenism or being burdened with

additional responsibilities solely to represent all Black women (Dickens et al., 2018). Black women must work harder and have higher accolades for career advancement and sustainability in the workplace (Neal-Jackson, 2020). Still, they also have enhanced work experience by having different standards and expectations placed on them versus their peers (McCluney & Rabelo, 2019). This heightened workplace experience is an emotional tax (Travis et al., 2016).

The experience of an emotional tax can cause physical, emotional, and internal/external health issues for Black women. Kilgore et al. (2020) posited that in addition to experiencing emotional tax, Black women experience more microaggressions than their peers. Microaggressions can also cause negative feelings, health concerns, and a more complex career trajectory for Black women in the workplace.

Corporations are responsible for the experiences of the Black women within their organizations who have suffered from a lack of opportunities based on gender and race (Wingfield & Chavez, 2020). The results of this study might help reduce and eliminate discrimination that Black women face in the workforce. Providing firsthand experiences could offer a glimpse of internal and external daily affairs. This approach allows a researcher to explain, explore, and highlight the experiences of Black women (Moustakas, 1994). Descriptive phenomenology will conceptualize the literature related to the research questions (Mantzavinos, 2016).

Utilizing general systems theory and the concept of intersectionality to analyze the data based on descriptive phenomenology in collecting data is the foundation of this study. These theories accentuates the interpretations that individuals manage in their

experiences. Descriptive phenomenology is the study of experiences and emphasizes the sheer description of people's experiences (Giorgi, 2009; Wertz, 2010).

Using a phenomenological approach allowed me to capture the experiences of Black women in the workforce. In phenomenology research, experiences can only be described to others based on their lived experience (Edmonds & Kennedy, 2017). To extract the most from the participants, a researcher should ensure the atmosphere is free from distraction while creating a relaxed environment for interviews (Moustakas, 1994).

Nature of the Study

The nature of the selected method of this qualitative exploration of Black women in the workforce was descriptive phenomenology, inquiring about their experiences. In qualitative research, a researcher uncovers participants experiences by interviewing them in the natural setting of the phenomenon (Denzin et al., 2017). Qualitative research allows a researcher to explore the phenomenon experienced as perceived by the participant, making it unique in comparison to other methods (Baxter & Jack, 2008). The descriptive phenomenology method allows for a richer exploration and extraction of the experiences of Black women in the workforce (Neubauer et al., 2019). Applying the descriptive phenomenology approach to this study helps to explore and uncover the experiences of Black women in the workforce based on their race and gender.

The quantitative method was not appropriate for this study because this research did not seek to correlate, quantify, or establish relationships (Williams, 2007). To fully explore the holistic experiences of the participants, qualitative methods were selected using phenomenology to fully extract the human experiences (Moustakas, 1994.)

In this study, I did not use a case study because case studies focus on processes and dynamics, not experiences (Yin, 2014). Although this approach is often used in qualitative research, if not properly conducted, a researcher could have difficulty completing and validating the findings (Baskarada, 2014). In the case of studies, a researcher considers the availability of the setting to complete the study, the required experience, and the time needed to invest in this approach (Yin, 2014). Amedeo Giorgi (2008) was a leading thinker on phenomenological philosophy and included steps to reveal the significance of the human perspective by using identified themes in research.

In this study, I used purposive sampling to gather data, including field notes, until saturation was reached (Sundler et al., 2019). Using purposeful sampling allows a researcher to immerse and understand the phenomenon experienced fully. The participants were chosen based on the attributes that contribute to the study. Participants met the requirements of being Black and a woman a large city in central Texas; this is considered a nonrandom technique (see Etikan et al., 2016). Intentional selection aligns with purposive sampling as this study was intended to explore the experiences of Black women in corporate America. Black women who reside and work a large city in central Texas were the source of data collection. The collected data were analyzed to identify themes using the NVivo software to find common words and categories.

The selected 13 participants were interviewed virtually as the source of data collection in this study. The interviews were the primary source of data collection for this study. The data obtained from the interviews were transcribed and analyzed using the NVivo data analysis software to find common words, which were used to determine the

codes and themes of the data. The themes were identified by comparing the participants' described experiences and how they relate to the total participant pool experiences in the workplace as a Black woman. Coding is part of identifying the themes and labeling them to place them appropriately within the findings (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Definitions

Black or African American: A person with origins in any of the Black racial groups of Africa (U.S. Census, 2021).

Black women's career advancement: Black women experience double discrimination within their organizations' cultures, policies, and practices (Sepand, 2015).

Black women's career barriers: All groups of women of color report higher career barriers due to racism and higher educational barriers due to racial discrimination than White women (Kim & O'Brien, 2018).

Code switching: Adjusting and adapting to an audience, group, or particular setting for the comfort of others to appear elevated or to seem more acceptable is a form of code switching. A common theme in code switching is navigating from one behavior to another to seek approval or increase opportunities in the workforce (McCluney et al., 2021).

Discrimination: Unfairly treating a person or group of people differently from other people or groups of people (Merriam-Webster, 2021).

Diversity: Various experiences, backgrounds, races, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, educational levels, and more (Peterson, 1999).

Double burden: Racism and sexism experienced by Black women in the workforce based on race and gender (St. Jean & Feagin, 2015).

Glass ceiling: Intangible barriers that prevent qualified individuals from advancing within their organization (Pai & Vaidya, 2009).

Intersectionality: Because of their intersectional identity as both women and people of color within discourses shaped to respond to one another, women of color are marginalized within both (Crenshaw, 2005).

Sexism: Stereotyping, discriminating, or alienating women based on gender (Hodson et al., 2021).

Tokenism: A small or limited number of minorities or underrepresented individuals within an organization primarily to give the perception of gender or race representation (Yoder et al., 1996).

Women in the workplace: Many companies overlook the realities of women of color who face the most significant obstacles and receive minor support (Krivkovich et al., 2017).

Assumptions

I first assumed that Black women in an organization would have the desire, availability, and access to participate in this research study. Accessibility and honesty during an interview are essential to extracting participants' lived experiences (Moustakas, 1994). I assumed the participants would recall their experiences accurately, authentically, and holistically. The second assumption was that Black women would provide a full spectrum and perspective of the phenomenon they experience, not just one perspective.

My last assumption was that Black women participants in this study would represent the population of Black women in a large city in central Texas.

Scope and Delimitations

In this study, I aimed to explore the experiences of Black women in the workplace from their perspectives of discrimination based on gender and race in corporate America. In this study, I aimed to understand the barriers and biases that Black women face in the workplace. The intent was to better understand the participants' experiences regarding gender and race discrimination. Black women may face higher levels of discrimination based on gender and race.

This study's scope was Black women employed in a large city in central Texas. Each participant worked in a corporation upon agreeing to participate in the study. The research problem shows that although Black women continue to prove career competency, they are more likely to experience gender and racial bias while being expected to perform well in the workforce. Therefore, the participants must be Black women employed in a large city in central Texas to participate in the research study.

Additionally, the geographical scope is confined to the southern region of the United States. This study included data collection via virtual in-depth semi structured interviews. The data analysis determined the experiences and perceptions of Black women in the workplace.

Research's limitations are in the confinements within the body of work; researchers have inclusions and exclusions as needed to ensure manageability. The delimitation of this study were that the participants must meet the criteria of being Black,

female, and working at a corporation in a large city in central Texas. The data collection was delimited to Black women in the workplace in a large city in central Texas. Only 7.8% of the population of in this large central city in Texas is Black; this limits the number of Black women who could participate in this study compared to cities with a higher population of Black people (U.S. Census Bureau, 2022). Based on the low percentage of Black people in a large city in central Texas, it may not be easy to replicate the study in another setting. Having 13 participants fit the criteria for qualitative research as saturation was reached; this group was considered a homogenous population (see Clarke & Braun, 2013; Fugard & Potts, 2014; Sandelowski, 1995). With a small number of participants, it is vital for a researcher not to draw generalizations for a particular group's entire population (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

In this study, I resisted generalizations about populations outside of Black women. In this study, I was delimited based on the period when this research was conducted, events that may have occurred outside of my control, the phenomenology research method, the limitations of the research question, and the tailored research questions. Future studies exploring Black women's barriers and discrimination in the workplace can focus on tools and resources to eliminate barriers.

Limitations

Limitations in research can vary from a small sample size, methodology, and limited resources (Theofanidis & Fountouki, 2018). Research has both limitations and delimitations within a body of work. This study's limitations were from virtual interviews (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). The interviews were conducted in a comfortable natural setting

to ensure participants were relaxed and engaged freely. Ross and Bibler Zaidi (2019) posited that researchers must be direct and upfront about the limitations of their study while also ensuring they do not alter the findings based on their bias of the study.

Another limitation of this study was that not every participant could always accurately describe or articulate their experiences effectively. Researchers who conduct qualitative research become a part of the research procedure; therefore, they must be informed and equipped to do so. Dodgson (2017) posited that a researcher must keep their bias at bay and remove any biases from the study. A researcher must remove preconceived notions from their own experiences and follow interview rules and current protocols to foster the trustworthiness and transferability of the research process and data collection (Creswell, 2013). Additionally, identified limitation of this study were that this large city in central Texas, has a low population of Black women (U.S. Census Bureau, 2022.) The limitations within a study assist with validating the reliability of the study as well (Theofanidis & Fountouki, 2018).

When conducting interviews with participants with varying experiences, a researcher uses proper judgment to limit misinterpretations and bias (Queirós et al., 2017). A study's dependability comes from the variations of perceptions of the participants' experiences. Lastly, another limitation was understanding that the Black women who agreed to participate in this study did not represent all Black women. The ability to replicate the study or the assumption is a critical factor of reliability (Mauk, 2017).

Significance of the Study

The study's findings are impactful in understanding the experiences of Black women in the workforce. Creating awareness of the current problems for Black women based on gender and race can reduce and eliminate future bias. The discrimination Black women face can be invisible, and often Black women do not feel safe discussing workplace issues (McDaniel, 2021). When Black women face invisibility, they feel unseen and lack a sense of overall well-being. This study highlights the experiences of Black women in the workplace and brings greater awareness to their unique perspectives.

Significance to Practice

This study highlights the discrimination faced by Black women in the workforce. As additional opportunities arise for Black women in organizations, being aware of potential obstacles may arm organizations with the knowledge to reduce or eliminate structural barriers and discrimination. This information, if applied, may increase career advancement opportunities, reduce impediments, and promote a more inclusive workforce. The research data might also assist in comprehending Black women's experiences in the workforce.

The significance of this study was to demonstrate the insights of Black women in the workforce. Presenting this information on the experiences of Black women to organizational leaders might lead to the implementation of diversity programs, employee resource groups, and other ways to reduce discrimination against this group. The findings of this research could expose the experiences of Black women that could aid with career advancement, reduce discrimination, and promote positive social change for this group.

The work experiences of Black women are distinctive; they often feel less valued, seen, and respected in the workforce (Flowers-Taylor, 2021).

Significance to Theory

In this study, Black women described their experiences in the workplace. This study gained significance by applying general systems and intersectionality theory as these theories highlight the importance of the exclusive experience of Black women in the workplace. The heightened biases and discrimination Black women face can lead to new findings from the data.

This study helps fill a gap by further exploring the views and experiences of Black women in corporate America; the encounters of Black women in the workplace prompts a need for further analysis. The literature review revealed a lack of research highlighting the experiences of Black women in the workforce at the intersection of gender and race.

General systems theory outlines the impact of various systems working in harmony in the workplace. Applying this theory increases awareness for Black women by understanding that organizational behaviors directly affect other systems within the organization's framework. General systems theory implementation requires an organization to look for the symptoms to break down the opportunities into smaller pieces to repair and place within a system to create harmony for all parts (Burden, 2018).

Intersectionality theory outlines the interconnection between gender and race. General systems theory promotes seeing each element individually and as a system and how they relate. Furthermore, intersectionality between race and gender presents unique

discrimination specific to Black women. The findings highlight the discrimination that Black women face in the workforce.

Significance to Social Change

This qualitative, descriptive phenomenological study was conducted to explore the experiences of Black women's discrimination in the workforce based on gender and race. These experiences have been underexplored in the prior research, and include obstacles faced and the intersection of gender and race for this group. The findings from this study highlight the experiences of Black women in the workforce and the discrimination they face based on race and gender.

Summary and Transition

Chapter 1 provided an introduction and background of Black women's experiences in American corporations. In Chapter 1, I discussed the problem of how Black women face discrimination based on gender and race. This chapter also addressed (a) the selected descriptive phenomenology method design in investigating the problem; (b) the sample population; (c) general systems theory and intersectionality theory as the frameworks to analyze the data; (d) limitations, delimitations, and scope; and (e) the significance of the study. Over the past several years, there has been an increase in studies related to race and gender. However, research on the experiences of Black women in corporate America is limited. Chapter 2 contains the literature review.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

The research problem is that Black women experience discrimination in the workforce based on gender and race (Crenshaw, 2005; McCluney & Rabelo, 2019; Reynolds-Dobbs et al., 2008). The purpose of this qualitative descriptive phenomenological study was to explore Black women's experiences of discrimination in the workforce based on gender and race. Black women may have more challenging experiences than their counterparts due to the intersectionality of race and gender (Crenshaw, 1989, 2005).

When Black women face discrimination in the workforce, it affects their career advancement opportunities, self-esteem, social impact, and health (Dickens & Chavez, 2018). Black women must simultaneously steer through career challenges based on race, gender, or both (Crenshaw, 1989). Black women face higher levels of challenges compared to their counterparts. The experiences of Black women in the workplace are unique and can affect their career paths and overall wellness (Spates et al., 2020).

Chapter 2 includes a review of the current research literature and an explanation of general systems theory and intersectionality. I synthesized past and current literature on Black women in the workplace and the discrimination they face based on gender and race. Hall et al. (2012) posited that the highest degree of stress for Black women comes from their experiences of racism and sexism. The current literature, general systems theory, and intersectionality support the conceptual framework for the explored content. Chapter 2's literature review is organized by topic and contains empirical research

regarding Black women's discrimination in the workplace and their unique experiences. Black women's discrimination can pressure them to assimilate, code switch, and navigate their careers (Liu et al., 2019). Black women's experiences in the workplace may differ from their counterparts.

The experiences of Black women range from stereotypes, racism, sexism, tokenism, emotional taxation, and lack of support in their managerial roles (Anderson & Stevenson, 2019). In the literature review, I synthesized the literature and the concepts used to view gender and race-related bias, intersectionality, and the direct effects of the experiences of Black women in the workplace. This section concludes with an analysis of the literature and a justification of the qualitative research design used for this study.

Literature Search Strategy

The primary databases used to search for related literature included APA PsycNet, EBSCOHost, Emerald, Google Scholar, ProQuest, Sage Journals, and ScienceDirect. Searches were focused on the following keywords: *Black women in the workplace*, *intersectionality*, *gender discrimination*, *general systems theory*, *barriers that Black women face in the workplace*, and *double discrimination of Black women in corporate America*. I reviewed current literature, covering articles published between 2016 and 2022 and pertinent topics related to the inquiry as old as 1986.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework of this study has components from general systems and intersectionality theory. Earlier researchers have used conceptual frameworks to highlight Black women's barriers and discrimination in the workplace. Griffin (2021)

applied critical race theory and social cognitive career theory to examine the experiences of Black women in leadership. This conceptual framework guided and assisted the study of the perspectives of Black women as they recount experiences of barriers and discrimination based on gender and race. Crenshaw (1989) used intersectionality, standpoint theory, and an analytical framework to explore the various intersecting factors that highlight the discrimination Black women face.

General Systems Theory

General systems theory offers the interconnectedness of living organisms, connecting relationships including set patterns and the behaviors of individuals within systems (Bertalanffy & Sutherland, 1972). Bertalanffy used interacting elements as an alternative way to view how intersecting components work. The elements include the effects of technology and the acceptance of humans' roles in technology. Bertalanffy and Sutherland believed that humans are similar to machines and that machines and technology stem from human beings (Bertalanffy & Sutherland, 1972). General systems theory is based on three systems: systems technology, systems science, and systems philosophy (Hammond, 2010).

Several others contributed to general systems theory; other concepts came to fruition from those inputs. Holism is a concept of general systems theory that supports the current conditions that Black women face in the workplace. Through the lens of general systems theory and holism, the experience of Black women in the workplace is not a separate experience from the organization itself. Holism comes from the Greek

word *holos*, which means all, entire, and total, supporting that each experience, although proprietary to the individual, reflects the organization holistically (Gomes, 2021).

General system theory offers how parts' interactions provide a complete picture of the role of each interacting part (Senge, 1990). In the case of Black women facing barriers in the workplace, essential tools and policies are the interacting parts that could change or eliminate barriers such as career advancement and discrimination based on gender and race (Senge, 1990, p. 13). Utilizing general systems theory allows for understanding of the interconnectedness of policies, organizational structure, and other dynamics in dismantling systemic barriers for Black women in the workplace.

General systems theory supports the need for Black women's experiences to be analyzed by the varying components and current systems (Bertalanffy et al., 1968). General systems and intersectionality theory illuminate the interconnection of gender and race for Black women. Black women's experiences in the workplace are unique and different from those of other women of color and White women (Crenshaw, 1989).

Intersectionality Theory

Intersectionality is a framework to explore the intersection of connections, dependencies, and other factors between systems and social categories (Crenshaw, 1989). This framework was critical to this study as it highlights and supports the various systems of race, gender, and other social categories. This study was grounded in the experiences of Black women in corporate America, and intersectionality emerged from the race and gender disparities in the United States. First coined by Crenshaw (1989), intersectionality is used to examine the experiences and occupations of a specific group. In this instance,

Black women are identified to understand their experiences as women and Black people in the workplace.

Intersectionality is often used in qualitative research as this theory explores the experiences of Black women. In preliminary work, Crenshaw (1988) analyzed the intersecting of gender and race for Black women in alignment with the framework of Afrocentric epistemology, which focuses on liberating African American and Black women's mindsets. In the original research, Collins (2000) claimed that feminist theory does not address the compound experiences of Black/African American women in the workplace. Black women's experiences are not monolithic, and some implications pertain to their experiences based on gender and race (Collins, 2000; Crenshaw, 1988). Although gender and race are not mutually exclusive, gender does not exclude or preclude race and, at times, can be positioned for double discrimination when experienced simultaneously.

Researchers who use intersectionality theory must adopt an intersectional reflexivity mindset. This mindset is an alternative approach to exploring the experiences of this group from an unorthodox perspective. An intersectional reflexivity approach is linked to intersectionality theory. Intersectionality theory also provides a framework that allows a researcher to further explore the experiences, the systems related to these experiences, and the levels of oppression that Black women encounter (Coles & Pasek, 2020).

Black women experience discrimination on a single axis in the workplace; they are viewed as both Black and a woman. When discrimination is reviewed in the workplace among people of color and women, Black women are viewed singularly,

considered often excluded from remediation efforts (Crenshaw, 1989). Research that addresses discrimination faced by Black women by gender and race must be viewed holistically to fully understand their experiences (Crenshaw, 1989).

This approach calls for researchers to explore their positions and compare the experiences and social connections of the experienced phenomena (Carstensen-Egwuom, 2014). Else-Quest and Hyde (2016) posited three assumptions from the research conducted around intersectionality: (a) individuals are commonly seen and judged based on various social groups, and many times, these settings are connected and interlinked; (b) within these groups, discrimination, and influence are often present; and (c) the characteristics of the group of individuals within the social setting can vary based on how the experience is perceived.

Women are a part of marginalized groups in the workforce and can experience discrimination based on their gender alone. Black women carry the burden of feeling the double burden of being Black and a woman (Crenshaw, 2017). When their gender and race overlap, the intersectionality of both could heighten the encounter for Black women. When Black women experience discrimination for extended periods, it can cause long-term adverse effects and increase their chances of experiencing racial battle fatigue when the discrimination is race based (Chancellor, 2019).

In addition to experiencing higher levels of discrimination, Black women may feel the need to shift their identity to ease the burden of layered discrimination in the workplace (Neblett Jr., 2019). When Black women assimilate or code switch, they risk creating hypervisibility in the workplace. When Black women have a spotlight on them

for reporting discrimination or adapting to their surroundings in the workplace, they may also experience higher levels of critical observation than their peers (Lewis & Simpson, 2010). Intersectionality theory supports that Black women experience the workplace differently than their counterparts do based on race and gender (Atewologun, 2018).

Besides race and gender, Black women may have other intersections, such as socioeconomic factors, sexual orientation, marital status, and more (Crenshaw, 1991). In research, intersectionality theory has gained traction as a critical part of conceptualizing the current and past knowledge and experiences of Black women in the workplace. This theory is instrumental in qualitative research to lessen the gap in knowledge and experience for Black women (Atewologun, 2018). Many researchers use intersectionality theory as an analytic tool to examine challenges, barriers, and oppression for Black women in society (Nash, 2008).

By understanding the importance of the intersection of gender and race, Black women can promote awareness and reduce the barriers faced by this group in the workplace. McCall (2005) posited that intersectionality theory is critical to a multidisciplinary approach to understanding experiences, interconnectedness, and barriers in the workplace. Intersectionality theory rebuffs a single-axis approach as individuals carry multiple experiences, social identifiers, and classes that cross. Based on those identifiers, many encounters could be perceived differently based on several factors supporting the application of intersectionality theory (Crenshaw, 1991). There are layers to intersectionality; however, the basis of the theory is gender and race.

Crenshaw's (1989) work impacts feminist theory and anti-racist work to apply other ways to raise awareness and reduce barriers for individuals affected by their multiple intersecting characteristics. Applying intersectionality in the framework to Black women can also support Black feminism. Black feminism concentrates on the experiences of Black women and the intersection of race, class, and gender (Collins, 2020).

Black feminism interconnects with the theory of intersectionality and assists in further understanding the experiences of Black women. Intersectionality theory supports the development and application of understanding the social and career advancement inequalities of Black women (Junco & Limonta, 2020). Black women experience systemic barriers, oppression, and misogyny at higher levels than other groups based on gender and race (Adams & Lott, 2019).

Intersectionality theory offers a framework for a researcher to identify the overlying ways that groups experience discrimination (Al-Faham et al., 2019). In this study, the focus was on gender and race intersection for Black women in the workplace. This theory assisted me in exploring the experiences of this group.

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

Maslow's hierarchy of needs consists of five components that reflect the psychological needs of humans: physiological safety and security, belongingness, esteem, and self-actualization. Employees of any organization must have their minimum basic needs met to be productive and happy. Black women are subject to workplace discrimination based on gender and race more than their counterparts (Crenshaw, 2005).

The foundation of Maslow's pyramid is psychological needs. Based on Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs theory, humans need five levels to be fulfilled holistically (Maslow, 1943).

When Black women experience overt and blatant discrimination in the workplace but do not feel safe enough to report it, they can face heightened health issues and reduced career advancement (McDaniel, 2021). Black women have lower psychological needs in the workplace (Bronder et al., 2014). Maslow built this system to support his *Theory of Human Motivation* (Maslow, 1943). Black women face a unique set of barriers and obstacles in their careers.

Black women are often isolated and have increased negative experiences in the workplace, such as discrimination based on the intersection of gender and race (Crenshaw, 2005; Crenshaw, 2017). These experiences, if left unchecked, can also result in workplace bullying (Hollis, 2021). Hollis (2021) posited that Maslow's pyramid illustrates the goal of reaching self-actualization's top level. Black women want the same fulfillment and opportunity as their peers in the workplace. Having self-actualization sets the foundation for all experiences and must be fulfilled to pursue higher pyramid levels.

Maslow's framework posited that talent and ability are driving factors in developing a sense of safety. Basic human needs are not optional but essential for holistic satisfaction, safety, and growth. Black women feel lower physiological safety needs and belongingness from their experiences in the workplace (Footman, 2020). When Black women have their basic needs met, they can reach self-actualization, and the assumption is that they can then achieve all five categories within the pyramid (Lester, 2013).

Maslow's theory supports interconnections of foundational needs for positive outcomes. Although each person faces unique challenges, basic needs must be fulfilled for all humans.

Footman (2020) posited that Black women experience higher levels of discrimination in the workplace and have more negative experiences than their counterparts. Emotional tax impacts Black women's negative experiences, directly affecting their overall welfare (Travis, 2016). When Black women are supported and their basic needs are met, they can have higher levels of self-esteem and improve their personal and professional lives (Yu et al., 2018). Black women's overall well-being must be considered and protected by ensuring they can experience the five components of Maslow's hierarchy of needs. Organizations must eliminate barriers and discrimination in the workplace.

Literature Review

Double Burden and Jeopardy

Black women are seen as both black and woman, subjecting them to a double burden based on gender and racial characteristics. The discrimination faced is considered double jeopardy. The double burden is racism and sexism experienced by Black women in the workforce based on race and gender (St Jean & Feagin, 2015). When she served as a Women's Liberation Committee member, Frances Beal coined the term double jeopardy in 1969 (Beal, 2008). Double jeopardy describes Black women's discrimination based on race and gender.

Black women face many challenges in the workplace; the intersection of gender and race makes the challenges incredibly unique for this group. Racism and sexism experienced concurrently create the enigma of double jeopardy and increase barriers for women in the workplace (Remedios et al., 2016). When experienced simultaneously, compound discrimination takes place and when this happens, intersectionality theory supports the need to look at the various components of the phenomenon.

Black women may experience discrimination in multiple ways; however, the intersection of gender and race is prevalent in the workplace. The dominant group in leadership, often White men, do not see Black women as either Black or a woman; they see them as both (Crenshaw, 1989). This group is more likely to be judged and viewed as women without direct consideration for their race more than White women (Beal, 2008). When Black women encounter this view, it is a double burden to carry in the workplace.

Mental health and psychological issues are higher in Black women exposed to sexism and racism continuously (Spates et al., 2020). Research indicates that Black women find several ways to cope with the barriers they face in the workplace. The coping mechanism includes assimilating, code-switching, and even being subject to imposter syndrome (Gee & Peck, 2018). Black women who have experienced opportunities despite ongoing discrimination suffer from feelings of inadequacy and doubt; they encounter double jeopardy based on gender and race (Baccous, 2018). Black women may feel invisible when they do not have the same career advancement opportunities as their peers (Ponce de Leon & Rosette, 2022).

In the workplace, Black women have a better chance of advancing their career trajectory when they have an ally or a sponsor to assert for them (Smith, 2021). Unfortunately, many organizations fail to seek ways to eliminate the barriers for Black women in the workplace. These barriers reduce Black women's talent pool and career advancement opportunities in corporate America (Chance, 2021). Furthermore, as Black women climb the corporate ladder or break through the glass ceiling, they may suffer from emotional tax and reduced physiological safety from carrying a double burden and experiencing double jeopardy (St Clair, 2020). As more attention and awareness arise for Black women in the workplace, this group face issues to speak their truths to assist in dismantling systemic barriers (Halsey et al., 2020).

Although the intent may be to increase awareness and be for the greater good, requesting all Black women to participate in whistleblowing could cause another burden. Experiencing racism and sexism alone is a heavy burden for Black women to carry. When Black women speak with passion, it could easily be perceived as them being angry Black women (Kilgore et al., 2020). When Black women shift to reduce or prevent discrimination in the workplace, they may live double lives while carrying a double burden (Jones & Shorter-Gooden, 2004). The experience of holding a double burden or experiencing double jeopardy can stem from stereotyping Black women initially in a negative manner (Sacks, 2017, p.60)

Davis and Maldonado (2015) posited that a common theme is double jeopardy for Black women in the workplace. Double jeopardy interlocks with the intersectionality theory based on gender and race. Racial discrimination and sexism are especially

challenging for Black women to navigate and avoid the double burden of functioning in an organization based on these social groups' intersections (Blackshear & Hollis, 2021).

Sexism

Black women experience gender discrimination at higher levels than white women and other women of color; when they experience sexism and racism, they often experience double marginalization (Bell, 1990; Jones et al., 2021). When Black women encounter sexism, they have heightened experiences of oppression compared to other women of color. Black women often experience compounded intersectional invisibility in the workplace based on gender and race (Baccous, 2018). Black women are often stereotyped negatively from being deemed sexually unrestrained to resilient (West, 1995). Coles and Pasek (2020) posited that Black women must seek ways to cope with the experiences of racism and sexism.

Black women are often dismissed or feel invisible compared to individuals with single identifiers (Rosette et al., 2016). Intersectional invisibility includes sexism when gender and race cross creating multiple identifiers (Purdie-Vaughns & Eibach, 2008). When Black women experience discrimination, they must find ways to cope with the experience of discrimination. Black women must create ways to acknowledge and push through these experiences to advance their careers (Smith et al., 2019). Smith et al., (2019) developed a theoretical model to complement their study; the findings concluded that when Black women experience discrimination like sexism, it could be interpreted as either benign or hostile. When Black women experience sexism and other forms of

discrimination, they could feel that they are not allowed to be upset or to disclose the experience to others (Kilgore et al., 2020).

Increasing awareness of sexism against Black women could reduce the shame of Black women sharing their experiences (Kilgore et al., 2020). Studies and research increase awareness, but decision-makers and people leaders must make the necessary changes to eliminate the negative experiences for Black women in the workplace. Sexism in the workplace could be ambivalent if it means it causes conflicts of values or emotions. No matter the type of sexism experienced, awareness and implementation of change are critical in dismantling barriers for Black women in the workplace (Madsen, 2020).

Black women are considered marginalized compared to their counterparts due to their race and gender (Adams & Lott, 2019). A study by Jones et al. (2022) determined a link between gendered racism and suffering for Black women. When Black women experience ongoing encounters with sexism, they are more susceptible to feeling depressed. When analyzed among white women and women of color, Black women experience the highest mental anguish from sexism experiences in the workplace (Jones et al., 2022).

In several instances, sexism and gendered racism have caused mental health issues costing Black women their lives (Lewis et al., 2017). The best way for organizations to reduce and eliminate barriers for Black women is to acknowledge that they exist, determine ways to dismantle the obstacles, and support their needs in the workplace (Lewis et al., 2017). Black women deal with intersecting their identities based

on their race and gender, which aligns with the association of racism and sexism and the negative barriers that this group faces collectively (Szymanski & Stewart, 2010).

Misogyny

The term misogyny is closely related to the word sexism, which defines the discrimination of women based on gender (Graham, 2020). Although misogyny and sexism are similar, they are different. Misogyny goes beyond discrimination; it is the overt discrimination of women. It is one thing to discriminate against a group and another with intent and hatred. Discrimination is oppression based on race, gender, and more but has varying factors and experiences (Chambers et al., 2020). When Black women experience misogyny, it includes the specific targeting of this group and is referred to as misogynoir (Bailey & Trudy, 2018).

Black women face higher levels of oppression based on gender and race (Bailey, 2020). Bailey (2020) coined the term misogynoir, highlighting that Black women are often questioned, gaslighted, and experience higher levels of discrimination than other races. Misogynoir is specific to Black women and their experience with discrimination based on race and gender, whereas intersectionality considers gender, race, class, sex, and physical ability (Bailey, 2021). Crenshaw's (1989) research focused on the oppression of Black women and the intersection of gender and race. The discrimination Black women face is the focus of this study, and both intersectionality and general systems theory support the exclusivity of their experience based on gender and race.

Both intersectionality and misogynoir conceptualize the experiences of discrimination against Black Women (Asare, 2020). Discrimination against Black women

cannot be eliminated but can be reduced by listening to their experiences. Asare (2020) highlights Black women's experiences and the tools used to combat racism, increase awareness, and reduce discrimination.

Gendered Racism

Research on gendered racism is limited even as emerging themes have surfaced about the intersecting experiences of Black women in the workplace. When Black women's experiences are combined and often experienced simultaneously, it could cause adverse effects on their overall well-being. When discrimination stems based on race and sex, this is an example of gendered racism (Lewis & Neville, 2015). Black women face oppression at higher levels than other women of color in the workplace. The intensity of these experiences directly impacts the mental health, confidence, and productivity levels of Black women in the workplace (Woods-Giscombé et al., 2008).

Research on gendered racism reports a connection between reduced psychological safety, a sense of belonging, and higher stress levels. Both theoretical and empirical evidence supports the link between gendered racism and sexism that Black women experience and their anguish (Williams & Lewis, 2019). Black women must find ways to cope with workplace barriers to maintain their sanity, perceived professionalism, and overall well-being (Davis, 2019). If these barriers, including overt discrimination, are eliminated, Black women have an opportunity to flourish in the work environment and could have happier and healthier lives (Griffin et al., 2006).

It can become a stressor when Black women struggle to be seen, respected, and given the same opportunities as their counterparts (Moody & Lewis, 2019). Systemic

barriers and social positions make career advancement harder for Black women. Opposing views and stereotypes have only worsened over the years for Black women in America (Morgan, 2020). Racism and sexism are woven into the fabric of American culture (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2003; Maya, 2019). When Black women experience gendered racism, it can intersect with sexism and gender wage pay gaps. Black women must deal with a series of intersecting discrimination just to navigate within the workplace.

Women, in general, face pay gap discrimination; however, Black women experience more significant gaps in pay and position based on gender and race (Blau & Kahn, 2017). While Black women have proven to be one of the most resilient social groups, it comes at the cost of mental, emotional, and physical adverse effects. Society and organizations should be aware of the experiences of Black women in American corporations; experiencing racism and sexism can have lasting adverse impact of this group (Spates et al., 2019).

Racism

Racism continues to rear its ugly head in corporate America, which is especially blatant for Black women. Racism experiences in America are heightened for Black women in the workplace, they face more issues based on their race, and this phenomenon often intersects with their gender (Coaston, 2019; Crenshaw, 1989). Research studies for Black women in corporate settings often report feelings of oppression, racism, sexism, and discrimination (Mosley et al., 2021; Myers, 2019; Remedios et al., 2016). When racism is experienced, Black women often internalize the experience to avoid

microaggressions, retaliation, and increased stress levels. These suppressed feelings and actions often lead to health issues and other work-related stressors (Hall et al., 2012).

Hall et al. (2012) study found five emerging themes surrounding stressors based on the racism and sexism Black women experienced in the workplace. The emerging themes were as follows: Slow career onboarding and limited career advancement opportunities, experiences of racism and sexism, and feeling pressured to code-switch or assimilate, including the need to search for ways to cope with discrimination and feeling no sense of inclusion or psychological safety (Hall et al., 2012). All five themes affect the well-being of Black women in the workplace. Black women who experience these themes are more likely to be unemployed, accept positions they are overqualified for, and have fewer opportunities for career advancement (Hall et al., 2012).

A significant component of the stressors experienced by Black women is the limited opportunities for career advancement (McCluney & Rabelo, 2019). Lack of response and support when Black women experience racism and sexism in the workplace prevents communication of the experience. Many Black women feel pressured to assimilate, identity shift, and code-switch to appear more professional and friendly. In response to discrimination based on gender and race, Black women seek ways to cope rather than leave an organization.

Work can be stressful in American corporations; compounding stress with overt racism and sexism can mentally be dangerous for Black women (Tomaskovic-Devey, 2014). Racism only adds to the numerous factors that can reduce the lifespans of Black women, from higher levels of blood pressure, stress, discrimination, and overall well-

being (Griffith et al., 2009). Racism and discrimination are not mutually exclusive; judgments, reduced opportunities, or stereotypes based on race and gender intersect with sexism, discrimination, and racism (St. Clair, 2020).

Regardless of the laws, it is always up to organizational leaders to adhere to the law and legal policies. If an organization is not law-abiding, there also needs to be environments that Black women feel safe and protected to report when they have experienced racism. Without a sense of belonging, security, and physiological safety, Black women must find ways to cope or assimilate rather than report gendered racism (Spates et al., 2020). Individuals who have a sense of belonging, security, and physiological safety can increase motivation and wholeness (Maslow, 1943).

The results of dealing with racism in the workplace take a toll on Black women's health, advancement, and overall well-being (Rosette et al., 2016). Black women deserve to be seen as equals, given room for growth and progress at the same rate as their peers (Kilgore et al., 2020). Racism in the workplace must be dismantled from the top of an organization to ensure that Black women are seen as safe and productive (Smith et al., 2019).

Assimilation

Black women often assimilate in the workplace to appear more manageable and easier to work with during their careers. There is a lack of safety or welcomeness for Black women to bring their whole selves to the workplace (Dar, 2019). They take the time to assimilate and absorb into a population or group (Halsey et al., 2020).

America has a deep-rooted past of blatant discrimination, racism, and sexism, including a colonized history. As Black women progress in their careers or minimize themselves, they often hide their perceived blackness in the workplace to assimilate to the whiteness, systemic racism and sexism rooted in corporate America (Dar, 2019). Even when Black women assimilate, adjust, and adapt to the environments they are placed in, this act alone does not do anything to dismantle systemic racism or sexism for themselves or others. These actions put a band-aid on the root cause of the problem rather than increase awareness, change, or hold people accountable for their actions (Dickens & Chavez, 2018).

Dickens and Chavez (2018) conducted research using an interpretative phenomenological analysis. The study found several themes and sub-themes while drawing from ecological systems theory. The study highlighted that Black women should not have to assimilate but suggested that integration can yield some benefits when placed in an environment dominated by one group. Although benefits can surface, the cost of assimilation can adversely affect Black women's overall well-being.

Dickens and Chavez (2018) posited that Black women could have difficulty managing their identity shifts and code-switching as they navigate their personal and professional lives. It could also be challenging for Black women to appear or feel authentic when adjusting to their surroundings versus being true to themselves. Outwardly, assimilating can mask the discrimination in the workplace as it can be hard to distinguish between the portrayal of comfort or happiness of Black women.

Black women, especially when they are the only Black employees, may feel pressure to represent all Blacks (Shim, 2020). One Black person cannot feel, act, or think on behalf of an entire race. Regardless of one's race, they are individuals. Representation matters in the workplace, (Fan et al., 2019) posited that gender and race inequalities are evident throughout an individual's career path. Lastly, Black women experience various emotions and trauma when they assimilate to act differently from how they may actually feel (Dickens & Chavez, 2018).

Black women even alter how they speak to mimic tone and vocabulary to gain a sense of belonging and tolerance in the workplace (Dickens & Chavez, 2018). Black women are also stereotyped when they speak a certain way; they are accused of talking white regardless of being a product of their environment or actively assimilating (Ogbu, 2004). Black women who chose to assimilate intersect terms such as code-switching, shifting identities, double burden, and double jeopardy (St Clair, 2020).

Black women lack a sense of safety as they feel the need to be on guard in the workplace. They live double and sometimes triple lives for survival (Jones & Shorter-Gooden, 2004). It is urgent and necessary for an organization to address barriers and bias to create safe spaces for Black women to be their authentic selves. Research has shown that organizations that create safe spaces and diversify talent have significant profits, retention rates, and happier teams (Nair & Vohra, 2015). Organizations must ensure that they are aware of the challenges, discrimination, and barriers within the walls of their business.

The experience of racism and sexism is often based on race and gender (Hodson et al., 2021). Jones and Shorter-Gooden (2003) posited when people live a double lives they can experience higher risks for social, mental, and physical health. In addition, the research concludes that gender and race discrimination is not singular in the experience. When gender and race discrimination intersect, both systems should be examined individually and as a whole. Each encounter is different and perceived differently by the person experiencing the phenomenon. Black women may feel pressured to assimilate and code-switch to appear more socially acceptable to their peers and, as a result, face higher stress levels (Macklin, 2021).

These issues directly impact Black women emotionally, mentally, and physically. Macklin (2021) argued that there could be advantages or disadvantages for Black women in assimilating and adapting to their environment. The issue is that Black women should not have to incorporate into the workplace to appear more professional or to emulate the dominant race and gender (Myers, 2020).

Glass Ceiling

The Glass Ceiling is an invisible barrier that women experience in the workforce. The term highlights the intangible barriers that prevent qualified individuals from advancing within their organization (Pai & Vaidya, 2009). The term glass ceiling gained attention when Hymowitz and Schellhardt (1986) published an article in the Wall Street Journal (McGregor, 2016). The glass ceiling intersects with unseen barriers in the workplace for women and the obstacles that stop mobility for women upward. Women have been in the workforce for decades. However, the feminist movement in the 1960s

was a period when more women began entering the job market (Brown, 2018). When women entered the workforce, they faced discrimination based on their gender alone.

Regardless of women's biases in the workforce, they have continued to evolve by increasing their skill sets to become entrepreneurs and climbing the corporate ladder (Carnes & Radojevich-Kelley, 2011). Black women often face discrimination based on race and gender (Rosette et al., 2016). Black women continue to improve their educational level to remain relevant in corporate America. Regardless of the accolades and experiences, Black women still struggle to achieve career advancement within the workplace (Schermerhorn, 1993). Women have higher levels of education in the past twenty years and still make considerably less than men in the same industries (Catalyst, 2018).

Black women subjected to the experiences of gender and race discrimination often develop coping mechanisms. Even with coping in the workplace, Arriola et al. (2007) posited that Black women face heightened health issues by being exposed to racism and sexism. Some research considers the Glass Ceiling a micro-inequity, a theory highlighting women's discrimination from being assigned gender-specific assignments or demeaning acts in the workplace (Tomaskovic-Devey, 2014).

Micro-inequities are synonymous with microaggressions, small actions, and unnoticeable discrimination. Both terms and acts could contribute to the effects of the glass ceiling on women. The glass ceiling is yet another invisible barrier that prevents women, especially Black women, from reaching hierarchal levels (Halsey et al., 2020).

Black women are burden based on gender and race and the glass ceiling compounds the barriers that they already must face and rise above.

Black women have a heightened experience with discrimination in the workplace as they often experience double discrimination, creating a marginalization between them and their counterparts. Studies have shown that Black women lack opportunities, representation, and career advancement compared to white women (McKinsey & Company, 2018). Research shows that Black women are often paid less based on gender and race. Unequal pay creates a pay and wealth gap for Black women; Research by (National Partnership for Women & Families, 2019) shows that Black women make approximately twenty thousand less than their peers.

Black women experience discrimination, which could adversely affect their overall well-being (Coles & Pasek, 2020). They remain marginalized until Black women are seen and offered the same opportunities as their peers. Research indicates that the enhanced experience of discrimination of Black women makes them experience the *Concrete Ceiling* more than the Glass Ceiling (Iyamba, 2020).

The glass ceiling is directly related to women's experiences and highlights the heightened encounters of discrimination that Black women face in the workplace (Carnes & Radojevich-Kelley, 2011). Crenshaw (1989) posited that organizations must remove the barriers and discrimination against Black women in the workplace as they experience double discrimination. Individuals that face discrimination and are underprivileged must have intervention, help, and restructuring available to provide advancement and advantage from their current state (Crenshaw, 2005).

When organizations create policies and other guardrails, they tend to exclude and lack acknowledgment of Black women's discrimination (Jones & Shorter-Gooden 2004). Exclusion in the workplace creates additional barriers for Black women (Sepand, 2015). The Black ceiling highlights the barriers Black women face in the workplace. When Black women are denied career growth and high-level workplace positions, it is an example of the Black ceiling in action (McGirt, 2017).

The term Black ceiling refers to the external barriers of the double discrimination Black women face (McGirt, 2017). The term implies that Black women face heightened obstacles compared to women. In 1991, the Federal Glass Ceiling Commission further explored the experiences of Black women facing discrimination in the workplace. In that same year, the Glass Ceiling Commission completed a study to provide recommendations to reduce and eliminate barriers for women and minorities (Yu, 2020). Racism and sexism in the workplace are significant issues for Black women in the workplace. This experience can worsen when the dominant workforce group is White men (Gambler & Turner, 2015).

Regardless of the title of the discrimination that Black women experience, the effect of the experience is a disadvantage to organizations, society, and this ostracized group. Research shows that Black women experience this double discrimination within their organizations' cultures, policies, and practices (Sepand, 2015). From health issues to economic impact, the glass ceiling must be dismantled along with systemic barriers. Demolishing the glass ceiling could be done with intentionality from an organization;

applying research that has practical application and acknowledgment that these barriers exist are starting points.

Emotional Tax

Women of color reported higher career barriers due to racism and higher educational barriers due to racial discrimination than White women (Kim & O'Brien, 2018). Black women experience discrimination based on race and gender and often have intersecting encounters compared to other women. A study conducted by Hall et al. (2019) showed that Black women also are paid less and, as a result, experience higher levels of health issues and poverty. From systemic barriers to organizational obstacles to race and gender bias in the workplace, Black women are expected to be resilient.

Resiliency for anyone is heavy and is harder to carry repeatedly. When Black women experience this, the burden is known as an Emotional Tax (Carpenter, 2018). When singled out based on gender and race, Black women face dire consequences mentally, physically, and emotionally (Travis et al., 2016). The research concludes that emotional tax directly affects the well-being of Black women in the workplace, from psychological safety as denoted under Maslow's Hierarchy of needs (Hollis, 2021; Maslow, 1943) to physical health. These effects directly impact career advancement, self-esteem, and the engagement of Black women.

More than 50% of Black women felt they needed to be "on guard" in the workplace, e.g., ready to defend, work harder and assimilate, in a study conducted by Travis et al. (2016). Eliminating barriers for Black women in the workplace can alleviate emotional tax. Inclusion and fostering inclusive practices and behaviors can increase

productivity and psychological safety and reduce barriers for Black women (Nelson & Piatak, 2021). Several key observations and recommendations exist to reduce and eliminate the emotional tax for Black women. Organizations must ensure that employees are empowered to speak up against any form of discrimination, encourage healthy dialogue, build trust and be flexible to accommodate the needs of Black women (Travis et al., 2016).

Tokenism

Tokenism is a small or limited number of minorities or underrepresented individuals within an organization primarily to perceive gender or race representation (Yoder et al., 1996). In organizations that lack diversity at some hierarchical levels, minorities are considered tokens (Perez & Strizhko, 2018). Being the only Black or part of team with minimal to no other minorities can increase pressure and emotional tax for Black women in the workplace (Kilgore et al., 2020). Research shows essential factors to consider regarding the cost of being a token. Perez and Stizhko (2018) posited that Black women in the armed forces experience hyper-exposure increased seclusion, and sleep interruption. Fan et al. (2019) posited growing racial and gender diversity and fostering inclusion to improve the work conditions for Blacks. Fostering an inclusive environment for the non-dominant group can reduce bias within the workplace.

In 1977, Kanter coined the tokenism theory (Kanter, 1977; Zimmer, 1988); once tokens reach a tipping point of fifteen representation, non-dominant employees experience fewer workplace problems (Zimmer, 1988). Zimmer (1988) concluded that the most effective way to combat tokenism is to increase diversity for women in the

workplace, especially in dominant white organizations. Griffin suggested that implementing diversity, equity, and inclusion is the best way to reduce and eliminate tokenism (Griffin, 2021). If adequately added to an organization and fostered, inclusivity happens naturally.

Inclusivity is when employees feel a sense of belonging regardless of their background and beliefs (Sherrer, 2018). When inclusive environments are effective, tokenism is reduced, and token fatigue decreases. Token fatigue is the mental, physical, and economic consequences of marginalized groups in the workplace (Shim, 2020). Shim (2020) posited that tokenism needs to be eradicated, but the workplace should also reflect the communities they serve.

Code Switching

Code switching is adjusting and adapting to an audience, group, or setting for the comfort of others to appear elevated or seem more acceptable is a form of code switching (McCluney et al., 2021). A common theme in code switching is navigating from one behavior to another to seek approval or increase opportunities in the workforce (McCluney et al., 2021). Many Black people in the workforce chose to code switch to appear more friendly or professional. Code switching involves analyzing the environment and mimicking the “norms” observed. These adjustments include modifying the way you speak, hair color/style, abbreviating your name, and preferences (McCluney et al., 2021). Research from McCluney et al. (2021) concluded that the employees engaged in code switching are viewed as more professional.

Black women face pressure to code switch to manage the phenomenon of gender and race bias. Macklin, 2021 posited that Black women use code switching to protect against further discrimination. Macklin's recommendations suggested that diversity, equity, and inclusion are mandatory components of changing the environment for Black women in the workplace.

Creating inclusive workplaces encourages Black women to bring their whole selves to work (Sherrer, 2018). Myers (2019) posited that Blacks in the workplace must make a conscious decision to code-switch based on the intersection of their identities. Code switching is less likely to be experienced by non-Black employees. Black women in the workplace feel additional pressure when working in a White-dominated organization.

Black women experience the double burden of their gender and race, and research shows that they are forced to codeswitch and identity shift more than any other racial/gender group (Jones & Shorter-Gooden, 2004; McCluney et al., 2021). Code switching can appear easy, but the mental toll for Black women outweighs the perceived benefits. Executive action must be taken to change the workplace environment for Black women in corporate America.

Invisibility

Often when a Black woman reaches a higher position or is granted a seat at the table, they are still not seen; this is invisibility (Coles & Pasek, 2020). The opposite happens when an organization engages in tokenism, the Black employee experiences additional visibility. For Black women, the pendulum swings from marginalization to

tokenism in the workplace. When this experience is intensified, it is hypervisibility (Dickens et al., 2019).

Black women that are tokens feel a higher level of visibility in the workplace (Holder et al., 2015). Like code-switching, Black women often shift their identity to limit hypervisibility in the work setting. In some cases, this can go against the desire for career advancement because there typically needs some exposure to be considered for growth. However, hypervisibility could increase stress levels and reduce productivity (Dickens et al., 2019).

Dickens and Chavez (2018) posited that Black women often lean on coping mechanisms to survive and function in corporate America. Past research shows that the intersection of gender and race for Black women comes at the cost of health, stress, coping, and shifting to maintain positions in the workforce (Dickens et al., 2019). Until there is intention and awareness to change the societal and work norms for Black women in the workplace, there will continue to be pressure to shift identities to the dominant group in the workplace to reduce discrimination (Jones & Shorter-Gooden, 2004).

Black Women's Career Barriers

Black women experience heightened discrimination in the workplace based on their gender and sex (Baccous, 2018). Research shows discrimination begins as early as the interview process, accessibility, and promotion opportunities in an organization (Lloyd, 2021). There is limited research on how the intersection of gender and race affects Black women in the workplace.

Significant barriers for Black women in the workplace include equal opportunity, support, diversity in the workplace, mentorship, and career advancement (Griffin, 2021). The Equal Opportunity Employment Commission 2021 review showed that Black women are underrepresented at the middle management levels and higher. Black women lack opportunities within American corporations but face barriers and stereotypes at micro-, meso-, and macro-levels (Collins, 2019).

The social problem and challenges Black women face extend beyond mere underrepresentation and intersect with the dominance of White men in mid-level positions within executive committees. This dynamic can give rise to affinity bias, wherein decisions tend to favor the dominant group (Banks & Stephens, 2018). When individuals decide on advancement in the workplace, they often lean toward people with similar backgrounds, beliefs, experiences, and appearances (Cirincione-Ulezi, 2020).

Black women's underrepresentation supports the importance of diversity in the workplace. Diverse groups, leaders, and decision-makers can reduce affinity bias as a holistic system (Hodson et al., 2021). When hiring managers make decisions based on affinity bias, they overtly exclude Black women from the equation. When the leadership does not include Black women, seeking Black women in those positions is more challenging. The opposite side of affinity bias is avoiding individuals who do not have similarities. Hodson et al. (2021) posited that affinity bias is a learned behavior that can be challenging to change even when identified. Black women often fall prey to affinity bias when encountering another Black person within the workplace (Pratt, 2012). Affinity

bias is a trait that most people have; when it creates barriers or harm to a marginalized group, it must be acknowledged and checked to reduce biases in the workplace.

Contrary to the definition of affinity bias, Black women and men seek out a familiar face as a sense of safety and protection in various settings (Carter, 2007).

Research conducted by Carter (2007) showed that it is essential for Blacks to have a safe space. They seek psychological safety as a response to past trauma and discrimination experiences.

Discrimination and gender pay disparities are barriers Black women face in the workplace. Black women have historically been disadvantaged in education, access, and pay (Budig et al., 2021). The intersection of race and gender intensifies the gap and discrimination encountered by Black women (Coles & Pasek, 2020). As the feminist movement advances, White women have had more advantages than Black women due to historical systemic barriers and systems created to oppress Blacks (Brown, 2018).

Ultimately, Black women have the same opportunities or barriers as their White counterparts in the workplace but they are marginalized exclusively based on race and gender (Zimmer, 1988). Black women who aspire to have career advancement, influence, and impact may lean towards the bottom-up ascription in the workplace. The bottom-up ascription pairs employees with individuals with similar backgrounds, including ethnicity (McKinsey & Company, 2020).

Bottom-up ascription could limit potential opportunities that fall outside of this approach. The dominant group in American organizations, White men, typically lean toward a top-down approach. The top-down approach places Black women at a blatant

disadvantage compared to their peers. This approach grants decision making for the organization from the executive level, primarily middle-aged White males (Elliott & Smith, 2001).

Black women face double discrimination as a non-dominant group, system oppression, and exclusion in the workplace (Spates et al., 2020). The research on their experiences is vital to dismantling current barriers for Black women in the workplace to highlight their unique experiences. Black women continue to face barriers in the workplace; when paired with discrimination, it often leads to burnout and health issues (Catalyst, 2018). Organizations that identify impediments in the workspace and acknowledge the barriers are better equipped to eliminate any potential obstacles for Black women in the workplace (Nelson & Piatak, 2021).

Inclusion and Inclusivity

Inclusion allows individuals to bring their whole selves to the workplace to contribute, engage and impact (Nair & Vohra, 2015). When inclusion is embedded within an organization, barriers and obstacles are reduced by removing practices and policies that go against an inclusive environment (Senge, 1990). Research shows that inclusive work settings have higher levels of retention and engagement.

Parker (2005) posited that corporate leadership must adopt values such as diversity and pluralism in the workplace to foster inclusion. As organizations increase their diversity, they must explore the benefits of inclusion and access to their needs. Leaders are responsible for implementing and promoting inclusion to create inclusive groups and teams to create a safe space. The intent of having a diverse workplace

includes developing an inclusive environment, especially for Black women in the workplace.

Research is limited to the experiences of Black women and their perspective on inclusion in the workplace. Black women often experience barriers to growth and acceptance in the workplace based on gender and race (Feeny & Langer, 2016). In addition, Black women are often the non-dominant group and therefore have feelings of exclusion (Hamidullah & Riccucci, 2017). Future research can examine how gender and race affect inclusion in the workplace for Black women. When Black women experience being treated differently than their peers, it can make them feel a lack of belonging in the workplace. When organizations foster inclusivity, employees' race or gender does not define their image or opportunities in the workplace (Spates et al., 2020).

Inclusivity must be intentional for organizations, especially for Black women. Black women must have equal access to career pathing, promotion, and psychological safety in the workplace to be productive and treated fairly (McCluney & Rabelo, 2019). Research shows that Black women in American corporation's face discrimination and disadvantages based on race and gender (Madsen, 2020). Inclusivity supports the need to ensure that anyone in a marginalized group that is underserved in the workplace is afforded the same advantages as others (Burke et al., 2021).

Promoting and fostering inclusivity takes work and diligence to be implemented and supported in the workplace. The need for inclusivity is a byproduct of a lack of diversity and inclusion within an organization. As a group, Black women face various

forms of discrimination and barriers solely based on gender and sex. This ongoing battle intersects with this group's equality, social injustice, and well-being (Morgan, 2020).

Years of systemic barriers and oppression for Black women have been the norm; as time passes and awareness increases, evidence shows a lack of inclusivity for this group. Inclusivity is a hierarchal effort; leadership must come from change and application. Without the buy-in of the need for change from leadership, the working conditions will remain the same. Leaders must educate themselves on the current state of Black women in the workplace, be committed, and promote inclusivity for all (LeBlanc, 2020).

Diversity

Diversity is various experiences, backgrounds, races, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, educational levels, and more (Peterson, 1999). Diversity includes an assortment of thoughts, experiences, and beliefs. Organizations dedicated to diversity can attract and keep talent (Tucker III & Jones, 2019). Even when some organizations have diversity, Black women could still feel isolated (Crenshaw, 1989). Organizations can significantly reduce and eliminate barriers for Black women in the workplace by creating awareness, training, and networking opportunities, especially when White men are the dominant group (Hunt et al., 2018).

Diversity in the workplace is not a destination; it is an ongoing process to ensure that the needs of the individuals in the organization are available. Implementing diversity includes creating, enhancing, and making necessary improvements to current programs

and opportunities for all within an organization, especially marginalized groups (Gomez & Bernet, 2019).

Crenshaw (2005) posited that Black women especially face discrimination at higher levels based on their intersection of race and gender. Crenshaw's findings indicated that Black women's bias is not based on a single axis, and their experiences are compound compared to their counterparts. Organizations that implement diversity and inclusion in the workplace are more successful and could reduce barriers for Black women in the workplace. Diversity efforts must focus on representation, access, and inclusion practices to embrace the characteristics and needs of all (Wong, 2019).

Diversity is essential to promote allyship, support, equity, and representation for Black women in the workplace (Dorsey, 2022). Organizations must also be mindful that when diversity initiatives do not include input from Black women, the actions could be considered performative (Gomez & Bernet, 2019). It is vital to ensure that various individuals within an organization have contributions and access to diversity programs and initiatives for the programs to benefit marginalized groups, especially Black women, in the workplace.

In one of the most extensive studies on Black women in corporate America: *The State of Black Women in Corporate America* (Lean In, 2020), the recommendations posited that organizations must make Black women's career advancement a priority by eliminating barriers, creating career pipelines, and increasing workplace diversity, and foster inclusive environments. Organizations must remove any current or potential hiring bias, discrimination, and other barriers for Black women in the workplace (Lean In,

2020). Without an organization's top-down commitment to change, the current state of obstacles and discrimination Black women face continue to show little to no progress.

Diversity programs, if implemented correctly, can improve productivity, culture, and execution within an organization (Griffin & Gully, 2017). Several bodies of research debunk the benefits of diversity within an organization (Fradella, 2018; Kaplan, 2020).

The studies may contradict the benefits of diversity in the workplace, but it also highlights that intent only is not practical. Purpose, management, and impact are how results and effectiveness should be checked for organizational diversity efforts.

Organizations that encourage engagement, representation, and culture can yield more positive outcomes for Black women in the workplace than those that do not (Lean In, 2022).

Black women face a myriad of challenges in the workforce based on the intersection of their gender and race (Crenshaw, 2005; Crenshaw, 2017). Without the tools needed to address and dismantle these barriers, Black women must discover ways to cope with discrimination and obstacles rather than leave organizations. Countless studies reveal sparse numbers of advancement and support for Black women in American corporations (Lean In, 2022).

Black women face unique circumstances based on their intersection of gender and race compared to other women of color and White women. Black women's experiences must be addressed differently (Hunt et al., 2021). Research shows that organizations that set targets for representation for Black women hold leadership accountable and support Black women in the workplace could increase their profits and improve their culture

(Kalev et al., 2006). When organizations eliminate barriers and discrimination against Black women in the workplace, it is not only the right thing to do but it is also utilitarianism in practice.

Representation

Black women can significantly benefit from seeing other women of color in the same or similar positions in the workplace (Bryant-Davis, 2013). When Black women have the option to socialize and receive support from someone who looks like them, they can benefit from this networking encounter (Davis, 2019). Diversity within the workplace can increase representation for this group and can increase opportunities for social support for Black women in the workplace. Research supports clear advantages for Black women to have social circles representing their culture, nationality, and ethnicity (Davis, 2017). On the contrary, lack of representation can reduce these benefits and leave Black women seeking ways to cope independently versus support within the same group (Perez & Strizhko, 2018).

Networking and access to social support can significantly reduce stress levels for Black women (Barrera, 1988; Bronder et al., 2014). Representation matters for various groups; however, for Black women faced with heightened encounters with sexism and racism, representation can reflect their experiences in the workplace (Robinson, 2021). The sisterhood can produce a therapeutic effect that can enhance the work and overall well-being of Black women in the workplace (Bryant-Davis, 2013). For Black women, representation always matters and could assist with reducing stress and trauma.

Black Women's Hair Discrimination

The intersection of Black women's gender and race increases their encounters with double discrimination in the workplace (Crenshaw, 2017). When this occurrence is compounded, it is called double burden or double jeopardy (St Jean & Feagin, 2015). Discrimination includes several factors but ultimately refers to the unfair treatment of particular groups and the difference in the treatment of others (Act, 1964; Faingold, 2022).

Discrimination can be heightened even more when other factors are introduced for Black women, such as religion, weight, sexual orientation, and hairstyles (Krivkovich et al., 2017). Many Black women have opted to assimilate to a European look or hairstyle to integrate into the dominant workplace groups versus wearing their natural hair (Lee & Nambudiri, 2021). In recent years, some Black women have chosen to wear their hair naturally despite the existing social constructs (Sini, 2016). The change in what is considered normal or professional for Black women's hairstyle comes from evolution, education, and other resources that support the trend of wearing your hair as you desire in the workplace (Lee & Nambudiri, 2021).

Black women increasingly attend work with curly hairstyles, dreads, and braids (Donahoo & Smith, 2022). This movement of protective and natural hairstyles was not readily accepted. Many Black women faced discrimination for being a woman, Black, and for their hairstyles, even when it is illegal to discriminate based on appearance alone (Act, 1964). As a result of the hair discrimination that Black women face, legal guidance was implemented called *Creating a Respectful and Open World for Natural Hair Act*

(CROWN Act, 2019). The *Creating a Respectful and Open World for Natural Hair Act* places guardrails around Black women's hair discrimination in the workplace.

When Black women feel like they must assimilate to be considered professional or to protect their job, it could cause physical, emotional, and mental consequences (Dickens et al., 2020; Jones & Shorter-Gooden, 2003). When Black women feel like they must choose to conform to societal norms just for employment, it could increase their stress levels and mental health (Randle, 2015). Black women often experience hair discrimination as their natural hair differs from European standards. Black women have adapted their image, including compromising their health to achieve what they deem to be professional in the workplace. Black hair discrimination in the workplace is another unique barrier heightened by Black women's gender and sex.

Perceived Discrimination

Perceived discrimination applies to mistreated people in marginalized groups (Williams et al., 1997). Whether or not the action happens, it could still have adverse effects on the individuals experiencing the perceived discrimination if alleged to be true. Black women, in particular, report experiencing gender and race discrimination during their careers (Baccous, 2018). In a study conducted by Matheson et al. (2019) to explore the experiences of perceived discrimination amongst various individuals of marginalized groups in the workplace, they posited that perceived discrimination has diminishing effects on mental health. The research concluded that Black trauma correlates to discrimination and relates to traumatic events.

The research indicated that discrimination, whether perceived or not, still has damaging effects on Black women in the workplace (Baccous, 2018). Perceived discrimination happens in many forms, from microaggressions and gaslighting to experiencing stereotypes. Various research studies suggested that Black women encounter health problems due to workplace discrimination. Perceived discrimination directly contributes to higher blood pressure levels (Matheson et al., 2019; Neblett, 2019).

In 2015, Triana et al. determined a direct correlation between perceived discrimination and psychological effects and the well-being of Black women in the workplace. Organizations need to recognize discrimination to place guardrails and work towards dismantling barriers for this group (Krieger, 1999; Triana et al., 2015). Perceived stress paired with perceived discrimination is expected in the careers of Black women forcing this group to find ways to appear okay during their time at work. However, they may be silently dealing with high-stress levels due to discrimination (Hall et al., 2012).

The effects of discrimination should not be taken lightly for Black women, as research has shown that their experience can have many negative health consequences. Discrimination affects Black women; it causes interpersonal trauma and posttraumatic stress disorder (Mekawi et al., 2021). Many women and women of color experience some form of discrimination during their careers; however, research findings by Mekawi et al. (2021) showed that Black women's experience with discrimination, racial trauma, and posttraumatic stress disorder is intensified compared to their peers.

Numerous studies indicated that that Black women face current discrimination and barriers based primarily on gender and race (Crenshaw, 2021; Lean In, 2020; Matheson et al., 2019). Organizations must identify these barriers and take immediate action to assess the opportunities for the Black women within their walls. Organizations must be intentional to successfully dismantle systems that work against the advancement, psychological safety, and overall well-being of Black women in the workplace (Coles & Pasek, 2020).

As a result of dealing with ongoing discrimination, workplace barriers, and other related factors based on race and gender discrimination, Black women often leave their jobs (Catalyst, 2018). Organizations and leaders should eliminate barriers and dismantle discrimination to provide a healthy and productive work environment for Black women in the workplace. Black women face higher-level discrimination based on gender and race, but they must also develop coping mechanisms for sanity and survival in the workplace (Branscombe et al., 1999; Lean In, 2022; Neal-Jackson, 2020).

Stereotypes

Black women are frequently on the receiving end of stereotyping in the workplace (Hall et al., 2019). Stereotypes are inaccurate views of something or someone without justification or certainty (Neal-Jackson, 2020). Black women are judged on numerous factors, from their hairstyle and the way they speak to their educational levels. Black women are typically evaluated based on gender and race (Crenshaw, 2017; Dunmeyer, 2020). Black women can be perceived as not White enough for the White class and not

Black enough for the Black class. These perceptions can make Black women feel excluded from any dominant group (Coles & Pasek, 2020).

Frequently, the stereotyping encountered by Black women in the workplace stems from sexism and racism rather than individual judgments (Spates et al., 2020). The impact is worsened for Black women because they experience sexist and racist stereotypes simultaneously (Asare, 2020). Research findings suggested that focusing on sexism alone may increase the racist experience or vice versa (Hodson et al., 2021), indicating that simultaneously pursuing both issues can reduce the stereotyping and discrimination Black women experience in the workplace.

Black women face unique circumstances as societal stereotypes are embedded in American culture (Rosenthal & Lobel, 2016). Intersectionality theories assist in framing the various elements of Black women's experiences in the workplace. Looking at their encounters holistically allows for a clearer picture and a deeper understanding of their experiences. These experiences may include stereotypes, sexism, career advancement barriers, and other discrimination. Rosenthal and Lobel's (2016) findings indicated that Black women incur adverse effects mental and psychological health based on societal stereotypes.

Black women's work environment must have diversity, awareness, and opportunities to reduce negative stereotypes (Rosenthal & Lobel, 2016). Black women have an additional burden to assimilate to manage their interpersonal relationships with their own and other races (Boylorn, 2020). Black women have common stereotypes that are perpetrated on social media and television. When a Black woman does not agree with

something and expresses disdain or does not agree with a narrative, they are often stereotyped as an angry Black woman (Kilgore et al., 2020).

With the stigma of being perceived as angry, many Black women cope by not reacting externally and experience increased cognitive dissonance levels. Many Black women feel they cannot be upset or have opposing opinions to protect themselves; they agree or go along to get along (Kilgore et al., 2020). Research conducted by Slatton (2018) debunks the myths that Black women are animalistic, lack knowledge, and experience heightened negative perceptions based on gender and race. Black women need protection, opportunity, and support in American corporate settings (Baccous, 2018).

Research conducted by Bond et al. (2021) posited that the intersection of gender and race for Black women increases race-based sexual stereotypes. Black women are often oversexualized based on their physical features (Flowers, 2018). Common stereotypes and naming conventions for Black women include welfare recipients, sapphire, resilient, and jezebels (Bond et al., 2021). Black women are categorized before having the opportunity to be judged by their own merits or character.

Stereotyping negatively impacts their self-reflection and self-esteem and limits their opportunities in their personal and professional settings. Stereotyping of Black women oppresses this group and eliminates a sense of belonging, stifles their confidence, and limits their growth (Neal-Jackson, 2020). Stereotypes are preconceived notions that should not seek to be validated without cause, especially for Black women (Porter & Byrd, 2021). Organizations and leaders must identify ways to reduce bias, barriers,

policies, and stereotypes that prevent Black women from psychological safety and career advancement in the workplace.

Coping

As Black women encounter various barriers and obstacles, they find ways to cope with the experiences of discrimination (Neblett Jr, 2019). Whether they experience everyday stressors, microaggressions, or ongoing obstacles as humans, Black women must find a way to deal with their encounters in the workplace. Unfortunately, Black women have often been stereotyped as strong or considered resilient (Donovan & West, 2015). These stereotypes alone may make Black women feel as if they have to embody strength they may or may not have.

Coping out of necessity can be considered oppressive and may increase mental health issues (Spates et al., 2020). Like intersectionality theory, Black women face a unique status based on belonging to two marginalized groups (Gay & Tate, 1998; Crenshaw, 2017). Black women with ongoing encounters with oppression and barriers have higher exposure to racism, sexism, and gendered racism (Bond et al., 2021). Many times, Black women use suppression to manage and cope. Suppression regulates emotions and reactions due to ongoing negative experiences (Gross, 2001, p. 216). Suppression can yield immediate temporary satisfaction; however, it has more negative effects over time. When an individual suppresses an experience rather than dealing with an experience, it can reduce emotional regulation, response, and overall wellbeing (Roberts et al., 2008; Spates et al., 2020).

Black women are held to higher standards of displaying strength and covering weakness than White women and other women of color. Unrealistic expectations of carrying discrimination, sexism, and racism can be overwhelming (Kilgore et al., 2020). Black women face pressure to be strong and deal with the strong Black women complex, often depicted via the media and workplace (Black & Peacock, 2011; Overstreet, 2019).

Coping for Black women can yield positive and negative benefits. The benefits include being prepared to deal with conflict and learning not to respond to every negative experience. The adverse effects include struggling internally and higher levels of health issues such as high blood pressure as emotions are suppressed (Liao & Yin, 2020). Suppressing emotions from discrimination cannot solve long term conflict; it simply becomes a way to bottle up emotions at a particular point and time (Bronder et al., 2014).

Experiencing sexism and racism is a part of the encounters for Black women in the workplace. Black women may also lean toward avoidance coping with escaping the realities of the stressors and issues they face in the workplace (Dickens & Chavez, 2018). It is essential to find ways to reduce the negative experiences for this group by dismantling systems, policies, or practices that further oppress Black women in the workplace.

Coping should not be the norm for Black women to make a living or seek career advancement. This coping mechanism is similar to identity shifting as they do not deal with the issue at hand; it is also another form of suppression (Saban et al., 2021). A study conducted by Saban et al. (2021) showed preliminary evidence linking race-based stress to Black women's health issues.

Current literature shows the connection of adverse health impacts for Black women that encounter ongoing discrimination; however, there is a lack of literature that offers ways to create awareness and interventions for this group (Saban et al., 2021). A healthier way for Black women to cope with discrimination in the workplace is active coping, which includes leaning on social support systems (Knighton et al., 2022). Representation matters for Black women when they have similar women in the workplace; communicating can be easier. The underrepresentation of Black women reduces active coping and networking when the dominant group is White (Beckwith et al., 2016).

Black women often choose to avoid accepting their experiences of discrimination, resulting in racial trauma (Hargons et al., 2022). Racial trauma comes from the experiences of discrimination and is considered a form of race-based stress (Comas-Díaz et al., 2019). Racial trauma is unique to the experiences of people of color. Ongoing exposure to discrimination, whether overt or perceived, can be detrimental to the health of the person experiencing the phenomenon. A study conducted by Kaholokula (2016) discovered a link between racism, racial discrimination, and health issues.

Healing and coping with racial stress could be complicated; however, when organizations and leaders are diligent about creating a safe space, it makes it easier for Black women to address issues as they arise. There could potentially be a reduction in racism, sexism, and discrimination occurrences for Black women if they feel a sense of belonging and psychological safety (Nelson & Piatak, 2021). If this is done on a foundational level and other recommended methods are implemented, healing, racial

stress, and trauma can be dismantled for Black women in the workplace (Anderson & Stevenson, 2019).

Although most women and people of color experience some discrimination, Black women continue to have higher encounters based on gender and race than their counterparts (Crenshaw, 1989; 2017). If not addressed, the impact of these experiences can lead to unhealthy ways of coping, including substance abuse and negative mental health impacts (Comas-Díaz et al., 2019). There are many benefits for Black women to not experiencing or coping with discrimination alone such as developing healthy relationships and feeling less of a need to assimilate (Dickens & Chavez, 2018).

When Black women learn healthy ways to cope, such as self-awareness and problem solving, they can reduce the adverse effects on their overall wellbeing. In a study by Saban et al. (2021), participants received access to psychoeducation to assist with social support and effective coping strategies. To be productive in the workplace, Black women need obstacles and barriers removed to reach their full potential. The research literature determines that Black women experience a greater need to cope based on the intersection race and gender.

Racial Trauma

The terms race-based stress, racial trauma, and similar related terms are defined in research completed by Comas-Díaz et al. (2019) that highlights the discrimination experiences of Blacks (Helms et al., 2010). Limited research defines racial trauma and the effects of discrimination. Race-based stress ensues from continuous encounters with discrimination and racism (Liu et al., 2019). The negative effect of discrimination

increases stress levels and impacts everyone differently (Anderson & Stevenson, 2019). Over time, race-based stress turns into racial trauma. When Black women experience ongoing discrimination, they can incur various adverse effects from health elements to loss of life (Spates et al., 2020).

The intersection of gender and race itself can increase the intensity of trauma that is resulted from the experience of discrimination (Crenshaw, 1989; 2017). Black women have historically had discriminatory experiences that have caused race-based trauma. Liu et al. (2019) posited that ongoing exposure to racial trauma, also known as race-based traumatic stress, comes from experiences of discrimination. Racial trauma can cause and increase stress-related health issues.

Racial trauma can threaten Black women's wellbeing if left unchecked as they have a unique workplace experience compared to their counterparts (Anderson & Stevenson, 2019). A by-product of racial trauma is race-based stress. Hargons et al. (2022) posited that race-based stress is experienced internally and externally and is amplified over time based on the exposure and length of discrimination experienced. Unfortunately, Blacks generally experience racism and discrimination for the duration of their lives in one form or another (Comas-Díaz et al., 2019). Blacks are at higher risk of stress-related illness based on the experiences in the workplace (American Public Health Association, 2020). The Black feminist framework has been used in several studies to explain racial trauma better and focuses on the unique experiences of Black women, from understanding the lack of support they receive to the absence of acknowledgment for their contributions (Evans-Winters, 2019).

When Black women have ongoing experiences of discrimination based on their race and gender, it should be called out, and anti-oppressive and anti-racism actions must be taken to dismantle barriers for Black women (Evans-Winters, 2019). Research (Evans-Winters et al., 2019) produced a racial trauma conceptual model highlighting the intersecting components of race-based stress. The model used in the study conducted by Evans-Winters et al. (2019) centered on the level and frequency of racial encounters and the need for racial healing. Continuous negative experiences can result in chronic stress and intense racial trauma. When stress and racial trauma intersect, it can result in the recipient of the experience feeling triggered by words or actions from past experiences (Moody & Lewis, 2019).

Carter et al. (2013) created the race-based traumatic stress symptom scale to measure race-based stress experiences and warning signs. This scale highlights the intersection of race and gender. The intersection of systems includes the psychological effects of the encounters with discrimination. Organizations and individuals can utilize race-based traumatic stress symptom to determine the level of race-based stress and racial trauma experienced and to what extent.

The scale ranges from anger to avoidance (Carter et al., 2013). Although race-based traumatic stress symptom can be used to identify the experiences of discrimination and race-based stress, there is limited research to acknowledge the adverse effects of discrimination against Black women in the workplace to provide recommended treatment. Racial trauma healing requires understanding, action, and anti-Black racism tools to create prevention (Mosley et al., 2021).

Providing tools and resources to reduce or eliminate the discrimination against Black women in the workplace may have a direct social impact on this group. When awareness is created, and organizations are held accountable to eliminate barriers for Black women in the workplace this can assist with removing discrimination against this group. Through action, race-based stress and racial trauma may be dismantled in the workplace (Mosley et al., 2021). This study explores the views and experiences of Black women in the workplace based on gender and race.

Summary and Conclusion

Chapter 2 contextualized the current literature surrounding double discrimination that Black women face in the American workforce based on gender and race, as they face obstacles in obtaining higher managerial or executive positions. The literature reviewed included several forms of data from books, scholarly journals, and articles. In Chapter 2, I expanded on the conceptual framework for this proposed study. The literature review established the unique experiences of Black women in the workplace. Chapter 2 offered various accounts of how Black women encounter compound journeys in the workplace based on gender and race, their hardships from the intersection of being Black and a woman are heightened, and their experiences creating visible and invisible barriers during their careers. Also, Chapter 2 detailed how race and gender discrimination were prominent in this group, which was exhausting and adversely affected Black women in the workforce. Chapter 3 includes the methodology and research design.

Chapter 3: Research Method

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative descriptive phenomenological study was to explore Black women's experiences of discrimination in the workforce based on gender and race. I conducted web-based audio-recorded in-depth semi structured interviews with study the participants. The open-ended questions asked were focused on participants' experiences and their perception of any discrimination they experienced in the workplace based on gender and race. The collected data from the interview provide insight into the unique experiences of being Black and a woman in corporate America. In the study, I focused on Black women's experiences in the workplace in a large city in central Texas. In this chapter, I present the research design and rationale, my role, methodology and issues of trustworthiness.

Research Design and Rationale

The use of qualitative descriptive phenomenology in this study assists in better understanding Black women's experiences in the workplace based on gender and race. The intent was to better understand and explore the experiences of Black women in the workplace; a qualitative phenomenological research design was conducted to examine the phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Myers (2019) posited that qualitative research allows a researcher to observe, describe, and be a part of the study while providing the ability to further explore the phenomenon.

Black women's experiences in the workplace are unique based on gender and race, and the use of a qualitative method allowed me to navigate and observe their

perceptions of their encounters. Descriptive phenomenology allows a researcher to examine the experiences of Black women in the workforce (Jackson et al., 2018). Descriptive phenomenology assisted me in further exploring the experiences to understand the state of Black women in the workplace from career opportunities, advancement, and the intersection of being both Black and a woman.

Descriptive phenomenology aims to understand the phenomenon and human experience to explain the experience (Giorgi & Giorgi, 2008). Phenomenology assisted me in understanding the experiences of the participants. Phenomenology is deeply rooted in philosophy and may bridge the gap to new theories in research. Phenomenology allows a researcher to extract experiences related to the phenomenon of gender and race discrimination (Jackson et al., 2018).

There are several categories of phenomenology: descriptive, existential, generative historicist, genetic, hermeneutic (interpretive), naturalistic and realistic, etc. However, there are three most used research types of phenomenology: (a) transcendental phenomenology by Husserl (1858–1938), (b) existential phenomenology by Merleau Ponty (1908–1961), and (c) heuristic phenomenology by Heidegger (1889–1976).

Phenomenology was founded in the periods of Aristotle, Plato, and Socrates, and the focus was primarily on studying human beings (Fochtman, 2008). German philosopher Edmund Husserl focused on phenomenology as a rigorous science (*strenge Wissenschaft*) as the intent is not to just focus on the philosophy alone (Carmen, 2007). Phenomenology is the philosophy of human experience and the interpretation of the value of that understanding. German philosopher Martin Heidegger (1993) influenced and

added to phenomenology, focusing on observing human beings in their natural setting or social context.

Husserl's (2012) contributions had a seminal influence on the modern view of philosophy. Husserl focused on natural knowledge, citing human experiences and connections to the empirical world through awareness. In addition, Husserl (2012) affirmed that there is a direct link between experiences and the environment in which the phenomenon occurs. Heidegger and Husserl have similar views regarding the philological review, concluding that research results do not solely follow the pedantic approach.

Husserl posited the science of interpretation, whereas Heidegger focused on determining the value of an experience through the interpretation process (Qutoshi, 2018). Merleau-Ponty (1964) posited that various components control the perception of an experience that eventually concludes in a universal understanding. I explored the participants' experiences using descriptive phenomenology while ensuring I set aside my biases and individual experiences.

In this study, a quantitative research method could not vividly describe the experiences of Black women in the workplace. Quantitative research is a measurable analysis to provide a piece of information based on statistics and data (Bloomfield & Fisher, 2019). In most cases, the use of quantitative research is focused on collecting and analyzing numerical data; in this study, it would not be the best research method to explore the experiences of Black women in the workplace.

A mixed-methods research design was possible for this study but would be inappropriate because the quantitative part of the design was not used. A researcher must use qualitative and quantitative methods to effectively use a mixed method approach (Almeida, 2018). The rationale for using qualitative research is that this method allows a researcher to truly concentrate on the participants and their perceptions of their experiences, allowing my interpretation to be a part of the research (Moustakas, 1994).

My Role

My role as a researcher in the study was to focus on the interview process and to interpret the collected data to explore the experiences of Black women in the workplace. When interpreting the data, I was mindful of my personal biases to ensure the findings reflect the participants' points of view and their holistic experiences. I was cautious to not lead or interject during the interview process. As a researcher, I used bracketing to mitigate any judgment, preconceived notions, and thoughts when conducting this study. Doing so assisted in removing my own experiences from the participants' encounters (see Moustakas, 1994). I used a reflective journal throughout the research to record my thoughts, reactions, and details while I analyzed the data.

The validity of this qualitative research relies on a researcher to conclude sound and justifiable conclusions (Morse, 2015). Data saturation occurs during data collection when no more new items are recognized, and repetition occurs (Hennik et al., 2017). These methods were used to uncover the experiences of Black women in the workforce. This study's participants offered comprehensive accounts of their experiences in the workforce.

Purposeful sampling connects the research problem to the phenomena (Suri, 2011). The interview process was vital to the integrity and reliability of this research study. Extracting and reporting on the experiences of Black women in corporate America was the premise of this study. To ensure the participants and the data collected were protected, I followed Walden University's guidelines to ensure my responsibility of this study was fulfilled. The measures used to safeguard the participants and the study were communicated, including the risks and possible benefits of the study. Before performing the interview process, each participant was informed they would need to complete a consent form.

Methodology

Phenomenology was the qualitative methodology used for this study. Phenomenological design was used to explore the experiences of Black women in the workplace in a large city in central Texas. The participants have experiences as Black women in corporate America and have encountered the phenomenon related to the study. The participants were interviewed virtually for data collection. The data collected assisted me in highlighting the experiences of Black women in the workplace in a large city in central Texas.

The participants were recruited to participate via social media and my business connections from my career network of Black leaders in a large city in central Texas. Participants needed to be employed in a large city in central Texas and be female and Black. This study helps to fill the literature gap regarding Black women's double

discrimination. The collected data were recorded, coded, and analyzed using NVivo software to assist with determining themes and patterns.

Participant Selection Logic

In this study, I used purposeful and convenience sampling. Purposeful sampling assists in classifying emerging themes and experiences from the interview data collection process (Shaheen & Pradhan, 2019). The targeted audience met the following criteria: (a) must identify as Black, (b) must identify as female and (c) must work in a large city in central Texas.

The participants were recruited to participate through social media. I posted a notice about the study and emailed my contacts through work association once I obtained approval from the Walden University Institutional Review Board. The number of participants was 13 Black women once data saturation was reached. I provided additional details of the study's aim by request to potential participants. I ensured that participants were notified that the interviews were audio recorded and that their consent was required to participate. The referred participants were informed of the process in the same fashion.

Instrumentation

Using the descriptive phenomenological method, my role as a researcher in this qualitative study involved describing the data collected as a source. Researchers who use a qualitative design are instruments as they observe participants' reactions, gather data, perform interviews, and process the information; these details are essential to the study (Ravitch & Carl, 2016; Xu & Storr, 2012). A researcher can use several types of instruments in qualitative research, from surveys to document analysis guides. I was the

main instrument to the interviews of the participants (Mensah, 2020). I conducted virtual interviews; I used semi structured questions to learn about the experiences of Black women in the workplace.

Phenomenology assists a researcher in learning the experiences of others (Neubauer et al., 2019). I was the primary instrument for data collection; therefore, I remained focused on meaning construction inductively as stated by the participants (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Semi structured interviews allowed me to observe and collect the necessary data to highlight participants' experiences in the workplace. Learning experiences from others is an essential and foundational part of research. Humans as subjects are unique as they can recant their experiences or perceptions of the phenomenon as they perceive it (Neubauer et al., 2019). Lastly, I used a researcher interview protocol as an instrument of examination related to the study topic (Patton, 2015).

Collecting the data was the initial step in the research study; this included audio-recorded interviews. To remain focused and task oriented, I used an interview protocol and questions as a tool. I established the interview protocol as part of the instrumentation for this study as a document that specifies aspects of the interview process, institution review board details, and the approval process. I used the interview protocol as a guide to complete the interviews of the participants. The interview protocol included opening and closing remarks for the interview, interview questions, and follow-up notes. This information is in Appendix C.

In descriptive phenomenological studies the focus is on meaning and creating knowledge. Unlike experimental research, in which a pilot test is conducted to account for variability (Creswell, 2018), or generic qualitative research, to account for accuracy of observation (Ravitch & Carl, 2021), descriptive phenomenology requires a pilot study to reflect on the nature of interview for the purpose of improving the quality of interview for data collection reflecting the created meaning (Elliott & Timulak, 2021). Conducting a pilot study serves to ensure the aim of a study (Castillo-Montoya, 2016) and determine the efficacy of interview questions in measuring the concept a researcher has included (Dikko, 2016). I conducted a pilot study with a Black woman colleague who met the general criteria of sampling for the study to assess any shortcomings in the interview process, questions, and their follow up to ensure the collected data are meaningful, offering rich descriptions of participants' experiences.

Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection

Lapid et al. (2019) posited that data collection can only proceed once the institution review board has approved a study. I was the primary source of data collection. The prospective participants' names, email addresses, and consent came from their responses via the social media invitation post. The recruitment process included the invitation email through social media and my contacts (see Appendix A). Once participants responded to my email stating their willingness to participate in the study, I emailed them an informed consent form. They were required to respond to my email with "I consent" to establish their consent to participate in the study.

The interviews were set up with the selected participants via email. Once a date and time was established, interviews were conducted on the agreed upon date and time. A reminder email was sent the day prior to avoid delays. The initial data collection began with semi structured audio-recorded interviews. The sessions were completed using the outlined interview questions in Appendix C. The interviews opened with questions that allowed the interviewees to become comfortable with the interview process.

Before the interviews, participants were informed that the interview would be recorded. Participants were prompted to communicate openly and had access to follow up with me regarding the interview for up to 14 days after the interview session. Participants were contacted to allow them to discuss any questions or concerns during the interview process. Confidentiality was explained to ensure they were aware of the privacy of the information discussed.

Data Analysis Plan

Sundler et al. (2019) posited data analysis in this study included identifying codes, patterns, and themes from the participants' experiences. In descriptive phenomenology, I looked to determine descriptive themes. In this study, I used descriptive phenomenology to assist in better understanding of the experiences of Black women in the workplace based on gender and race. I determined the themes from the data collection process and interpreted the meaning of the recalled experiences of the participants. Once completed, I turned the data into descriptions and themes (Sundler et al., 2018).

In phenomenology, I accurately describe their interpretation of the data and experiences without bias. During the data analysis, I reduced generalizations and focus on

the significance of experiences (van Manen, 2017). In qualitative research, data analysis is the procedure that researchers utilize to determine the breakdown of the data collected; in this study, this examination of data includes interview transcripts, notes, and my interpretation of a phenomenon (Myers, 2019). In this proposed study, I analyzed the data using the descriptive phenomenological research method.

The initial data analysis began with me familiarizing myself with the obtained data. After, the data was organized and coded. Next, a thematic analysis was conducted to determine themes that I found in the collected data (Castleberry & Nolen, 2018). The thematic analysis consisted of six steps. The steps included familiarization, coding, generating themes, reviewing themes, defining, and naming themes, and writing up (Kiger & Varpio, 2020).

During the familiarization step, I checked the data to become acquainted with the collected data. Next, the initial data coding process began to categorize the existing data. Once the initial data was coded, I searched for themes. Next, the themes were reviewed and defined. Once those five steps were completed, the last step was to complete the write-up (Creswell, 2012).

Issues of Trustworthiness

Credibility

To ensure that each participant was authentic and truthful, Hipps posited that it's my responsibility is to ensure that all information is accurate and unaltered. All four factors were synonymous with validity, generalizability, reliability, and objectivity (Hipps, 1993). I was responsible for advising the participants that authenticity is

mandatory, and their participation was voluntary. A thematic analysis was the optimal way to eliminate any bias by identifying several sources and approaches to evaluate the collected data further. The collected data was organized and coded to determine themes. A thematic analysis was conducted to identify themes found within the data (Castleberry & Nolen, 2018); this increased the creditability of the study (Patton, 1999). This process increased the trustworthiness of the research study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Noble & Heale, 2019).

Transferability

Transferability is similar to generalization as several components can support a set of elements. When looked at in the generalization scenario, for qualitative research, analytic generalization endorses the transferability of research (Maxwell, 2021).

Transferability was determined by highlighting the findings, demographics, and other components of the study results to determine if the information can be transferred or applied to future research (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). The transferability of this study is left up to the readers of the study based on the robust description of the participants methodology and results (Maxwell, 2021).

Dependability

The premise of dependability of the research study was based on my due diligence and the participants' authenticity. Dependability is synonymous with data stability, e.g., consistency in research. The steps and procedures of the study are outlined throughout the body of work. I kept an audit trail throughout the analysis to document and record details during the research study (Carcary, 2020). As a researcher, I used an

audit trail to trace my process, thoughts, and decisions regarding the study (Carcary, 2020). Through compliance with the directive and requirements of Walden University, the research achieved dependability.

Confirmability

Confirmability is a way that other researchers can validate a study. In this study, I kept an audit trial and journal to ensure that results are accurate, others can confirm the results as well. Confirmability substantiates that the findings and results are provided solely from the collected data (Maxwell, 2021). As a researcher, I was responsible for keeping my personal bias from interpreting the interview data collected. The data has been reviewed and rechecked throughout the collection process, including analyzing the collected data to validate confirmability (Nassaji, 2020). Throughout the data collection and analysis, I utilized coding to identify themes and audit the data collection for quality, dependability, and trustworthiness.

Ethical Procedures

A numbering system was used to identify each participant as P1, P2, and so on to maintain confidentiality and participants' privacy. As a researcher, I was in tune with the responses, body language, and conversation to better gauge the interviewee's state. I ensured that the interview began on time and was free of distractions to improve the interview process. When researching human subjects, Walden's Institutional Review Board must review and approve the proposed study before data can be collected. All participants fit the outlined and approved criteria to participate in the study.

I followed all requirements consistent with Walden University's Ethics Review form and code of conduct. Each participant received details on the purpose of the study, their role, my role, and the possible risks and benefits of the study. They also received details on ways to remove themselves from the study. Each participant was advised that their real name was not used for their protection via the informed consent form (see Appendix B).

An informed consent provided details of the study, risks, and benefits of participating (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The collected interview data is on a password protected and encrypted flash drive and locked in a safe for a period of five years, after which it will be destroyed by placing the flash drive inside a shredding machine. Per the guidelines, all data collected and related information to the study is to be destroyed after five years of storage.

Summary

Chapter 3 discussed the research design and rationale for choosing a qualitative descriptive phenomenology, participant selection logic, participant sample, data collection, analysis, and the issues of trustworthiness. In Chapter 3, I explained the process for participant selection, obtaining consent before beginning data collection, maintaining participants' confidentiality during and after the study, and protecting the data after the completion of the research. Also, in this chapter, I outlined the study's credibility, transferability, dependability, confirmability, and ethical procedures. Chapter 4 presents the data.

Chapter 4: Results

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative descriptive phenomenological study was to explore Black women's experiences of discrimination in the workforce based on gender and race. The focus of the study was on the experiences of Black women in the workplace and discrimination based on gender and race. The research question was: How do Black women describe their experiences regarding discrimination in the workforce based on gender and race? I used a descriptive phenomenological design to collect personal narratives from 13 Black women leaders in a large city in central Texas. Using thematic analysis based on descriptive phenomenology, I extracted participants' experiences. Chapter 4 includes research demographics, data collection and analysis procedures, trustworthiness of data, and study results.

Pilot Study

I conducted a semi structured in-depth interview with one participant for the pilot study to assess the interview questions. The interview was guided by the interview protocol (see Appendix C). The participant in this pilot interview completed the informed consent and was informed of the details of the study. The participant self-identified as a Black woman who worked in a large city in central Texas, was over 18 years of age, and experienced discrimination in the workplace based on gender and race. The pilot study offered insight into potential biases and allowed me to refine my reactions to participant answers. The pilot study interview lasted approximately 45 minutes. The interview was transcribed, reviewed, and sent to the dissertation committee chairperson for feedback.

Setting

The data for this study were collected via semi structured interviews of 13 Black women via Zoom conferencing. Zoom is a secure and user-friendly tool for data collection (Archibald et al., 2019). Participant recruitment occurred via an invitation email through social media, Facebook and LinkedIn, and referrals (see Appendix A). Once participants responded to the email stating their willingness to participate in the study, I emailed them an informed consent form. Their response to my email with “I consent” established their consent to participate in the study. The interviews were completed over 3 weeks and were scheduled at the convenience of each participant’s schedule. The interviews were recorded via Zoom audio and a recorder as a backup.

All participants displayed willingness, authenticity, and comfort in answering interview questions during the interview process. There were no signs of distress during the interview, and participants were informed they could stop the interview at any time. Each participant openly expressed their experiences with discrimination in the workplace. Several participants described their career experiences and others in their current position. I used bracketing to mitigate judgment, preconceived notions, and thoughts when conducting this study—doing so assisted in removing my own experiences from the participants’ encounters. In addition, I used a reflective journal throughout the research to record my thoughts, reactions, and details while I analyzed the data.

Demographics

I used purposeful and convenience sampling. Purposive sampling assists in classifying emerging themes and experiences from the interview data collection process

(Shaheen & Pradhan, 2019). The targeted audience met the following criteria: (a) identify as Black, (b) identify as a woman, and (c) work in a large city in central Texas. In addition, participants' demographic information included their current tenure and the size of their organization. Each participant was assigned a unique numerical identifier—P1, P2, and so on—to maintain confidentiality and privacy.

Table 1

Participants' Demographics and Characteristics

	Years in leadership	Industry	Organization size
P1	20 years	Human resources/government	101–500
P2	3 years	Education	1–100
P3	2 years	Technology	1–100
P4	3 years	Education	101–500
P5	2 years	Human resources	501–5,000
P6	5 years	Education	501–5,000
P7	3 years	Human resources	501–5,000
P8	26 years	Government	501–5,000
P9	9 years	Education	501–5,000
P10	20 years	Business operations	501–5,000
P11	7 years	Business operations	501–5,000
P12	10 years	Business operations	1–100
P13	11 years	Business operations/entertainment	1–100

The participants' industries included human resources, education, government, business operations, entertainment, and information technology. Most participants held some type of higher education degree. Most participants in this study were mid-career, and half had at least 10 years of leadership experience. Three participants had 20 years of experience or more. Six participants have 5 years of experience or less. All participants were over the age of 18 and identified as Black women who have experienced some level of discrimination in the workplace.

Data Collection

The data collection for the study began on December 3, 2022, after receiving Walden University Institutional Review Board approval (#12-16-22-0664837). Participants were recruited using my contacts and connections, an invitation email through social media site, and referrals. I sent out seven invitations from referrals. I posted the recruitment flyer/invitation via social media, and once a prospective participant responded stating their willingness to participate in the study, I emailed them the informed consent form. Their response to my email with “I consent” established their consent to participate in the study. The interviews were scheduled with the selected participants via email. The data collection concluded on January 14, 2023.

Semi structured Interviews

I interviewed 13 Black women for this study. The semi structured interviews lasted between 20 to 50 minutes. I read an introduction to every participant that included my name and status as a doctoral candidate at Walden University, that the interview would be audio recorded, and what to expect before beginning the interview. I also advised them of their identifiers and informed them they could stop the interview at any time. I bracketed my own possible biases by adhering to the interview protocol to gain a deeper understanding of the workplace experiences of the participants. After completing each interview, I thanked them for participating.

I kept a journal and jotted down notes throughout the interview to ensure accuracy. Interviewees openly shared their workplace experiences; some were more intense than others. However, all participants had no hesitation recalling their work

experience as a woman, a Black person, and the combination of being Black and a woman in the workplace.

After completing the ninth interview, common themes began emerging. At the 11th interview, evidence of data saturation was present. I completed the remaining two scheduled interviews, and no new themes emerged. Data saturation was established upon review of the transcripts from all 13 participants. I double checked that no repetitive themes or further information were evident in the interview. Using thematic analysis, I familiarized myself with the data, coded, generated, reviewed, and defined and named themes (see Kiger & Varpio, 2020).

At the end of each interview, I thanked the participants for their time and contribution to the study. The debriefing of each participant took about 5 minutes. At this time, the participants could add information to the research or ask any possible questions related to the study. Several participants provided additional feedback or expressed that this topic and research were essential to Black women in the workforce. All data collected were stored on Otter.ai, NVivo, and interview transcripts and audio recordings were electronically saved on a password-ported USB drive.

Theme Development

I reviewed each transcript of all 13 participants and the remaining data post reduction to analyze the experiences further. Each response was then coded into themes, measuring the frequency and meaningfulness of each occurrence. When I reviewed the emerging themes, I continued to analyze them. I gathered the same and synonymous

words to form the unique codes, then grouped them into code groups. Next, I added them into subcategories and produced themes.

The data analysis was textual as it related to the patterns determined from reviewing the interview transcripts. All summarized themes, subcategories, and final themes were derived from patterns from the participant data. Additionally, I used descriptive phenomenology and invariant constituents to assemble the thematic interpretation of the experiences of Black women in the workplace (see Moustakas, 1994).

Data Analysis

The 13 participants' transcripts were reviewed thoroughly to ensure the accuracy of the data collected. The initial coding was from reviewing the summary keywords and the data generated on the transcript to begin the manual coding process. The data were transcribed using Otter.ai and NVivo. More codes emerged as I combed through each transcript and the journal notes. Otter.ai and NVivo software allowed me to review the data line by line. When the exact or synonymous words emerged, I merged and created themes. The themes were created based on the commonality of experiences, reactions, and language from the data collected. I used the six steps to complete the thematic analysis (see Clarke et al., 2022). I used descriptive phenomenology to understand each participant's experiences in the workplace. This method made it possible to understand the meaning and effects of the phenomena experienced by the participants (Giorgi, 2008).

Coding

Every participant gave detailed data regarding their experiences in the workplace as a Black woman. The data from each participant added value and meaning to the research study as they provided descriptive themes related to the phenomenon. The first step to conducting descriptive phenomenology is bracketing to set aside personal bias. The next step is intuiting to interpret the data.

The data analysis was conducted to determine themes; the last step was to describe them by synthesizing the findings. First, I checked the data to familiarize myself with the collected data. Next, the initial data coding process began by hand coding and then adding to NVivo to categorize the existing data. Once the initial data were coded, I searched for themes. Next, the themes were reviewed and defined (see Creswell, 2012). Finally, I analyzed the data by organizing the participants' responses to properly code. Finally, I arranged and analyzed the data to detect emerging themes and relationships (see Koh et al., 2020).

Evidence of Trustworthiness

Credibility

I ensured each participant volunteered for the research study to provide authentic and accurate information. As a result, all participants were comfortable and willingly discussed their experiences in the workplace. I collected the data through semi structured interviews. I organized and coded themes and used thematic analysis to identify the emerging themes. Lastly, I also conducted a pilot study to increase the credibility and trustworthiness of the study.

Transferability

I ensured this study's transferability by highlighting the findings, demographics, and themes to determine if the information could be transferred or applied to future studies. The transferability of this study would be based on the established description of the participants, the data collected, and the study results.

Dependability

I ensured that I completed all due diligence as a researcher and that the participants willingly participated. Each required step was conducted in this study and was outlined in each section. In addition, I kept a journal to track my thoughts and notes throughout the process. As a result, I have achieved dependability by following Walden University's directions, steps, and requirements.

Confirmability

To ensure confirmability, I kept a journal and notes throughout the process. I rechecked and ensured that all information was accurate. I confirmed that I kept any personal bias from interpreting the interview data collection and only analyzed the raw data from the participants' experiences. The data, including transcripts and recordings, have been reviewed to validate conformability. Lastly, I used coding to identify themes and compared the collected data to ensure accuracy for quality control, dependability, and trustworthiness.

Results

This study was conducted to address a gap in the literature and assist in identifying themes connected to the experiences of Black women in the workplace. To

correctly display the findings from the data, in this section, I provide details of the results related to the research question and the subsequent interview questions. Through semi structure interviews and coding, I identified and labeled themes (see Creswell & Poth, 2018). In the first cycle of descriptive and NVivo coding, I identified 35 unique codes. In the second cycle the codes were grouped into 18 unique codes (see Table 2). The data were consolidated into 17 code groups and then into six subcategories that were renamed to expose five themes to assist my understanding of the experiences of Black women working in a large city in central Texas.

The five identified themes and details are the following:

- Black women's work experiences and intersectionality: Self-awareness that there is a unique experience in the workplace based on gender and race. There is an exclusive experience in comparison to workplace counterparts. These experiences also relate to the role of intersectionality, pressure to assimilate, feelings of loneliness, lack of representation, and senior leaders not being diverse. Black women do not feel that Black culture or experiences are consistently recognized or understood; there is an absence of knowing the fatigue of being a token Black woman in the workplace. People of color are considered tokens in corporations that lack diversity at various hierarchical levels. Intersectionality highlights that Black women often experience the intersectionality of being a woman and being Black in the workforce. Additionally, Black women frequently face gender and racial bias in the workforce (Iyamba, 2020). Black women are not typically seen

as just Black or a woman; they are seen as both, which is the basis of intersectionality.

- **Workplace diversity:** Diversity in the workplace is not limited to gender and race. Diversity includes race, nationality, ethnicity, gender, and sexual orientation among others. Organizations that understand the importance of diversity and implement programs or resources for employees attract and retain top talent. Workplace diversity is vital to encourage allyship, support, and representation for Black women in the workplace.
- **Glass/concrete ceiling and career barriers:** Career barriers and obstacles faced by Black women in the workplace include microaggressions, additional workloads, being assigned supportive/managerial roles versus senior leadership roles, having their abilities questioned, sexism, and racism. They are expected to train underperforming and underqualified colleagues for positions unattainable for Black women. Imperceptible barriers prevent capable people from proceeding within their organization
- **Representation matters:** When Black women experience being the only Black person, the only woman, or the only Black woman in the workplace and throughout their career, emotional taxation can result. Additionally, they experience the pressure to properly represent an entire race, gender, or both. Lastly, Black women must sit with this experience being the norm or business as usual.

- Coping, support systems, and resources: Coping is a response to dealing with workplace discrimination and other factors. When Black women must cope for survival, this can be deemed oppressive and increase mental health risks. High exposure to sexism, racism, and other types of discrimination creates additional barriers for Black women in the workplace. Support systems are needed for Black women to assist with social support and effective coping strategies. Several participants reported ignoring issues as they arise in the workplace. However, active coping may be a healthier way for Black women to cope in the workplace by leaning on support systems. Lastly, there are limited or no resources to assist with career development and coping for Black women; such resources would add value to the organization and allow it to retain top talent.

Theme 1: Black Women's Work Experiences and Intersectionality

Black women's work experience is exclusive and unique based on gender and race. This experience is very different from their counterparts. The effects of these unique experiences can increase feelings of loneliness, emotional fatigue, and pressure to assimilate. Twelve of the thirteen participants felt that the Black experience is unique, and they have faced challenges based on their race and gender. P2 discussed her hair experiences and reflected on their career experience being trying and challenging. From being judged based on age, race, gender to feeling that the entire experience itself was hard. P3 described her experience as being lonely and discussed performative diversity that is not tangible. P11 stated that being a Black woman is simply challenging. Lastly, P12 seconded P11's notion that the work experience has and continues to be challenging.

Black women report that their experiences in the workplace differ from their counterparts. The Black women workplace experience is unique based on the intersection of their gender and race. P2 said:

With me going into the workforce young. It was trying. A lot of people didn't think that I could do the job because I was young and because I was Black. Just like my age was always a huge thing. Maybe [she would get] sad looks or them wanting to do extra checks on the work that's being done because maybe whatever I thought was whatever they thought I didn't do correctly. They wanted to make sure it was checked or needed to recheck it. I don't know, just like I have had many people that gave me opportunities that wouldn't have usually given me opportunities. So, I do appreciate those. Sometimes maybe having longer hours or more things to do than the usual person would or my hair as an example like sometimes I wear my afro out and where I work, it's not appropriate, or if it's not like in a certain style or if my hair is in a certain way then it's not appropriate. Those are some of the major things.

P3 added:

I would say you can kind of subtly kind of feel lonely for just being Black. I feel like because mostly everyone is Caucasian. And it can feel a little weird, you know, when the higher ups are saying, you know, oh, we have diversity, but you don't really see diversity, right? And then even as an example, I could give I think it's like a last minute meetings and it's like, I wear my hair naturally and it takes a little more time manage it. For the longest we have been taught, and we were told

not to use video, and then they made it a mandate [to use video]. And I realized like, oh, I have to make sure my hair is good. And now it's just something in the back of my head to think about before you know, starting my remote job in terms of my appearance.

P11 stated, "I would definitely say by being Black there are more challenges than others. So, it is kind of the same, that my opinion or perspective is not valued or higher than my white counterparts."

P12 explained:

It has been hard, and it has had its challenges. Throughout my entire career, working has been very challenging. I believe I have been treated differently as a woman. I have to work harder to get promotions, whereas I've seen men with less experience, less education, not have to do half of what I've had to do to get the same title, and I've been paid less.

Intersectionality is the connectedness of being Black (race) and a woman (gender), which presents a unique experience for Black women. Being Black and female plays a major factor in the assessments of Black women in corporate America. The intersectionality of being both Black and a woman is a unique experience for Black women in the workplace. P10 iterated "That no matter how you chose to identify they both cross over and you have to deal with both factors at work which can be taxing."

P10 further explained: I definitely think that there are some things that are unique to me, being Black and being a woman and knowing that those two identities are in constant conflict with the system's you know, that exist so I

definitely think that there are some shared [cross over] you know, some shared challenges across race. But I do think that I'm still Black like it just it is like a different road. You know, like there's a baseline, maybe of being a woman and there's a different world whenever you are a Black woman. So, in that sense, I do think that the challenges are unique to being a Black woman in general. But also specific to me.

Theme 2: Workplace Diversity

Workplace diversity and representation cause mixed experiences for the participants from feeling the need to assimilate to the dominant group to carrying the burden to represent all Blacks. Ten of the thirteen participants were either the only Black women or Black person on the team or department. These participants also had organizations that lacked workplace diversity and representation of Black women especially at senior levels. P3 recalled feeling lonely as the only Black and recalls hearing the diversity conversation without seeing visible diversity. She also felt the burden of wearing and managing her natural hair to appear more palatable for her peers. P4 recalls experiencing overt discrimination that was glossed over and dealing with continuous challenges that she was forced to absorb. She also felt pressure in meetings and that her suggestions had to be quality checked.

P7 recalled working harder than her counter parts and believed she had to assimilate to White men frequently and felt they did not have the burden of having to do the same. She discussed feeling the need to carry the load of paving the way for Blacks to

come behind her. She needed to be exceptional to debunk stereotypes about Blacks in the workplace.

Black women report feeling the need to assimilate to the dominant group in the workplace and carrying the burden of representing all Black women. The lack of workplace diversity is alienating at times and can result in imposter syndrome overtime.

P4 conferred: That's a whole different arena there. Being Black comes with sometimes representing the voice of all Black people. Sometimes being Black comes with the weight of pointing out inequities that seem so obvious that a blind man can see them and then people like oh, what about our fragility or guilt or whatever aspect that comes to light as opposed to let's move forward and problem solve. Being Black sometimes is, well I checked in with this one Black person so that means that all Black people are good with this, and I've done my equity piece.

Sometimes being Black means you can have an interaction that is completely professional, meaning that in a meeting you have a direct [question] asked, and you put boundaries in place. And in your face, those boundaries are received. Oh, thank you so much. We need to have brave and courageous conversations like this. But then afterwards, you see the backstabbing, passive aggressive behaviors where now this person doesn't work with you the same way as when a White colleague who cried to say, the boundaries that they needed or how they felt, and then the other white colleague cried together, and then those two colleagues are able to continue to move forward without a change. In the way

they do business. And so, you can only say, what's the difference here? So those are just a few examples of what being Black and the challenges of being Black and a woman.

P7 stated: Well, I will say, you know, I think I self-identify as Black anyway. Because I just think, you know, mostly in corporate America that color and race is seen first and so as a Black person in corporate America I think the challenges are that finding the commonality, you know, it is put on the person of color there the Black person to find some type of commonality with typically you know, their White male peers, and that can be challenging and especially if you're just starting out your career and figuring out well, why do I, you know, first kind of why do I have to be the one responsible, why can it be a two-way street? And then being comfortable with kind of finding those commonalities to where you can actually have some type of relationship beyond just the working relationship?

Being Black, I think it comes with it a huge responsibility in corporate America or this is kind of how I was brought up. When I go into an organization, I go in with the mindset that I need to be exceptional. Um, and part of that is because I want to make sure that you know, the organization is seeing my work, that what motivates them, encourages them to hire more Black people, because the expectation is that, you know, she did well, and I want more people like her. And so, my hope is that in excelling is to have more [Blacks] in corporate America, any stereotypes that others may have had about Black people working that I have hopefully shifted them in a more positive way, and so as that next

college kid comes in at mid-level or higher comes in the expectation has been set that this person is going to be you know, exceptional.

Theme 3: Glass/Concrete Ceiling and Career Barriers

All 13 participants felt that Black women face a glass or concrete ceiling when it comes to career advancement which indicated a blatant perceived career barrier for this group. Participants felt there are blatant barriers to career advancement based on gender and race.

Participants discussed challenges in the workplace from lack of representation in the C-suite and senior leadership positions to feeling overwhelmed. P1 leaned on the statistics and how Black women are in very low numbers or not present at all in senior leadership roles. P2 asserted “That it is a who you know scenario for the Black women that have cracked the glass and those that do are magical almost mystical”. P5 stated “That its exhausting to constantly work toward positions that are deemed unattainable for Black women”. P10 explained “That Black women have to fight against preconceived notions and stereotypes constantly and when Blacks are looked at for career advancement it is typically a Black male.” P10 also asserted that Black women are responsible for jackhammering their way through.

One hundred percent of the participants felt that they faced a glass/concrete ceiling in the work. A majority of the participants felt that the lack of career advancement resulted from no sponsorship, opportunity and lack of mentorship.

P1 concurred: I think the data shows it if we look, Black women do not sit on boards at the same rate as their counterparts like Asian women, or Caucasian

men. So, we have some work to do, even the same as Black men. In reality, we're still further behind. We don't sit in the same level of C-level positions. There was a great article that just came out from an organization, and they show the numbers of Black women who sit in the C suite. So yes, there are still some challenges there. There's a glass ceiling that we are trying to break through. But I think that having programs that allow us to do so is a key component for organizations.

P2 described: Yes, unless you just know the right person. Um, we're only expected to do this much. And when you exceed that much, it's already like, oh, what are you doing? Like, you weren't supposed to be over here in our area or this section of life. So yeah, I definitely think that we have mindsets that we're only supposed to reach this [certain] goal and if you reach anything beyond or past that, then it is magical. Like, God has blessed you.

P5 added: Yeah, I think we do. I think Black women have to work harder, I think there is a limit to where Black women can go you know, work your way up and it's been, you know, just this uphill battle. I was trying to get there. Then finally got there. You know, I feel like that's pretty exhausting. It's been determined, you know, but yeah, I think there is a limit. I think it's a limit, if we decide to quit fighting, the reality is, there is a fight there. I don't know. Some people have been born to be hardcore. That's great. But it's sad to know that you cannot get to a certain place in your career as a [Black women] or gentleman, you do have to [put in a] certain amount of energy to get beyond to get to a place where others work. So, it is a thing for sure.

P10 asserted: Yes. I think that they do; I think that you know, if you're in a place where you're not respected and people have certain ideas about you know, who you are, doesn't matter how much education you achieve, it doesn't matter. You know, how much you know, and how much you share it it's still gonna...it just still leans towards maleness. And within the Black community, it's gonna lean towards the Black male and it's like, it just like those are the conversations because we are typically stereotyped. I mean, literally, that's what it is, like, there's so many stereotypes that introduce people to us that we don't even embody, but because they continue to act on that, and then sometimes for survival, we have to act against that, that's where, you know, the ceiling is and I'm not saying that we are like we are to be implicated in our own inability to rise because it is a survival tactic. But I think that we're gonna be the ones that shatter it because no one's gonna shatter it, you know or jackhammer it for us.

Theme 4: Representation Matters

In recalling the participant's experiences as a woman in the workplace, there were instances of being the only woman on a team or department or being unable to separate being a Black woman from just being a woman. Nine of the thirteen participants felt that representation in the workplace is essential and contributes to the overall work experience. As a result, Black women feel they have no choice but to navigate the workplace and take on whatever is thrown their way to get by.

P1 and P13 described male-dominant environments and had to adjust to the conversation and expectations. P1 decided to own her journey and learn how to roll with

the punches and have an optimistic view, whereas P13 felt that since she was the only female sibling, she already had the skill set to deal with the surroundings of all or mostly men in the workplace.

Black women who see other Black women, Black men, or even other women of color may not feel the same isolation as when they are the only Black women. Therefore, representation matters in the workplace for Black women and is essential for their overall well-being and productivity:

P1 explicated: Yeah, so in a technology space, typically, technology within itself is more male dominated. We see more women coming into the technology space. It is a very different industry. The only industry I will compare us to is energy. Because in energy you see very much a male dominated but it's a space it's growing right. And it is a heavily sought-after space. As a woman in this environment, it is a very technical environment. So being able to sit down with engineers that are off the charts smart but being able to have an interpersonal conversation has challenges. It's made me better and more effective, but I had to also toughen up. And I have thin skin. Because when you are in operation, people say things that could be considered offensive, and it may not come from a bad place.

So, I've had to learn not to take every word and every thought as being offensive. It's not just the nature of someone's surroundings and what they're used to. I would also say what it's done for me as a woman is it's put me in a room and helped me to understand how important it is to have allies in my career. So, my

personal board of directors is diverse. It is not all men there are women in the room. It is women and men because I understand that to be in the technology space. It is important for me to be surrounded by both. So, I could say that it's challenging being a woman, but in reality, it's created some unique opportunities. And I am latching on to each of those and running forward with them.

P13 stated: For most projects, I am usually the only woman, or I may be the second for me like maybe one of two. So that is always something to add. When we are dealing with different projects. I mean, I remember one project last year, it happened to be all women and all of us noticed at that moment that we were like, oh my gosh, there's we're all women, like this never ever happened. So, it's one of those things that you notice just like being a minority when it comes to you know, your race or your background.

I think the challenge is as a woman in a work environment, and when you're the only woman at that, for the most part, you're very easily forgotten. I feel in my industry, it's very easy to get lost, because the men in that in that world tend to forget that there is a woman present sometimes, they can get a little inappropriate or whatever. And I mean, I grew up to be the only girl so sometimes, I mean, I'm used to hearing jokes or whatever. But there are times that I had to be like, hey, and then are like, oh, sorry, you know, or sometimes I feel like it takes a minute when we're back on a professional level for them to hear what I'm saying, you know, but you know, you figure out your way around it, and how to present yourself to get the recognition needed to you know, move

ahead and be able to complete whatever needs to be done. But yeah, I will say being the only one that sometimes it's like, you're having to like, fight a little bit against the testosterone, maybe to get their attention to hear you out. But then there every once in a while, you know, you have a couple great people I mean, I'm generalizing, of course, because it's not everyone but it does make a huge difference when the plain feels not exactly equal.

Theme 5: Coping, Support Systems and Resources

Coping in the workplace can be hard for Black women without a proper support system or resources. Ten of the thirteen participants reported the need to vent and cope about their experience of being a Black woman in the workplace. These women also reported having existing support systems or desired more resources for Black women. P2 reported being depressed, drinking to deal with discrimination and watching movies as an escape. P6 leans on friends, mentors and even books to get another perspective to possibly look at things in a different way. P8 asserted that she is in constant prayer to seek a deeper understanding of what's going on. She leans into faith to regroup, recenter and relax versus responding in a negative way. Lastly, P9 stated that she will seek a different viewpoint or sound off to friends or her husband. However, over the last 20 years of leadership she has picked up drinking as a habit to cope with. She has been vocal when things happened and faced backlash and now, she is on medication to power through it all. These participants reported several unhealthy habits to manage and survive during their career journey.

Black women may lean into avoidance to attempt to cope with discrimination and other and issues they face in the workplace. Black women that must cope with issues should lean towards active coping by seeking out and utilizing social support systems. Having available resources to reduce the need to cope will have an impact on Black women. Creating safe spaces, support groups and other resources can assist with dismantling discrimination and support active coping.

Black women report several factors related to coping: Depression, anxiety, the need to assimilate, extra pressure, etc., that resulted in drinking, smoking, and leaning on support systems to isolation:

P2 shared: I've kind of been depressed. And just watching movies like movies are my thing. I will just try to watch movies, whatever I can watch. Um I mean, I drink a little alcohol and a little wine every now and then to try to relax and to not be you know, so consumed by work trying to leave work where it is. And maybe just not going out and not associating with other people because I am thinking maybe there's going to be some judgment because of what I look like or what I have on or the words that I'm saying or anything, so I just became a house person. Really don't go out that much other than to get what I need and come back home and do my things.

P6 stated: Definitely my friends. Definitely reach out to my friends and mentors about any of the workplace concerns that I have. I continuously read, to improve my knowledge, so that I can understand that I'm looking at [in regard

to] these challenges through a more educated lens. I would say those would be the resources that I utilize for them, books and mentors.

P8 explained: I pray a lot literally; I pray a lot. It is just a thing I do is I just I literally will sit at my desk and pray because there were times I just wanted to lash out and I'm like, nope, that's not gonna help you. So, sit down, rethink, regroup, and I will call, I will get up and take a break. And call somebody and have them literally talk me off the edge because it would get that bad. So, I would use my resources to reach out to people that knew what I was dealing with, and how to bring me back down to reality and say it's just not worth it. Go back to your desk. Get it back together. And that is what I did. So, my resource was basically praying and reaching out to other people outside of that job that knew who I definitely was. And that is how I got through a lot of things just praying through a lot.

P9 shared: I will talk, I will express my voice and say [if something] is not okay. However, that also gets me in trouble - I have been labeled aggressive, but the fire and lighting has been able to find, um, you know, they're just gonna be like, oh, P9 is gonna say something or she's gonna bark it at it, you know, if that's my go to, I will express myself. Now dealing with it, you know, I'll come home, and I'll talk to my husband or friends that are inside of that circle. Just to see if am I crazy? You know? I will say that in my professional years. In my profession. I have been in the industry for 20 years, as a professional for 12 years and in leadership for 6 years and I can say I really did not drink until I

became mid-management, like my principle is I would consider mid-management because you still have bosses above you. So, I did not really [drink] until I got to mid-management. I drink [now] you know, and not to excess, but just to kind of wind down and relax for the evening. It's some way of coping, I suppose. Oh, and medicine, I'm on medicine now [to cope].

Summary

The experiences of Black women in the workforce were explored using qualitative descriptive phenomenological study in this study based on gender and race. I asked the participants six interview questions and seven follow-up questions to explore their experience. Five themes were identified: (a) Black women's work experience and intersectionality, (b) the importance of workplace diversity, (c) glass/concrete ceiling and career advancement, (d) representation matters, and (e) coping, support systems, and resources.

Each theme was discussed in detail and how it correlated to the research question. Black women in the workplace recalled their encounters based on gender and race, to sum up, their experiences that range from lack of workplace diversity, representation and challenges based on the intersection of gender and race. Chapter five will provide a discussion of the research findings, the interpretation, and recommendations.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative, descriptive phenomenological study was to explore Black women's experiences of discrimination in the workforce based on gender and race. Black women experience discrimination in the workforce based on gender and race (Crenshaw, 2005; McCluney & Rabelo, 2019; Reynolds-Dobbs et al., 2008). The information obtained in this study can assist Black women with finding the proper tools to feel empowered and cope with experiences when not treated fairly in the workplace. My research findings may lead to positive social change by providing a platform for Black women to feel empowered to speak up about their experiences of discrimination and inequality within the workforce for an increased sense of self-worth, self-esteem, and overall well-being. In addition, this research can promote equality and provide opportunities for individuals from diverse backgrounds while promoting diversity in leadership positions and providing opportunities for Black women to advance in their careers. The results of this study also can highlight the coping mechanisms, support systems, and resources effective in helping Black women navigate discrimination in the workplace and identify factors that contribute to glass and concrete ceilings and developing strategies to overcome them.

I conducted the study by collecting data through audio-recorded virtual interviews with 13 Black women who were employed in a large city in central Texas. My findings include five themes that describe Black women's experiences of discrimination in the workforce based on gender and race: (a) Black women's work experiences and

intersectionality; (b) the importance of workplace diversity; (c) glass/concrete ceiling and career advancement; (d) representation matters; and (e) coping, support systems, and resources. In this chapter, I present interpretations of the findings and limitations, recommendations, and implications.

Interpretation of Findings

To understand the phenomena of Black women's discrimination in the workforce based on gender and race, I used a conceptual framework grounded in general systems theory and intersectionality (see Crenshaw, 1991; Jones, 2021; von Bertalanffy, 1968). In this study, I suspended my personal viewpoint to understand the experiences of the 13 Black women participants. None of the participants' responses were of my interpretation, and results were solely based on participants' experiences. I stayed true to the descriptive phenomenology design and followed the act of epoché allowing participants to lead the results of the study to a source of meaning and existence as experienced (see Moustakas, 1994).

Black Women's Work Experience and Intersectionality

My study's findings aligned with the works of several researchers on the intersectionality of gender and race and Black women's discrimination in the workforce based on gender and race (Crenshaw, 1991; Jones, 2021; von Bertalanffy, 1968). In Chapter 2, I discussed how the experiences of Black women are not monolithic, and some implications pertain to their experiences based on gender and race (Crenshaw, 1988; Collins, 2000). Coles and Pasek (2020) noted that intersectionality theory provides a

framework that allows a researcher to explore further the experiences, the systems related to these experiences, and the levels of oppression that Black women encounter.

When discrimination is evaluated in the workplace among people of color and women, Black women are viewed singular and often excluded from remediation efforts (Crenshaw, 1989). My study findings support Else-Quest's and Hyde's (2016) three assumptions from research of intersectionality: (a) individuals are commonly seen and judged based on various social groups, and many times, these settings are connected and interlinked; (b) within these groups, discrimination and influence are often present; and (c) the characteristics of the group of individuals within the social setting can vary based on how the experience is perceived. McCall (2005) posited that intersectionality theory is critical to a multidisciplinary approach to understanding experiences, interconnectedness, and barriers in the workplace. Crenshaw's work impacted feminist theory and antiracist work to apply other ways to raise awareness and reduce barriers for the individuals affected by their multiple intersecting characteristics.

Junco and Limonta (2020) noted that the application of intersectionality theory has facilitated the comprehension of the inequalities experienced by Black women in their social and career advancement. Adams and Lott (2019) further added that Black women encounter systemic barriers, oppression, and misogyny at significantly higher levels compared to other groups due to their gender and race. Black women experience this early in their careers, beginning at the interview process, and throughout their careers (Lloyd, 2021). Lack of support, career advancement, and a sense of belonging increase the likeliness of Black women failing or becoming displaced (Roberts & Mayo, 2019).

The unique experiences of Black women place a surmountable amount of stress on them that affects their physical and mental health. Without advocates and safe spaces to discuss their wants and needs, Black women are often overlooked, and their careers are stalled. Black women are often not afforded the same opportunities as their counterparts, and when they are offered career growth, it is typically in supporting roles. Even with more tenure and higher education, advancement is limited for Black women (Heckler, 2019). Throughout their careers, Black women often face racism, sexism, and many times both. Existing studies highlight these experiences and are supported by intersectionality theory. Crenshaw (1989) posited that the adverse statistics for Black women are based on race and gender.

Furthermore, if there is little to no experience with Black women in the workplace, incorrect assumptions and misleading stereotypes can surface from social media, television, and other outlets. Thomas et al. (2018) contended that negative thoughts or beliefs hinder Black women from career advancement, support, and development. Intersectionality emphasizes characteristics of individual experiences that overlap from varying perspectives and highlights bias that may arise as a result (Crenshaw, 2005).

Workplace Diversity

Another key finding of my study was that diversity in the workplace is not limited to gender and race. In Chapter 2, I discussed the unique experience for Black women is that being Black is often evident, and other factors—such as religious beliefs, sexual orientation, etc.—are typically not tangible (Asare, 2020). This is a factor for Black

women, who are often prejudged, and face stereotypes based on something they cannot control or change. Additionally, when there are no other Black women within teams or in senior leadership, it can be harder for Black women to see they have an opportunity for growth in those roles. Furthermore, leadership and decision makers unfamiliar with working with or managing Black women are more likely to shy away from doing so. Affinity bias is natural and sometimes hard to manage without training and accountability (Banks & Stephens, 2018). Typically, the dominant group makes decisions in corporate America; the dominant group is often middle-aged cisgender White men (Lean In, 2020).

My study findings support Hamidullah and Riccucci's (2017) argument that Black women are often the nondominant group and therefore have feelings of exclusion. To ensure that marginalized groups or anyone underserved in the workplace is afforded the same advantages as others, inclusivity is necessary (Burke et al., 2021). Black women in the workplace continue to face lack of inclusivity (LeBlanc, 2020).

Glass/Concrete Ceiling and Career Advancement

My study findings support Halsey et al.'s (2020) statement that the glass ceiling is yet another invisible barrier that prevents women, especially Black women, from reaching hierarchal levels. Women in the workplace face invisible barriers that can reduce or prevent upward mobility. Black women often face higher levels of discrimination based on gender and race than White women do (Rosette et al., 2016). In Chapter 2, I discussed how participants had higher levels of education and skill sets with an average of 10 years in management but still experience barriers and obstacles in the workplace (Schermerhorn, 1993). Even as the participants explained their stories and

understood the discrimination, they experienced, most still owned their professional journey.

Some participants did not want sympathy or discuss the race card and wanted the same opportunities as everyone. They wanted their voice to be heard; they did not want to feel like they had to mansplain when they were amongst male colleagues. The pressure to be perfect, assimilate, and smile regardless makes the glass/concrete ceiling tangible and, at times, unbearable for Black women. These collective experiences make it hard for Black women to see the light at the tunnel's end and foresee career advancement in their current roles. Some participants did not want sympathy or discuss the race card and wanted the same opportunities as everyone. They wanted their voice to be heard; they did not want to feel like they had to mansplain when they were amongst male colleagues. The pressure to be perfect, assimilate, and smile regardless makes the glass/concrete ceiling tangible and, at times, unbearable for Black women. These collective experiences make it hard for Black women to see the light at the tunnel's end and foresee career advancement in their current roles.

Representation Matters

Seeing is believing for many people in the workplace; for Black women, it can be hard to imagine an opportunity to be a CEO in America. There are currently two Black women CEOs in fortune 500 companies as of 2021, and each has spoken about their challenges in the workplace, from being mistaken as a lower-level leadership person to not being taken seriously (Smith, 2021). Again, the adverse statistics for Black women are based on race and gender; the intersection of the two can create a negative workplace

experience. Fan et al. (2019) posited that gender and race inequities affect Black women throughout their careers. Representation matters for a Black woman in the workplace, but without support, representation is not sustainable.

In Chapter 2, I described how Black women, especially when they are the only Black employees, feel pressure to represent all Blacks which causes assimilation to act differently (Dickens & Chavez, 2018; Shim, 2020). I also described in Chapter 2 that Black women experience various emotions and trauma when they assimilate to act differently from how they feel (Dickens & Chavez, 2018). My study supported Jones and Shorter-Gooden (2003) posited that black women living double lives experience higher risks for social, mental, and physical health. Participants in the study described feelings of having no choice but to navigate through the workplace and just take on whatever is thrown their way to get by which becomes taxing when being the only Black woman.

Coping, Support Systems, and Resources

Ten of the 13 participants felt they had to find ways to cope with workplace stress. In Chapter 2, I discussed that coping out of necessity can be considered oppressive and may increase mental health issues (Spates et al., 2020). The intersection of being Black and a woman increases stress as they are both marginalized groups that are often subjected to exclusive experiences in the workplace. This group is also more than likely to experience racism and sexism based on the gender and race (Bond et al., 2021). When Black women must find coping mechanisms independently, they can have negative and positive benefits. Several participants expressed having healthy coping methods, from

exercise to talking with friends. Others reported having to seek professional help, which resulted in being prescribed medicine for self-medicating with drugs and alcohol.

My study supported Liao and Yin (2020) that there could be harmful effects if stress is not managed, from high blood pressure to other health issues. Creating support systems and resources for Black women is an urgent factor. Black women may not naturally gravitate towards asking for help and may lean into conflict avoidance to appear unaffected by workplace obstacles (Dickens & Chavez, 2018). For Black women, coping is often normalized as it comes with the territory. Saban et al. (2021) posited that not dealing with issues is similar to feeling the need to assimilate or identity shift and is another form of suppression. Lastly, Black women, peers, and organizations can significantly benefit from providing resources to cope, grow and voice their opinions in the workplace.

When the Black women's experience is further explored, the findings show that they deal with various barriers, varying from unwarranted stereotypes, misogyny, racism, tokenism, lack of support, and emotional taxation. These traits support the findings that Black women's experience is exclusive and unique. The Black women in this study had to learn resilience, assimilation, and tenacity to survive in corporate America. Not one of the participants expressed wanting a handout but leaned towards wanting equality based on their abilities, tenure, expertise, and passion in their particular area of expertise. Each woman believed that the glass/concrete was real and present but was actively finding ways to break through it.

Limitations of the Study

I identified several study limitations. The initial limitation of this study is that the research is not generalizable to all Black women in the workplace in specific industries or various positions. The study was centered on Black women that work in a large city in central Texas in multiple roles in several industry sectors. Although all participants willingly shared and were comfortable doing so, not every participant can accurately describe their experience efficiently. Another limitation is ensuring that personal bias is at bay as qualitative research employs me to be an instrument in the study (Dodson, 2017). As a Black woman in a senior role in a large city in central Texas, I made every effort to ensure the data collection process was free from bias, assumptions, influence, or the lens of my own experiences. Creswell (2013) posited that researchers must remove preconceived notions and bigotry from the research process.

This study focused on Black women's work experience solely based on race and gender. It did not include other races, ethnicities, or cultural backgrounds. In this large city in central Texas the population is low for Black women, which makes it a limitation compared to other cities in Texas that may have a higher population of Black women in the workplace. The research was also conducted with the understanding that the participants do not represent all Black women in the workplace in a large city in central Texas.

Lastly, intersectionality and general systems theory provided a lens of several factors that highlight various experiences that result from overlapping factors. These theories can minimize the individual expertise that Black women may face on a singular

axis. Using descriptive phenomenology allowed me to explore further the participants' experiences, perceptions, and the effects on their career experience. Although each participant had individual experiences, they had more overlapping encounters in the workplace based on gender and race. General systems theory and intersectionality were used to analyze the data collected based on descriptive phenomenology allowed me to interpret each participant's experience (Neubauer et al., 2019).

Recommendations

Several recommendations for further research are proposed based on the literature reviewed in Chapter 2. The first recommendation for further research, is to conduct an extension of the study population to include Black women in the workplace to determine if the discovered themes are constant for Black women nationally. A second recommendation for further research is an expansion of the experience of Black women based on specific sectors such as Human Resources, Operations, Education, C-Suite, and other equivalent industries to compare the variations and similarities based on their profession or business sector. A third recommendation for further research would be to investigate if advocacy and sponsorship increase opportunities for advancement or reduce the glass/concrete ceiling concept for this group. A fourth recommendation for further research to delve deeper into the origins and adoption of the notion of workplace assimilation among Black women. A fifth recommendation for further research would be to study coping strategies for Black women to reduce the health effects of workplace stress and emotional tax. A sixth recommendation for further research would be to highlight the need for diversity at all levels within an organization, emphasizing the

importance of representation. And a final recommendation for further research would be to highlight the value of programs supporting Black women who wish to expand within the organization through exposure and mentorship programs.

Implications

Black women experience discrimination in the workforce based on gender and race (Crenshaw, 2005; McCluney & Rabelo, 2019; Reynolds-Dobbs et al., 2008). This study addressed a gap in the literature and provided new knowledge for understanding Black women's experiences of Black women's discrimination in the workforce based on gender and race. Positive social change is an important outcome of any research study, and this study aimed to explore the experiences of Black women in the workplace. Several implications of this study were identified.

The experiences of Black women in the workplace have been historically overlooked, and this study aims to give a voice to their experiences. The findings of this study can lead to positive social change by empowering Black women to speak up about their experiences of discrimination and inequality in the workplace, which can potentially lead to an increased sense of self-worth, self-esteem, and overall well-being. Workplace diversity is crucial for positive social change as it promotes equality and provides opportunities for people from diverse backgrounds to share their experiences and perspectives. The findings of this study can promote positive social change for organizations by encouraging organizations to create diverse and inclusive work environments which can potentially lead to better productivity, creativity, and employee satisfaction. The study findings can inform organizations to promote diversity in

leadership positions and provide opportunities for Black women to advance in their careers. This can potentially lead to a more diverse and inclusive workplace and promote greater social justice and equity.

Intersectionality is an important concept that acknowledges that people may experience discrimination based on multiple identities, such as race and gender as did the participants of this study. The study findings can promote positive social change by highlighting the experiences of Black women who face discrimination based on the intersection of race and gender, which may lead to a greater understanding of intersectionality and encourage organizations to develop policies and practices that address discrimination based on multiple identities. The study findings can promote positive social change by highlighting the coping mechanisms, support systems, and resources that are effective in helping Black women navigate discrimination in the workplace, which may lead to greater access to resources and support systems, resulting in better mental health and overall well-being. Black women face unique challenges in advancing their careers, including glass and concrete ceilings. The study findings can promote positive social change by identifying the factors that contribute to glass and concrete ceilings and developing strategies to overcome them, which may lead to greater opportunities for career advancement and promote greater social justice and equity.

The qualitative research design used in this study allows for a more nuanced understanding of the experiences of Black women in the workplace. The conceptual implications of this study can inform future research on discrimination and inequality in the workplace. Finally, the empirical implications of this study can inform policymakers

to implement policies that address discrimination and promote equality. Based on the findings of this study, several recommendations for practice can be made. Organizations can promote diversity and inclusion in the workplace by creating diverse and inclusive work environments, promoting diversity, and addressing the unique experiences of Black women in the workplace.

Conclusion

The results of this study imply that Black women are still experiencing discrimination in the workplace that is impacting their growth and causing more harm to their mental health. This descriptive phenomenological study aimed to explore the work experiences of Black women in a large city in central Texas. I interviewed 13 Black women regarding their experiences based on their gender and the effects of their experiences. The intersectionality and general systems theory allowed me to analyze the experience of Black women based on gender and race, including how the range of factors directly affect them (Crenshaw, 2005; McCluney & Rabelo, 2019; Senge, 1990, p. 13.) The intersection of gender and race represents two marginalized groups in the workplace that shape their experience with sexism and racism occurrences. This experience is unique in comparison to Black women's counterparts.

The research analysis suggested that opportunities for Black women must be created, maintained, and implemented to remove existing obstacles. The participants interviewed were educated and tenured; however, many did not have access to decision-makers, allyship, and the mentorship needed to climb the corporate ladder. Creating awareness and providing tools and resources are important in dismantling policies and

eliminating bias and discrimination in the workplace. Workplace stress, emotional taxation, and trauma take action to stop an organization (Mosley et al., 2021).

Individually, Black women must have allies, sponsors, or advocates to succeed in the workplace. This study also suggests that the lack of sponsorship, opportunity, and safe spaces for Black women stagnant their career trajectory (Smith, 2021).

This study's participants represented Black women tenured and affected by their workplace experience from various business sectors. Their resiliency through their experiences was a common theme. The women openly discussed their experiences, including those of others on their career journeys. Many participants acknowledged that their work experience bled into their personal life, from dealing with depression, leaning on social circles, and drinking alcohol to being prescribed medicine to cope.

There is a lack of resources and support systems in the workplace. In addition, Black women face an exclusive experience in the workplace based on gender and race. These two factors are the participants' commonality and perception of the work experience. The exploration of the experience of Black women assists in fostering inclusive environments, diversity programs, and resources which is not consistently available for this group.

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Appendix A: Social Media Post/Invitation Email

Hello,

My name is Neferiatiti Holt, and I am a doctoral candidate at Walden University. I am pursuing a doctorate in management (Ph.D.). My research is titled: “The Experiences of Black Women in the Workforce: A Phenomenological Study.” I invite you to participate in this research to describe your experiences as a Black woman in the workplace in a large city in central Texas.

This voluntary research study aims to obtain 15-20 participants, to engage in an interview lasting between 30-45 minutes. The interview questions will be asked to explore and understand the lived experiences of Black women; based on gender and race in the workforce. This study is considered very low risk, and no harm is foreseen to you if you decide to participate.

The anticipated benefit of partaking in this research study is to impact social change by improving the understanding of Black women’s workplace experiences with being Black and women to improve their working conditions. If you are willing to participate in the study, respond to this email so I can provide further details. If you decide to participate in the study, I will send you a consent form to confirm your participation and to schedule your interview.

Thank you in advance for your time and consideration.

Regards,

Neferiatiti Holt

Appendix B: Interview Questions and Protocol

Date:

Location:

Name of interviewer:

Name of participant:

Thank you for your time today and your willingness to participate in this study. I am asking you questions regarding your experiences as a Black woman in the workplace. As noted in the consent form, I am recording the audio of the interview and taking notes to enhance the accuracy of the interview.

If you do not wish to answer any of the questions asked or want to stop the interview, please feel free to do so.

Background – Warm-up questions:

1. How are you today?
2. How is the weather where you are?
3. How many years have you been in management?
4. What is your tenure with your current organization: 0-3 yrs., 4-5 yrs., 6-8 yrs., 9-10 yrs., 10 yrs. plus?
5. How would you categorize your current organization: 1-100, 101-500, 501-5000, 5001 or more

The semi-structured interview questions are as follows:

1. How would you describe your experiences in the workforce?
2. How? Can you explain and provide examples?

3. How would you describe your experiences as a woman in the workforce?
4. As a woman, how would you describe your challenges at work? Can you offer some examples?
5. Thinking of yourself simply as Black, without thinking about being a woman, how would you describe your challenges at work?
6. Why? Would you think these challenges or obstacles are unique to you as a Black and a woman?

The follow up semi-structured interview questions are as follows:

1. Have you seen any positive changes in the past two years at your organization? If yes, what changes have you seen?
2. What tools or resources do you use to cope with discrimination in the workplace?
3. If you have had an issue, did you feel comfortable reporting or addressing any concerns to the Human Resource department? Can you explain why or why not?
4. Do you feel that you have the same career opportunities as your counterparts?
5. What are your recommendations to reduce discrimination in the workplace for Black women?
6. Do you think Black women face a glass/concrete ceiling for career advancement?
7. Do you think your career experience would be different if you were not a Black woman? Why?

Appendix C: Theme Development – Chart of themes and summarized themes.

Table 2

Theme Development – Emerging Themes

No.	Themes	Excerpts from Results	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	P7	P8	P9	P10	P11	P12	P13
1	Black Women’s Work Experience and Intersectionality	<p>“I would say you can kind of subtly kind of feel lonely for just being Black.”</p> <p>“I would definitely say by being Black there are more challenges than others. So, it is kind of the same, that my opinion or perspective is not valued or higher than my white counterparts.”</p> <p>“I would say yes or no; I mean, I think that you know, I know who I am. So, I definitely think that there are some things that are unique to me, being Black and being a woman and knowing that those two identities like are in constant conflict with the system’s you know, that exist so I definitely think that there are some shared [cross over] you know, some shared challenges across race. But I think I’m still Black like it just it is like a different road.”</p>	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
2	Workplace Diversity	<p>“Being Black comes with sometimes representing the voice of all Black people”</p> <p>“Being Black, I think it comes with it a huge responsibility in corporate America or this is kind of how I was brought up”</p>	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X	X	X
3	Glass/Concrete Ceiling and Career Barriers	<p>“I think the data shows it if we look, Black women do not sit on boards at the same rate as their counterparts, Asian women or Caucasian men”</p> <p>“I think Black women have to work harder think, I there is a limit to where Black women can go you know, work your way up and it’s been, you know, just this uphill battle”</p> <p>“The ceiling is and I’m not saying that we are like we are to be implicated in our own inability to rise because it is a survival tactic”</p>	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
4	Representation Matters	<p>“Yeah, so in a technology space, typically, technology within itself is more male dominated. We see more women coming into the technology space. It is a very different industry.”</p> <p>“I am usually the only woman, or I may be the second for me like maybe one of two.”</p>	X	X		X			X	X	X		X	X	X
5	Coping, Support Systems and Resources	<p>“I’ve kind of been depressed. And just watching movies like movies are my thing. I will just try to watch movies, whatever I can watch. Um I mean, I drink a little alcohol and a little wine every now and then to try to relax and to not be you know, so consumed by work trying to leave work where it is.”</p> <p>“I pray a lot literally; I pray a lot. It is just a thing I do is I just I literally will sit at my desk and pray because there were times I just wanted to lash out and I’m like, Nope, that’s not gonna help you.”</p>	X		X		X	X	X	X	X	X			X

“So, I did not really [drink] until I got to mid-management. I drink you know, and not to excess, but just to kind of wind down and relax for the evening. It’s some way of coping, I suppose. Oh, in medicine, I’m on medicine now.”

Table 3

Theme Development – Themes and Summarized Themes

Themes	Summarized Themes	P01	P02	P03	P04	P05	P06	P07	P08	P09	P10	P11	P12	P13
Only Black person or women	Tokenism	X		X		X	X	X	X	X	X			X
Feels corporate lacks the understanding of the Black experience	The Black Women’s Work Experience	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X	X
Lack of diversity	Diversity	X		X		X	X	X	X	X		X	X	X
Sees performative diversity	Performative Diversity			X	X		X	X	X	X	X		X	X
Feels like the Black woman experience is unique	Intersectionality	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Has to find ways to cope with the effects of the workplace	Emotional Tax	X	X	X	X				X	X	X	X	X	X

Being Black in a large city in central Texas can be challenging	Demographic	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Lack of support systems in the workplace	Support Systems	X	X	X	X		X		X	X	X	X	X	X
Friends and family are support systems	Support Systems	X	X	X	X		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Cannot rely on HR for help	Human Resource Reliability		X	X	X		X		X	X	X		X	X
Owens professional journey	Discrimination	X			X	X		X	X	X	X	X		X
Experienced racism	Racism	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X	X	X
Experienced sexism	Sexism	X	X	X	X			X	X	X	X	X	X	X

