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# Effect of Workplace Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Programs on Black Women Leaders at Nonprofit National Associations of Regulatory Boards

Staci Mason  
*Walden University*

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# Walden University

College of Health Sciences and Public Policy

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Staci Mason

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Walden University  
2025

Abstract

Effect of Workplace Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Programs on Black Women Leaders  
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by

Staci Mason

MPhil, Walden University, 2022

MS, Nyack College, 2009

BS, Howard University, 2003

BS, Virginia Commonwealth University, 1993

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Public Policy and Public Administration

Walden University

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## Abstract

Research has shown that due to their intersecting identities, Black women must contend with both racism and sexism in the workplace, resulting in oppressive work environments and limited access to career advancement. Studies also highlighted Black women's disillusionment with workplace diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) programming and its role in addressing these negative impacts. However, these issues have not been studied through the perceptions of Black women leaders at national associations of regulatory boards. The purpose of this generic qualitative study was to examine perceptions of these Black women regarding the impact of DEI programs on their career. Using Benet's polarities of democracy theory, the study explored the perceptions of 10 Black women leaders regarding these impacts. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, and thematic analysis was used to understand the complex interplay of structural barriers, biases, and systemic inequities. Five themes emerged: conceptualization of leadership, discrimination despite positive experiences, minimal effects of DEI programming, recommendations for other Black women in leadership, and recommendations for designing workplace DEI programming, which can support ideas and practical strategies for enhancing leadership diversity, promoting equitable hiring and promotion practices, and fostering an environment of inclusivity. The study has implications for positive social changes in public policy such as affirmatively framing equity initiatives as civil rights compliance, repealing or amending statutory language that disallows DEI, and/or ensuring statutes allow institutions and organizations to implement culturally responsive leadership programs without fear of retribution.

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## Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my ancestors whose strength, vision, and sacrifices made it possible for me to be here. I stand on the foundation you built, and I carry forward the hope you refused to surrender. I carry with me your voices—women and men who endured unimaginable hardship, who resisted erasure, and who dreamed of a future where your children’s children could live and lead freely. Their stories are not relics of the past; they are blueprints for survival and reminders of the unfinished work that lies ahead.

To the Black, Indigenous, and women of color leaders like my mother, whose courage and persistence continues to inspire me: You have fought, and still fight, against systems and workplaces that were not designed for us to thrive. Your resilience shapes my voice and fuels my purpose. Watching you navigate systems never built for us taught me what it means to persist when the world tells you no, to lead when your leadership is questioned, and to fight even when the odds are stacked against you. Your resistance and resilience became my roadmap.

And to my daughter, and to every future generation of Black, Indigenous, and women of color who will inherit the torch: May you rise fiercer, dream louder, and demand more. It is my hope that you, and others like you, will inherit more than struggle—that you will inherit possibility, liberation, and the knowledge that your voice has power. The torch you and your peers carry will illuminate paths that we cannot yet see, but I pray this scholarship helps light the way. This work is for you, because the fight is not over—but neither is our hope, our power, or our freedom.

I began this journey with more than a research question—I began it with a responsibility. This dissertation is born from the intersection of my lived experience, my scholarly pursuits, and a profound awareness of the struggles and triumphs of those who came before me. It is both personal and political, rooted in the knowledge that scholarship does not exist in isolation, but within the context of histories, communities, and movements for justice.

The questions that guided this research are grounded in more than theory—they are rooted in lives, legacies, and communities whose futures depend on the dismantling of barriers and the creation of more equitable systems. To write this dissertation has been to reckon with the weight of history, to name injustice where it persists, and to imagine alternative futures where justice and dignity are nonnegotiable.

This is not simply my story; it is a collective story. It belongs to the ancestors who dared to dream, the communities who continue to resist, the scholars and activists who labor for equity, and the daughters who will inherit both the work and the hope.

This dissertation also represents more than my academic journey; it is an offering to the ongoing struggle for justice, equity, and freedom—one that began long before me and will continue long after. It is a testament to what we inherit, what we endure, and what we dare to imagine. This work honors the past, speaks to the present, and invests in a future where our collective fight for dignity and freedom continues—and ultimately prevails. May this work light the path toward the freedom we deserve.

We are the dreams of our ancestors, and we are still building the world they imagined. We will not be moved.

## Acknowledgments

This work is the product of many hands, voices, and histories. It is rooted in the sacrifices of those who came before me, sustained by the love and support of those who walk beside me, and carried forward by a vision of what is possible for those who will come after me.

First and foremost, I honor God—the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit—from whom all my blessings flow.

I honor my ancestors, whose unyielding strength and resistance laid the foundation upon which I stand. You dreamed of freedom, justice, and dignity in times when such dreams were denied. This dissertation is both a tribute to your perseverance and a continuation of your struggle.

To my mother, Christina, and to all the Black, Indigenous, and women of color who have carried the weight of generations while daring to carve out space for us to thrive: Your resilience has been my compass. You have taught me what it means to endure, to resist, and to lead with courage and grace. To my dad, Roger, and all the men who stand beside these women: You have been a rock, providing the support, security, and space for this important work.

To my daughter, Jaci: You are my inspiration and a constant reminder of why this work matters. Every late night, every hard-fought page, every act of persistence has been for you and for the generations who will inherit both our victories and our unfinished battles. My hope is that you will rise on the shoulders of this labor and carry the torch further than I ever could.

To my sisters-in-love, Daryl, Kelley, Marshan, and Katrina; my closest friends, Jun, Ja'Na, Ife, Tonya, and Nhu; my family and community of Black women and women of color; and my sisters of Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Incorporated: Thank you for creating spaces of solidarity, dialogue, and accountability. You reminded me that scholarship is not meant to exist in isolation, but in service to collective liberation.

I extend my heartfelt gratitude to my mentors, Anita B. Johnson, Renee Johnson, Clifford P. Cooks, and Robin Y. Jenkins; my advisor-sponsor-advocates, Sharon Mebane and Deborah Wells; my coach, Ranieka Weston; and my committee members, Dr. Bill Benet and Dr. Gloria Billingsly: Your guidance and wisdom challenged me to think critically, speak boldly, and stand firmly in my convictions. You believed in my vision and helped sharpen my voice.

To the participants in my study: Your honesty, courage, and generosity in sharing your experiences gave this research its heartbeat. Your stories, insights, and truths are not just data—they are testimony. You trusted me with your words, and I carry that trust with reverence. This work would not exist without your willingness to speak truth to power and to imagine what could be. I am deeply grateful for the light you brought to this project and the wisdom you shared.

Finally, to the broader community of activists, scholars, and visionaries who continue to resist oppression in all its forms: This work is forever indebted to your brilliance and your bravery. It is because of you that the fight for democracy continues—and it is because of you that hope remains.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

### **Introduction**

In 2020, as the world battled a global pandemic responsible for millions of lives lost, a global movement to end systemic racism and police brutality was ignited after the murders of George Floyd, Brianna Taylor, Ahmad Arbury, and countless other Black people in the United States at the hands of police and vigilantes (H.R. Rep. No. 116–434, 2020). In the nearly 60 years since the enactment of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and its associated affirmative action policies, there had not been an international focus of this magnitude on the fight for racial equality in society or in the workplace. Recognizing the enormous toll these events had taken on their staff, organizations worldwide began to announce their diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) efforts, mainly through posting diversity statements on their public-facing websites and developing internal human resources policies (Michener & Brower, 2020; Mor Barak et al., 2022). Organizations centered their efforts around developing workplace DEI programming to support workers from historically marginalized backgrounds. However, many programs were devoid of plans to identify and reduce oppressive workplace environments and advance these populations, especially Black women, into executive leadership (Mor Barak et al., 2022).

Adding to this dilemma, opposition to initiatives designed to redress racial imbalances, such as critical race theory and workplace DEI initiatives, began to reverberate within various segments of society. The political discourse in the United States shifted the narrative to a critique of DEI policies and programming as forms of reverse discrimination (Portocarrero & Carter, 2022). In June 2023, the Supreme Court of

the United States ruled that affirmative action programs in higher education institutions were unconstitutional, effectively rendering race-conscious admissions meant to bolster diversity on college campuses unlawful (*Students for Fair Admissions, Inc. v. President and Fellows of Harvard College*, 2023). These actions are relevant because a reversal in affirmative action in higher education could result in significant negative effects on Black women's access to higher education and the pipeline to the workforce. Affirmative action policies helped create diverse environments in educational institutions, leading to the development of broader professional networks crucial for job referrals, career advancement, and access to other professional opportunities for Black women and other women of color (Freeman, 2023).

Less than 1 month after the Supreme Court ruling, Senator Tom Cotton of Arkansas sent letters to law firms regarding the potential for DEI hiring initiatives to violate federal civil rights laws (U.S. Senate, 2023). In it he wrote:

Though [the Supreme Court] case focused on colleges, the same principles and indeed the plain text of federal law also cover private employers. Title VI of the Civil Rights Act already prohibits federal fund recipients from discriminating based on race. Title VII likewise prohibits private employers from basing hiring decisions on race, prompting a U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commissioner to recently warn that “diversity programs pose both legal and practical risks for companies.” ... Employers should take to heart the Supreme Court's recent declaration that “eliminating racial discrimination means eliminating all of it.” Congress will increasingly use its oversight powers—and

private individuals and organizations will increasingly use the courts—to scrutinize the proliferation of race-based employment practices (p. 1).

Likewise, in 2025, the White House issued a presidential action, *Ending Illegal Discrimination and Restoring Merit-Based Opportunity* (Executive Order No. 14173, 2025), revoking a previous executive order that promoted equal employment opportunity in the federal government (Executive Order No. 11246, 1965). This new order directed federal agencies to terminate DEI programs. Additionally, in 2025, the United States Department of Justice issued guidance to federal agencies regarding unlawful discrimination by entities that receive federal funding. The memorandum called out four unlawful practices, including requiring DEI training, which could result in revocation of funding and/or recipients being held liable for discrimination. These actions against DEI initiatives may create a ripple effect that could have far-reaching impacts on the future career opportunities for Black women.

Despite enormous advancements in terms of gender and racial equality in the United States, there continues to be a pervasive lack of diversity in executive leadership, particularly regarding Black women leaders in corporate, higher education, and nonprofit workplaces (Nickels & Leach, 2021; Norris-Tirrell et al., 2018; Thomas-Breitfeld & Kunreuther, 2017). Executive “power elite” leadership in the United States remains sanctioned among the privileged majority: predominantly White, heterosexual, Protestant men (Chin & Trimble, 2015; Erskine & Bilimoria, 2019). The United States Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC, 2020) reported that although women and racial minorities have risen in rank to midlevel management positions in many industries,

less than 5% of these same populations have acquired executive leadership positions. Furthermore, a Google search of the executive leadership and mission statements of nonprofit national associations of regulatory boards and a review of their individual websites revealed a lack of a racial and cultural diversity representative of the licensee stakeholders they serve, the workforce they employ, and the services they provide.

Although researchers have investigated the issue of leadership and DEI in the workplace, there was no research on Black women in nonprofit national associations of regulatory boards and what barriers they face, what facilitates their success, and how workplace DEI programming affects their experiences on the path to leadership. In addition, there was no research exploring this issue through the lens of the polarities of democracy theory. The current study explored the perceptions of Black women leaders at nonprofit national associations of regulatory boards, through the lens of the polarities of democracy (see Benet, 2006, 2012, 2022).

In this chapter, I detail the study's background, problem statement, purpose statement, research question, and theoretical and conceptual frameworks. Next, I address the nature of the study, definitions, and assumptions. Finally, I describe the scope and delineations, limitations, and significance of my research, and close the chapter with a summary.

## **Background**

Acknowledging the disparate impact of global events of 2020 on certain segments of the workforce, including Black, Indigenous, and people of color (The BIPOC Project, n.d.), women, LGBTQ+ people, people with disabilities, and those at the intersection of

some or all these identities, organizations committed to pursuing workplace DEI more intentionally. Transparency and commitment to DEI on the part of workplaces has not been absent from scholarly research; rather, scholar-practitioners have argued that creating more diverse, equitable, and inclusive workplaces may reduce discrimination and oppression, advance a more democratic society, and protect the survival of humanity (Benet, 2022; Branche & Ford, 2022; Brown, 2022; West, 1993/2017, 2004). In response, organizations developed and posted diversity statements as a public announcement of their commitment to DEI; some doubled down on this commitment by developing workplace DEI programming to support their historically marginalized staff (D. P. Mason, 2020; Mor Barak et al., 2022; Portocarrero & Carter, 2022; Zheng, 2022). Nevertheless, at the time of the current study, there was a gap in the literature regarding the effects of workplace DEI programming on the career ascension of Black women leaders, including those employed at nonprofit national associations of regulatory boards.

Notwithstanding the increase in women and racial minorities in executive management positions in many industries, Black women, in general, continue to be underrepresented and underpaid in executive leadership when compared to White men. The EEOC (2020) reported that Black women held only 2.2% of the total number of executive leadership positions in all job categories, compared to 69% held by non-Hispanic White men. In contrast, White women held over 30% of the total number of executive leadership positions, while Black men held less than 2.1% of the total number of executive leadership positions in all job categories. Moreover, the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2020) reported that Black women's median earnings in all job categories

in 2020 were 68% of what non-Hispanic White men earned, while White women earned 79.6% of what non-Hispanic White men earned. In contrast, Black women earned over 90% of what Black men earned. There were no data reported for nonprofit national associations of regulatory boards.

Racial and gender labor market differences have manifested as impediments to Black women's careers and social elevation, perpetuating the long-standing racial and gender wealth gap (Field et al., 2020; Jauhar & Lau, 2018; West, 1993/2017). Recent studies found that these gaps are also associated with many other factors that disproportionately affect Black women, including the degree and type of discrimination encountered in the workplace (Bowers, 2021; Boyd & Robinson, 2022; Brown, 2022; Chance, 2021; Cirincione-Ulezi, 2020; Hood, 2022; Johnson & Fournillier, 2021; Morgan, 2020). Due to the disparate effects of racism, sexism, and classism, Black women's experiences on the path to leadership are wrought with unique challenges that negatively impact their career advancement opportunities.

### **Problem Statement**

The specific research problem that was addressed through this study is the lack of information on how workplace DEI programming impacts the barriers, strategies, and perceptions of Black women's leadership advancement in nonprofit national associations of regulatory boards. There is also a lack of information on how this issue is viewed through the lens of the polarities of democracy (Benet, 2022). The initial interest in this issue was sparked by my personal observations as a woman of color, oftentimes one of few executives of color in the room. The situation that prompted me to pursue this study is the

noticeable underrepresentation of Black women in executive leadership positions in nonprofit national associations of regulatory boards.

Regulatory boards in the United States play a significant role in shaping policies and regulations within the occupational and professional licensing community. Leaders in U.S.-based nonprofit national associations of regulatory boards work with legislators to develop model laws, rules, and entry and practice standards for their respective regulatory boards. The Federation of Associations of Regulatory Boards (FARB) (n.d.) describes nonprofit national associations of regulatory boards as a source of learning, knowledge, and information sharing for various professional and occupational licensing boards, commissions, and councils. According to the Council on Licensure, Enforcement & Regulation (n.d.), nonprofit national associations of regulatory boards also develop and disseminate resources, education, and ideas to enhance the power and performance of the regulatory community in support of public protection. Thus, failing to elevate Black women into leadership roles at nonprofit national associations of regulatory boards may contribute to overlooking issues that specifically affect Black women or other marginalized groups. This can result in the creation of licensing laws and regulations that inadvertently perpetuate inequalities that in the past have persistently and disproportionately affected racial and socio-economic minority communities.

The research presented in this study represented seminal and current literature on Black women's encounters of racism, sexism, and social classism as consequences of intersectionality (Chance, 2021; Crenshaw, 1989; Curtis, 2017; Davis, 1981; Johnson & Fournillier, 2021; Morgan, 2020; Smith et al., 2019), invisibility (Johnson & Fournillier,

2021; Smith et al., 2019; Weiner et al., 2021), stereotypes (Cirincione-Ulezi, 2020), and lack of mentorship (Cirincione-Ulezi, 2020; Johnson & Fournillier, 2021). These biases can manifest as oppressive and discriminatory workplace experiences, stalled career advancement, and widening economic disparities for Black women, and appear in conformity with the disparate impact of workplace oppression identified in Benet (2022). Benet proposed workplace democracy as a solution intended to “reduce or eliminate the negative consequences of occupational stress (including the disparate negative impacts of occupational stress based on race, gender, and class) ... ” (2006, p. 66). Hence, applying the polarities of democracy as a framework for this current study allowed me to explore how well the polarities are being managed to support workplace democracy and Black women’s leadership aspirations.

At the same time, workplace DEI programming was being presented as the value proposition that would give companies a competitive advantage in recruiting and retaining talent, fostering innovation, and improving corporate image (Feeney & Camarena, 2021; Field et al., 2020; Weiner et al., 2021). Yet, research has revealed that the lack of intentionality and poor implementation of DEI programming has proven to be ineffective in advancing Black women into senior leadership roles (Doan & Jaber, 2021; Feeney & Camarena, 2021; Ferdman, 2017; Field et al., 2020). Indeed, it appears Black women are sometimes left to navigate the DEI space to support their leadership aspirations without support or tangible reward. In combination with the disparate effects of racism, sexism, and classism, this lack of purposeful workplace DEI programming may exacerbate unique challenges to Black women’s workplace experiences which can

negatively impact their ability to advance their careers, participate in workplace decision-making, or be represented in leadership (Barak, 2022).

Encouraging diversity and equal opportunities in the workplace is not only a matter of social justice but also a strategic imperative for fostering innovation, fairness, and sustainability. While there are public policies in place that are consistent with federal equal employment opportunity regulations, developing public policies to improve career opportunities for Black women involves addressing systemic barriers, promoting inclusivity, and fostering a supportive environment (Pandey, et al., 2022). The underrepresentation of Black women in leadership positions within national associations or regulatory boards can have far-reaching consequences, affecting the quality of decision-making, the development of policies, organizational culture, and overall societal well-being. Thus, there is a need for public policies to strengthen and enforce existing anti-discrimination and equal opportunity laws, support inclusive hiring and pay equity practices, address historical inequalities, and promote proactive measures to bridge the gap and potentially improve conditions for Black women in nonprofit national associations of regulatory boards.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore and better understand the perceived barriers faced by Black women who seek leadership positions in nonprofit national associations of regulatory boards, identify what strategies they use to overcome barriers to leadership, and what effect workplace DEI programming had on their experiences on the path to leadership. The underrepresentation of Black women in

leadership roles due to a dearth of workplace democracy may weaken societal efforts to combat racial, gender, and economic discrimination. This appears to be consistent with Benet's (2022) polarities of democracy theory. Thus, excluding the perspectives of Black women in leadership of nonprofit national associations of regulatory boards maintains the status quo of the privileged majority's narrative and perpetuates the marginalization and economic oppression of Black women.

This study contributes to the research body of knowledge on the experiences of Black women on the path to leadership in nonprofit national associations of regulatory boards and further explore how biases impact Black women's career trajectory. The implications for positive social change are multifaceted. First, the findings may provide valuable insights to organizations, regulatory boards, and policymakers regarding the importance of prioritizing and/or strengthening workplace DEI initiatives. Specifically, such programming can support the career advancement of Black women within the regulatory sector. Second, this current study may help address broader workplace and societal factors that contribute to discrimination against Black women. Finally, these efforts have the potential to reduce the longstanding wealth gap experienced by Black women and their families.

### **Research Question**

What has been the experience of Black women who have obtained leadership positions in nonprofit national associations of regulatory boards?

## **Theoretical and Conceptual Framework for the Study**

To ground my study, I utilized the polarities of democracy theory (Benet, 2006, 2012, 2022) as the theoretical framework. I utilized the polarity management model (Johnson, 1992) as the conceptual framework. To fully appreciate the model of workplace democracy set forth by Benet's polarities of democracy theory, a polarity thinking mindset must be understood; therefore, I begin this section in reverse, starting with a brief description of Johnson's polarity management model as the conceptual framework before introducing the theoretical framework.

### **Conceptual Framework**

The conceptual framework I used for this study is the polarity management model proposed by Johnson (1992). Johnson posited that there is a distinction between problems that can be solved and dilemmas that must be managed to address unsolvable problems. These dilemmas are represented as interdependent polarity pairs, each with their own positive aspects, or upsides, and negative aspects, or downsides. Using this conceptual lens allows for recognition that there are polarities related to workplace culture that organizations must manage effectively to experience more of the upsides while minimizing the downsides of the polarity pairs. I expound upon this conceptual lens and provide an in-depth description of the connection to the polarities of democracy (Benet, 2022) in Chapter 2.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The theory that grounds this study is the polarities of democracy theory, proposed by Benet (2022). The major theoretical proposition for the utility of the polarities of

democracy in promoting positive social change is “[d]emocracy should be a solution to a problem in both the workplace and in society, the purpose of which is (a) to overcome oppression (our deepest fear), and (b) to build healthy, sustainable, and just organizations and communities (our highest aspirations)” (p. 1). Benet’s model of workplace democracy includes 10 essential values, arranged in five interrelated polarity pairs: freedom and authority, justice and due process, diversity and equality, human rights and communal obligations, and participation and representation. As Benet (2006) posited, “none of these values works well without its paired value...all of these values are essential for the attainment of workplace democracy and...none is sufficient independent of the others” (p 3). I return to these values in Chapter 2, where I explain their interrelationships in greater detail.

I used the polarities of democracy to investigate how Black women in nonprofit national associations of regulatory boards perceive barriers to their ascension to leadership in the workplace. Through the analysis of participants’ responses to in-depth interview questions, my study led me to conclude the ways in which the mismanagement of polarity pair(s) impacted the four other pairs to create barriers to career advancement. I also discovered reasons why the effective management of polarity pairs may help Black women address and overcome these barriers to facilitate their success, and explored the effect of workplace DEI programming on their experiences on the path to leadership.

### **Nature of the Study**

To address the research question, the specific research design included a generic qualitative approach (see Caelli et al., 2003). Caelli et al. posited that a generic qualitative

study focuses on understanding an experience and is “not guided by an explicit or established set of philosophical assumptions in the form of one of the known qualitative methodologies” (p. 2). Since the intent of this current study was to improve the understanding of the perceived barriers faced by Black women who seek leadership positions in nonprofit national associations of regulatory boards, identify what strategies they use to overcome barriers to leadership, and what effect workplace DEI programming has on their experiences on the path to leadership, a generic qualitative approach was appropriate. According to Caelli et al., “research reports aiming for credibility as generic qualitative research must address the following four key areas: 1. the theoretical positioning of the researcher; 2. the congruence between methodology and methods; 3. the strategies to establish rigor; and 4. the analytic lens through which the data are examined” (p. 5). I address each area in greater detail in Chapter 3.

A characteristic data collection method for addressing a qualitative study is in-depth interviewing (Burkholder et al., 2020; Creswell & Poth, 2017; Patton, 2015; Rubin & Rubin, 2012). The interviewing format for my study consisted of individual, in-depth, semistructured interviews with a purposive sample of Black women leaders from multiple nonprofit national associations of regulatory boards. Purposive sampling refers to intentionally selecting participants based on their characteristics, knowledge, experiences, or some other criteria (M. Mason, 2010; Patton, 2015; Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Although Opdenakker (2006) tells us that face-to-face interviewing is the most synchronous mode of communication, allowing for spontaneity in asking follow-up or probing questions, I conducted interviews for my study via a videoconferencing platform

due to geographic constraints and the need to accommodate participants' schedules while maintaining safety and accessibility. Through these interviews, I explored the participants' perceptions of barriers they faced, the strategies they used to overcome the identified barriers, and what effect workplace DEI programming had on their experiences on the path to leadership. The participant responses were coded, both manually and with coding software. Thematic analysis interpreted participants' responses according to constructs from the literature to improve the understanding of the perceptions of Black women on the path to leadership in this industry.

### **Definitions**

*Executive leadership:* Managerial and supervisory positions encompassing, reporting to, or within four management levels of the chief executive officer or other chief officer roles, e.g., chief operating officer, chief administrative officer, chief human resources officer, chief diversity officer, and holding significant decision-making authority.

*Nonprofit national associations of regulatory boards:* Membership-based organizations whose members are occupational and professional licensing boards and commissions in the United States of America which promote public protection through regulation, education, and information sharing (CLEAR, n.d.; FARB, n.d.).

*Workplace DEI programming:* workplace trainings, educational activities, and other events sponsored by an organization's human resources department or DEI office (or other variations of nomenclature) which "are proactive and aim to achieve a diverse

and heterogeneous workforce that appreciates and embraces employee differences-and contributes to the local as well as a global community” (Barak, 2022, p. 11).

### **Assumptions**

A central assumption guiding this current study is that the insights generated may inform meaningful changes in public policy. These insights have the potential to assist policymakers and administrators in making evidence-based decisions, developing targeted interventions, and allocating resources more effectively. Such efforts are critical to addressing the persistent underrepresentation of Black women in leadership roles and to fostering workplaces that are equitable, inclusive, and reflective of democratic values. My secondary assumption is that, through in-depth, individual interviews, I would gain insight into the perceived realities and personal perspectives of Black women leaders at nonprofit national associations of regulatory boards about what barriers they face, what facilitates their success, and how workplace DEI programming affected their experiences on the path to leadership. Rubin & Rubin (2012) recommend using an interview guide in qualitative research as a tool to provide a structured framework for the interview. I expected that, by creating and utilizing an interview guide (see Appendix A), I would administer all interviews in a consistent manner, all participants would respond truthfully, and I would accurately transcribe and code all interviews. Further assumptions for this study addressed four philosophical principles: ontology, epistemology, axiology, and methodology:

**Ontology**

Ontology is the philosophical study of what exists and whether there is one reality (realism) or multiple realities (relativism). This means that the constructs under study related to the barriers faced by Black women in the workplace may be treated as an independent reality or as multiple realities. My assumption is that multiple realities exist for participants.

**Epistemology**

Epistemology is the philosophical study of the scope of knowledge and how it is created. It analyzes how one's knowledge and experience relate to their truths, beliefs, and justifications. Epistemology also focuses on perception and whether what is known is accepted as real. My assumption is that by providing participants an opportunity to voice their perceptions of their reality, they would reveal their beliefs and justify their truths as Black women in the workplace.

**Axiology**

Axiology is the philosophical study of values, judgement, and ethics. The value of pursuing this study is to explore and understand the participants' perceptions and realities of their experiences as Black women in the workplace; therefore, I assumed participants' responses would describe their perceptions and experiences truthfully. When analyzing and coding their responses, I applied objectivity without judgement of right, wrong, good, or bad. Additionally, by using the polarities of democracy theory (Benet, 2022), I tacitly assume that the 10 values contained therein are essential for creating and sustaining democratic workplaces.

## **Methodology**

Methodology is the process used to guide research. Based on my assumptions of ontology, epistemology, and axiology, I devised a generic qualitative study (see: Caelli et al., 2003) to explore Black women leaders' experiences and perceptions in the workplace. My assumption is that by following a semistructured interview protocol with participants, I would gather data on the perceptions of Black women on the barriers to and facilitators of their success, and how workplace DEI programming affected their experiences on the path to leadership. I return to the methodology in greater detail in Chapter 3.

### **Scope and Delimitations**

This study's research problem involves perceptions of Black women leaders at nonprofit national associations of regulatory boards. I only selected Black women leaders, which may delimit the ability to apply the study's findings to other populations. Consequently, results obtained from this study only apply to Black women leaders at nonprofit national associations of regulatory boards.

### **Limitations**

Qualitative studies have several inherent limitations which can affect results (Creswell, 2013). The amount of time spent conducting interviews or differences in the profession or occupation regulated by the national association at which the participant is employed may have impacted their responses. Additionally, since I purposely selected my participants based on their race, gender, and workplace, the sample population was not representative of diverse racial or professional backgrounds. According to Creswell, this decision may have affected my ability to address other influences, such as cultural or

educational background, on participants' experiences and, perhaps, weakened my study. While there is not an established sample size for qualitative studies, M. Mason (2010), O'reilly & Parker (2013), and Saunders et al. (2018) recommend that it be large enough to sufficiently describe the phenomenon of interest, address the research questions, uncover a variety of experiences, and yet, not surpass the point of saturation. By choosing this purposeful, small sample population, saturation may have been reached; however, the diversity of experiences may have inadvertently been narrowed. Moreover, I identify as a Black woman who previously worked as an executive leader at a national association; therefore, my professional experience may have influenced the study. To help with reporting during the research process, Tong et al. (2007) offers directions in the form of a 32-item checklist (see Appendix B) that I referenced for my interviews. By practicing reflexivity and bracketing, I attempted to identify, minimize, eliminate, and manage any other preconceptions or biases that might have influenced the study's outcomes and remained cautiously objective regarding participants' opinions.

### **Significance**

This current study is significant because biases against Black women in the workplace create specific, unique challenges to career advancement and barriers to their ascension to leadership positions, resulting in lower wealth accumulation over their lifetime. My study's approach may contribute to current and future research on Black women in leadership and workplace democracy in nonprofit, public, or private organizations. My study may also contribute to recommendations for changes in public

policy focused on the implementation of accountable, organization-focused workplace DEI programming which may improve conditions for Black women in the workplace.

Addressing the underrepresentation of Black women in leadership positions will require a resolute effort from policymakers and employers to recognize and combat structural racism and sexism in the workplace. Accordingly, a sustained focus on enhancing equitable and inclusive workplace policies may serve as the foundation for shaping a more equitable and inclusive society. Thus, my study is needed to examine the persistent underrepresentation of Black women in executive leadership at nonprofit national associations of regulatory boards, explore the effect of DEI policies and practices on Black women's leadership career aspirations, and contribute to current and future literature on how public policy can bolster support for Black women on the path to executive leadership.

### **Summary**

Throughout Chapter 1, I describe a problem wherein structurally racist, sexist, and elitist workplaces manifest as barriers to Black women's representation in the upper echelons of leadership in nonprofit national associations of regulatory boards. The problem originates within the accepted inequitable norms of American culture and permeates into the innermost layers of organizational culture. Moreover, the social implication is that Black women may experience oppressive work environments which result in undue stress, stunted career advancement, and limited financial growth, perpetuating longstanding gender and racial wealth gaps.

I connect the problem to Benet's (2006, 2012, 2022) polarities of democracy theory which is based, in part, on Johnson's (1992) polarity management model. This theoretical foundation establishes the framework for examining the perceptions of Black women in nonprofit national associations of regulatory boards through the lens of the polarities of democracy theory. On this foundation, I discuss how the effective management of the 10 values that make up the polarities of democracy, arranged as five interrelated pairs, may result in more equitable workplaces for Black women and support public administrators in defending and upholding democracy as a solution to workplace and societal oppression.

In this chapter, I also define workplace DEI programming, nonprofit national associations of regulatory boards, and the state of Black women that my study addresses. I do so by establishing assumptions, reducing the scope of my research with the appropriate delimitations, and identifying limitations. Finally, Chapter 1 reinforces the significance of my study. By connecting to the role of public policy and public administration in contributing to the social good, this current research may inform employers and policymakers and aid in the discovery of opportunities to dismantle structurally oppressive, racist, and sexist workplace culture. Consequently, by creating more diverse, equitable, and inclusive workplaces and elevating Black women to decision-making leadership positions, the promise of democracy may become a reality for more Black women and, eventually, the racial and gender wealth gaps may be closed. In Chapter 2, I describe the extant literature and confirm the gap my study will fill.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

Although limited research on DEI in nonprofit organizations existed, there was a dearth of literature on Black women in nonprofit national associations of regulatory boards and what barriers they face, what facilitates their success, and what experiences they encountered with workplace DEI programming on their path to leadership. Viewing these constructs through the lens of the polarities of democracy (Benet, 2022), I explored how workplace DEI programming impacts the barriers, strategies, and perceptions of Black women leaders at nonprofit national associations of regulatory boards. First, this chapter incorporates a brief discussion of the literature search strategy and a review of the theoretical foundation (including the conceptual and theoretical framework) used for my study. Then, I synthesize foundational and recent studies related to historical demands for social equity, workplace democracy, and reducing disparities in leadership. Next, themes surrounding the unique barriers to leadership ascension faced by Black women, including incongruent narratives, invisibility and hypervisibility, insufficient support, and the impact of workplace DEI programming, are discussed. I close the chapter with a summary and conclusions drawn from my review of the literature.

### **Literature Search Strategy**

The literature search strategy targeted seminal and recent literature on the perceived barriers faced by Black women who seek leadership positions, what strategies they use to overcome these barriers, and what effect workplace DEI programming has on their experiences. Although most of the research cited in the literature review was published within the 5-year range, there was a need to highlight findings from seminal

works that remain germane to the research question and the social constructs identified in my study.

The literature review includes peer-reviewed and scholarly journal articles, published dissertations, books, and government documents located in online databases available through the Walden University Library, including Academic Search Complete, Google Scholar, ScholarWorks, ProQuest Central, Thoreau multi-database Search, ProQuest Dissertations and Theses Global, and Dissertations and Theses at Walden University. Additionally, government documents were retrieved from Google and official government websites of the U.S. Department of Labor and the U.S. EEOC. Furthermore, the literature review references research on workplace democracy, diversity in leadership, public administration, workplace discrimination, bias in career advancement, organizational culture, and workforce diversity. Search terms were *Black women, African American women, intersectionality, leaders, leadership, executive leadership, nonprofit leadership, glass ceiling, concrete ceiling, diversity, equity, and inclusion programs, pay inequity, democracy, workplace democracy, workplace discrimination, workplace bias, oppressive workplace, oppression, mentorship, invisibility, and career advancement.*

### **Theoretical Foundation**

To explore the perceptions of Black women leaders at nonprofit national associations of regulatory boards, I selected the polarities of democracy theory proposed by Benet (2022) as the theoretical framework and the polarity management model (Johnson, 1992) as the conceptual lens through which I viewed my study. I introduce the conceptual framework ahead of the theoretical framework because understanding

Johnson's polarity management model is integral to understanding and grasping the potential of Benet's polarities of democracy theory and how it functions. More importantly, using Johnson's polarity management model allowed for a deeper understanding of the foundation of the polarities of democracy theory and its applicability to understanding the workplace experiences of Black women and addressing dilemmas that involve competing values, perspectives, or tensions, which are often present in complex social issues.

### **Conceptual Framework**

The polarity management model (Johnson, 1992) is the conceptual lens through which I viewed my study of the perceived barriers faced by Black women leaders at nonprofit national associations of regulatory boards, the strategies they use to overcome these barriers, and the effects of workplace DEI programs on their path to leadership. Johnson developed the polarity management model to identify and manage unsolvable dilemmas, or polarities, in the workplace, distinct from problems where a solution exists using either/or thinking. Johnson contended that a workplace polarity exists only if two criteria are present: an ongoing difficulty and the existence of two interdependent poles. Johnson illustrated a workplace polarity as a four-quadrant polarity map representing the two interdependent poles, each divided into an upper quadrant and a lower quadrant. The upper quadrant of each pole represents the positive outcomes, or benefits, of concentrating on that pole, while the lower quadrant represents the negative outcomes, or disadvantages, of concentrating solely on that pole to the neglect of the opposite pole.

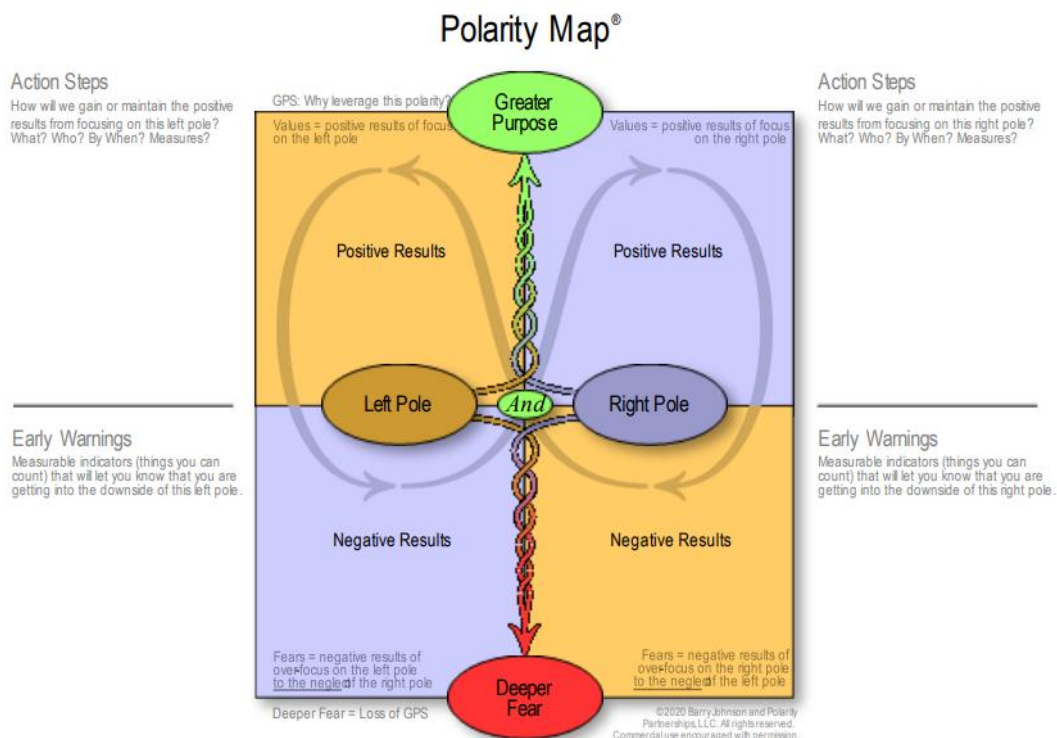
To effectively manage a workplace polarity, Johnson (1992) argued that the benefits and disadvantages of both poles must be examined collectively with the intent of maximizing the upsides and minimizing the downsides. In contrast, Johnson reasoned that failing to recognize or effectively manage a workplace polarity by maximizing the upsides and minimizing the downsides of both poles can lead to a never-ending cycle of unsuccessful efforts to solve an unsolvable dilemma. Furthermore, Johnson emphasized that shifts between poles occur because of a desire to move away from the downside of one pole, or the perceived problem, and move toward the upside of the opposite pole, or the perceived solution. Moreover, Johnson stressed that this shifting from one pole to the other will continue endlessly as two major forces (formerly identified by Johnson as tradition-bearers and crusaders) battle in their desire to either uphold the status quo or effect change. Thus, as Johnson underscored, it is necessary to understand the “paradoxical relationship between the poles” and use a “both/and” approach to manage the polarity (p. 23).

Figure 1 below is a map of a framework to visualize Johnson’s (1992) polarity management. The x-axis represents the polarity pair. The y-axis represents the upsides (positive) and downsides (negative) of each value. An infinity loop represents the desired state of polarity management-leveraging the values to maximize the upsides and minimize the downsides of both values. The “and” in the middle indicates the interdependence of the values. The top end of the y-axis identifies the “greater purpose” of maximizing the upsides of both values while the bottom end identifies the “deeper fear” of focusing on one value to the neglect of the other. The outer areas of the upper

quadrants indicate the action steps necessary to maintain positive results while the outer areas of the lower quadrants show the early warning signs of a negative shift.

**Figure 1**

*A Framework to Visualize Johnson's (1992) Polarity Management and the Infinity Loop*



*Note.* Image reproduced with permission of Polarity Partnerships LLC and the Polarities of Democracy Institute.

### Theoretical Framework

The polarities of democracy theory proposed by Benet (2022) forms the theoretical framework for this current study. The theory provides a strategy for how social change work can be evaluated, advances a unifying definition of democracy, and specifies the 10 values (freedom, authority, justice, due process, diversity, equality,

human rights, communal obligations, participation, and representation) that must be effectively managed to achieve the promise of democracy as a solution to oppression. Additionally, Benet contended that each value must be paired with its interrelated value, all five polarity pairs are necessary, and no lone pair is sufficient to support the attainment of workplace democracy. Moreover, Benet maintained that all five polarity pairs are interrelated. Lastly, Benet posited that for workplace democracy to be realized, and, ultimately, the promise of societal democracy achieved for all people, all 10 values must be leveraged effectively to maximize the upsides and minimize the downsides of all five pairs. Figure 2 visually represents the polarities of democracy arranged in their value pairs (Benet, et al., 2025).

### **Figure 2**

*Polarities of Democracy Theory as an Either/or Solution to Oppression, With the Ten Values Arranged in Their Polarity Relationships*



*Note.* Image reproduced with permission of the Polarities of Democracy Institute.

Benet (2022) also argued that all five polarity pairs are interrelated and no lone pair is sufficient to support the attainment of workplace democracy. Additionally, Benet

posited that all 10 values, in their interrelated polarity pairs, must be leveraged effectively to maximize the upsides and minimize the downsides of all five pairs for workplace democracy to be realized. Moreover, Benet theorized that achieving workplace democracy can contribute to attaining the promise of societal democracy for all people.

Benet (2006, 2012) initially constructed the polarities of democracy theory by drawing on five models of research related to the workplace and/or democratic principles: occupational stress (Karasek & Theorell, 1990), participation and workplace democracy (Bernstein, 1976), worker control and empowerment (Blake & Mouton, 1987), concepts of ownership (Ellerman, 1990), and general democratic theories (Butts, 1980). In formulating the theory, Benet also discussed challenges with defining democracy in general and highlighted the myriad barriers to full democratization of workplaces and society at large. The discourse evolved to explore various relationships: between workplace democracy and occupational stress, including how and why occupational stress disproportionately affects marginalized populations (women, people of color, and lower-waged workers); the relationship between workplace democracy and societal democracy, particularly emphasizing opposing arguments regarding whether efforts to address occupational stress should be focused on the individual or the organization/community; and, the relationship between human consciousness, human agency, and the evolution of democratic values.

Benet then examined the five polarity pairs in detail: freedom and authority, justice and due process, diversity and equality, human rights and communal obligations,

and participation and representation. Each of the value pairs includes a corresponding Basic Map (Benet, et al., 2025). About these maps, Benet (2022) stated,

Basic Maps represent just one example of the potential positive and negative aspects of each of the 10 values that make up the five Polarities of Democracy pairs. They should not be thought of as the only possible positive or negative aspects of the 10 values contained in the theory. Nor should the higher purpose and deeper fear associated with an individual pair be thought of as the only possibility. Students reading my original dissertation research, or conducting their own research, can find dozens if not hundreds of other examples of positive and negative aspects that could be used in the appropriate quadrants of each pair along with an appropriate higher purpose and deeper fear (p. 21).

### ***Freedom and Authority***

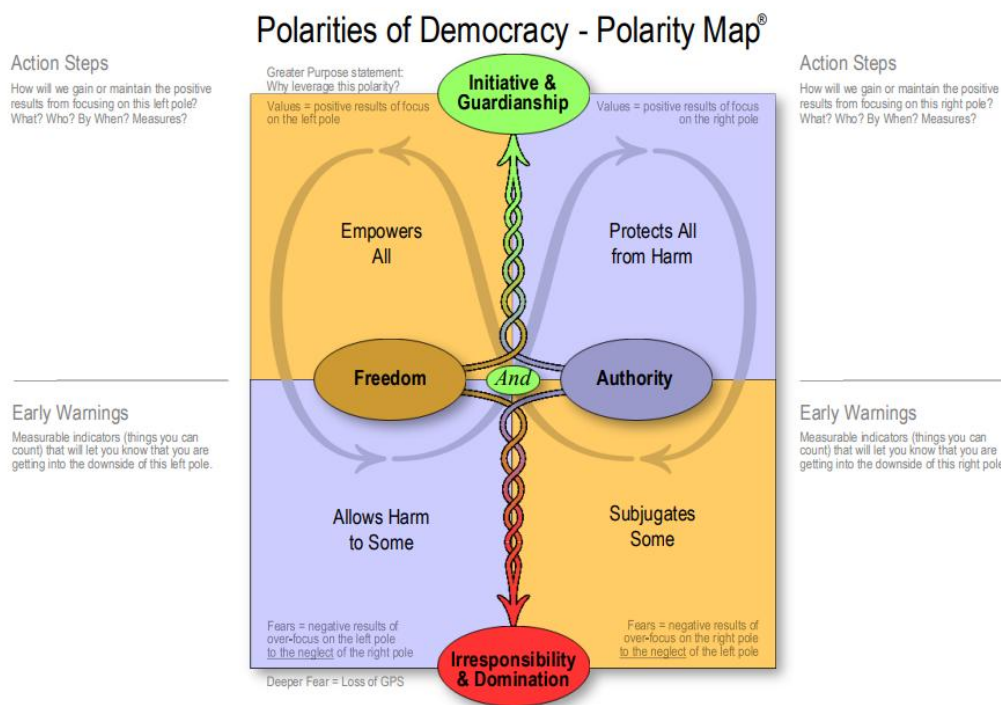
According to Benet (2006), when the benefits of effectively leveraging the upsides of the freedom and authority polarity pair are realized, specifically the benefits of a *legitimate* use of authority, workers are (a) empowered to think, act, and learn independently to assert their needs, (b) expected to be treated in a dignified and respectful manner, and (c) enabled to actively contribute to the decision-making process. In this state, organizations can make decisions in the best interest of people, there is increased trust between employees and management, and an overall improvement in productivity and effectiveness follows. Conversely, Benet posited that the abuse of authority engenders the downsides of freedom and authority—oppressive workplaces, inequitable treatment of workers (particularly by race, class, and/or gender), decreased productivity,

and mutual distrust. Moreover, those wielding illegitimate power can themselves be negatively impacted by paranoia and a susceptibility to corruption when an overfocus on personal advantage leads to the self-absorbed, paternalistic behaviors observed in both the workplace and society (Bui, 2019; Brown, 2022; Carbajal, 2018; Fulton et al., 2019; Heckler, 2019; Young et al., 2021).

Figure 3 is a Basic Map to visually identify the positive and negative aspects of the freedom and authority value pair. The two quadrants above the x-axis identify the positive aspects, or upsides, of focusing on freedom and authority: empowering all and protecting all from harm, respectively. The two quadrants below the x-axis identify the negative aspects, or downsides, of focusing on either freedom or authority to the neglect of the other: allowing harm to some and subjugating some, respectively. The infinity loop represents the desired state: maximizing the upsides and minimizing the downsides of both values, thereby reaching the “greater purpose” of initiative and guardianship while diminishing the “deeper fear” of irresponsibility and domination.

**Figure 3**

*Polarity Map for Identifying the Positive and Negative Aspects of the Freedom and Authority Polarity Pair of the Polarities of Democracy's Values*



*Note.* Image reproduced with permission of Polarity Partnerships LLC and the Polarities of Democracy Institute.

### ***Justice and Due Process***

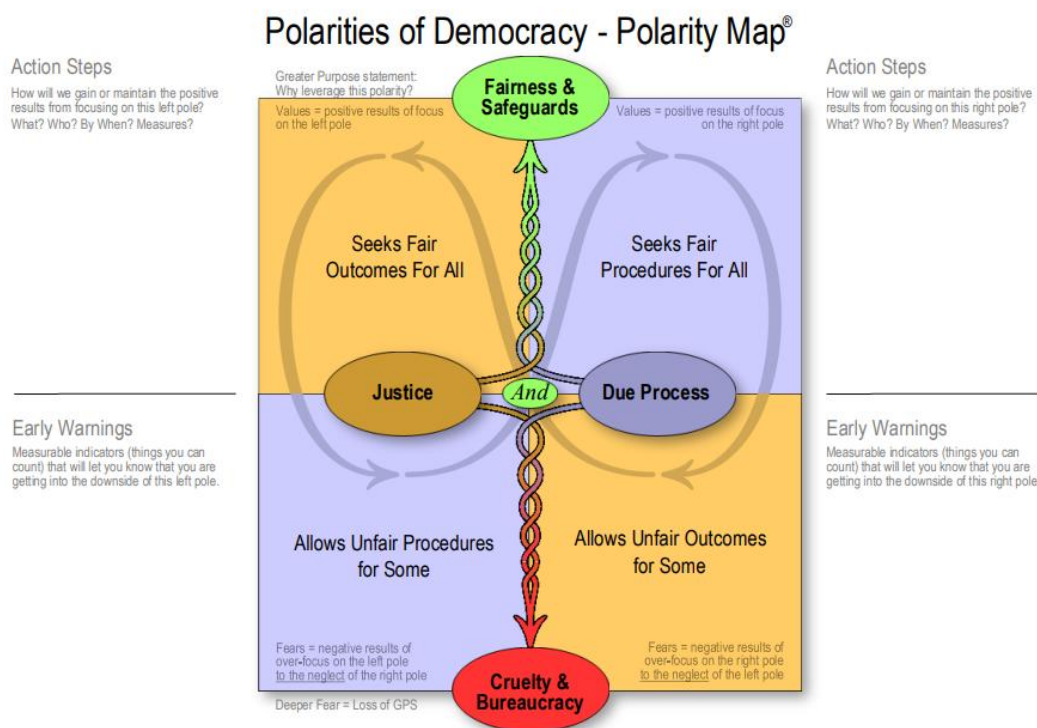
Justice and due process exist as a polarity of function, whereby due process functions as the process of pursuing (doing) justice (being). Benet (2006) posited that the effective management of the upsides of justice and due process—harnessing power inequities, overcoming oppression, and protecting human rights—benefits both the individual and society. In contrast, Benet argued that the downsides of both justice and due process occur due to a lack of the other value, emerging as injustice and undue

process, respectively. This is particularly evident in law enforcement and the judicial system. Benet suggested that the effective management of justice and due process in the workplace is demonstrated by limiting stringent hierarchical power inequities, eliminating oppressive talent management systems and behaviors, protecting worker's rights, and, ultimately, improving worker motivation and productivity.

Figure 4 is a Basic Map to visually identify the positive and negative aspects of the justice and due process value pair. The two quadrants above the x-axis identify the positive aspects, or upsides, of focusing on justice and due process: seeking fair outcomes for all and seeking fair procedures for all, respectively. The two quadrants below the x-axis identify the negative aspects, or downsides, of focusing on either justice and due process to the neglect of the other: allowing unfair procedures for some and allowing unfair outcomes for some, respectively. The infinity loop represents the desired state: maximizing the upsides and minimizing the downsides of both values, thereby reaching the "greater purpose" of fairness and safeguards while diminishing the "deeper fear" of cruelty and bureaucracy.

**Figure 4**

*Polarity Map for Identifying the Positive and Negative Aspects of the Justice and Due Process Polarity Pair of the Polarities of Democracy's Values*



*Note.* Image reproduced with permission of Polarity Partnerships LLC and the Polarities of Democracy Institute.

### ***Diversity and Equality***

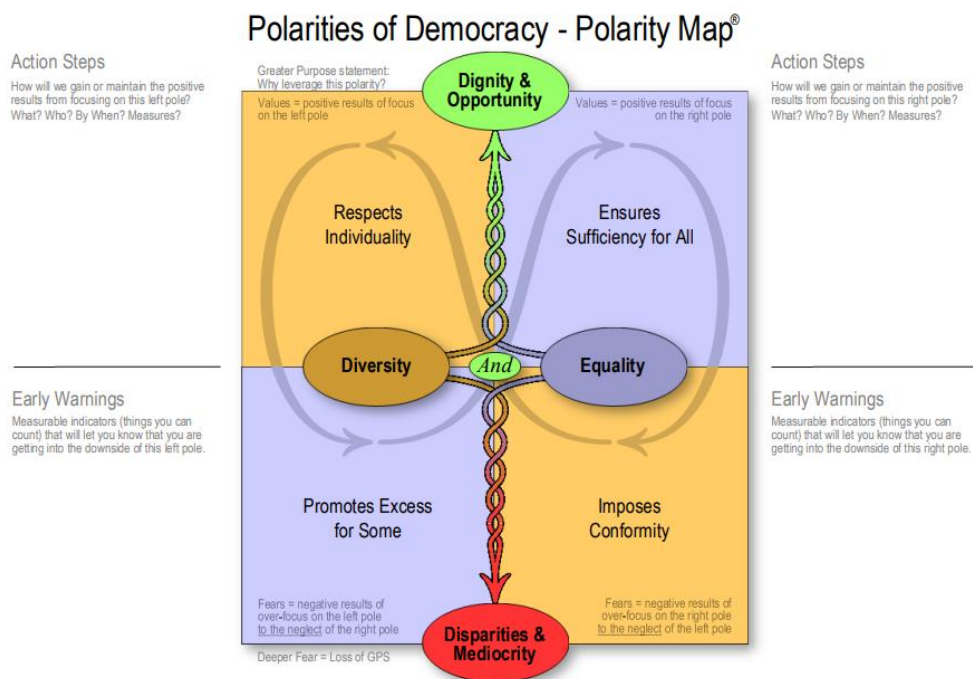
Benet (2006) argued that the successful management of the upsides of the diversity and equality polarity pair protect individual rights and beliefs and is “a motivating force for creativity, hard work, diligence, competitiveness, and commitment to excellence...” (p. 180). Benet also posited that the downsides of the diversity and equality polarity pair foster dominating, hierarchical workplace and societal structures, oppression, and occupational stress, stifling individual creativity. Benet

suggested that the effective management of diversity and equality in the workplace is demonstrated by limiting stringent hierarchical power inequities, eliminating oppressive workplace cultures, protecting worker's rights, and, ultimately, improving worker motivation and creativity. Benet also contended that many American workplaces promote socioeconomic diversity for some (those with power and privilege) to the neglect of equality for others.

Figure 5 is a Basic Map to visually identify the positive and negative aspects of the diversity and equality value pair. The two quadrants above the x-axis identify the positive aspects, or upsides, of focusing on diversity and equality: respecting individuality and ensuring sufficiency for all, respectively. The two quadrants below the x-axis identify the negative aspects, or downsides, of focusing on either diversity and equality to the neglect of the other: promoting excess for some and imposing conformity, respectively. The infinity loop represents the desired state: maximizing the upsides and minimizing the downsides of both values, thereby reaching the "greater purpose" of dignity and opportunity for all while diminishing the "deeper fear" of disparities and mediocrity.

**Figure 5**

*Polarity Map for Identifying the Positive and Negative Aspects of the Diversity and Equality Polarity Pair of the Polarities of Democracy's Values*



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### ***Human Rights and Communal Obligations***

Benet (2006) theorized that the human rights and communal obligations polarity pair exists as a cluster of six reciprocal categories of rights and obligations of and between individuals, organizations, and the community. The six reciprocal categories are:

(a) the individual's obligation to the organization; (b) the individual's obligation to the community; (c) the organization's obligation to the individual; (d) the organization's obligation to the community; (e) the community's obligation to the individual; and (f) the

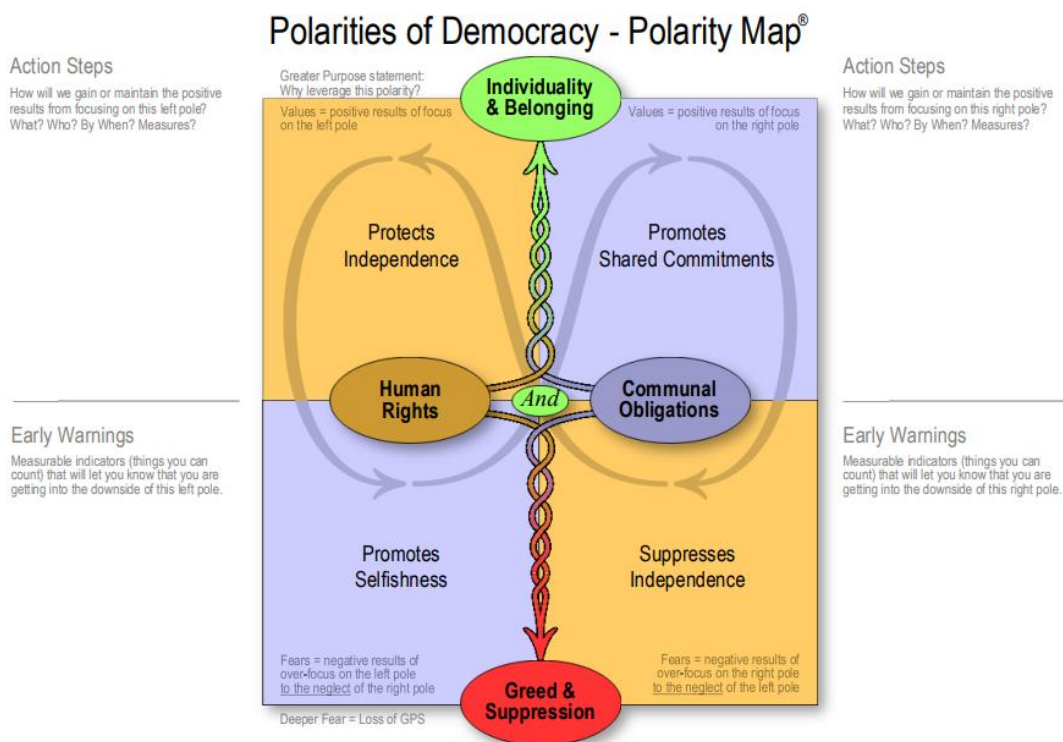
community's obligation to the organization (p. 221). Benet contended that these rights are essential to cultivating the developmental needs of the human species, namely self-actualization and self-governance. Although the U.S. Bill of Rights and The Universal Declaration of Human Rights established myriad individual rights and protections that justifiably extend to employment settings, Benet argued that these rights and protections must be supported by an external source to be realized in the workplace. Furthermore, to advance workplace democracy, those with the power to support (or disregard) these rights in the workplace (e.g., chief executive officers, chief human resource officers) must choose to embrace and actively engage their obligation to uphold workplace rights. Thus, Benet contended that the effective management of the human rights and communal obligations polarity must be adopted and supported at the highest leadership levels and demonstrated in the workplace as a shared commitment between the organization and the individual workers.

Figure 6 is a Basic Map to visually identify the positive and negative aspects of the human rights and communal obligations value pair. The two quadrants above the x-axis identify the positive aspects, or upsides, of focusing on human rights and communal obligations: protecting independence and promoting shared commitments, respectively. The two quadrants below the x-axis identify the negative aspects, or downsides, of focusing on either human rights and communal obligations to the neglect of the other: promoting selfishness and suppressing independence, respectively. The infinity loop represents the desired state: maximizing the upsides and minimizing the downsides of

both values, thereby reaching the “greater purpose” of individuality and belonging while diminishing the “deeper fear” of greed and suppression.

**Figure 6**

*Polarity Map for Identifying the Positive and Negative Aspects of the Human Rights and Communal Obligations Polarity Pair of the Polarities of Democracy’s Values*



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### ***Participation and Representation***

Benet (2012) theorized that the participation and representation polarity pair exists as a hybrid polarity, one of function and of meaning. As such, representation serves as both a means of strengthening participation and the ability to disengage from

participation for regenerative activities. Benet contended that participation is necessary for individuals to gain control over how they use their skills in the workplace to manage their work and to avoid occupational stress and burnout. In society, namely politics, individuals make decisions on who they wish to represent their needs and demands by participating in the governance of their community, state, and nation. This participation is crucial for the functioning of a democratic society and can be accomplished through various means, including, but not limited to, voting in elections, staying informed about political issues, engaging in civil discourse, community involvement, communicating with elected officials, protesting and advocacy work, and educating others. However, participation absent adequate representation can be stifled by systemic “power-over” structures, leading instead to excessive or chaotic activity. In extreme cases, such dynamics can foster collective paranoia or mob mentality, as evidenced by the insurrection at the U.S. Capitol on January 6, 2021, and often occur without yielding tangible benefits (Lorentz II & Saks McManaway, 2022; Mann, 1977; Tsesis, 2022).

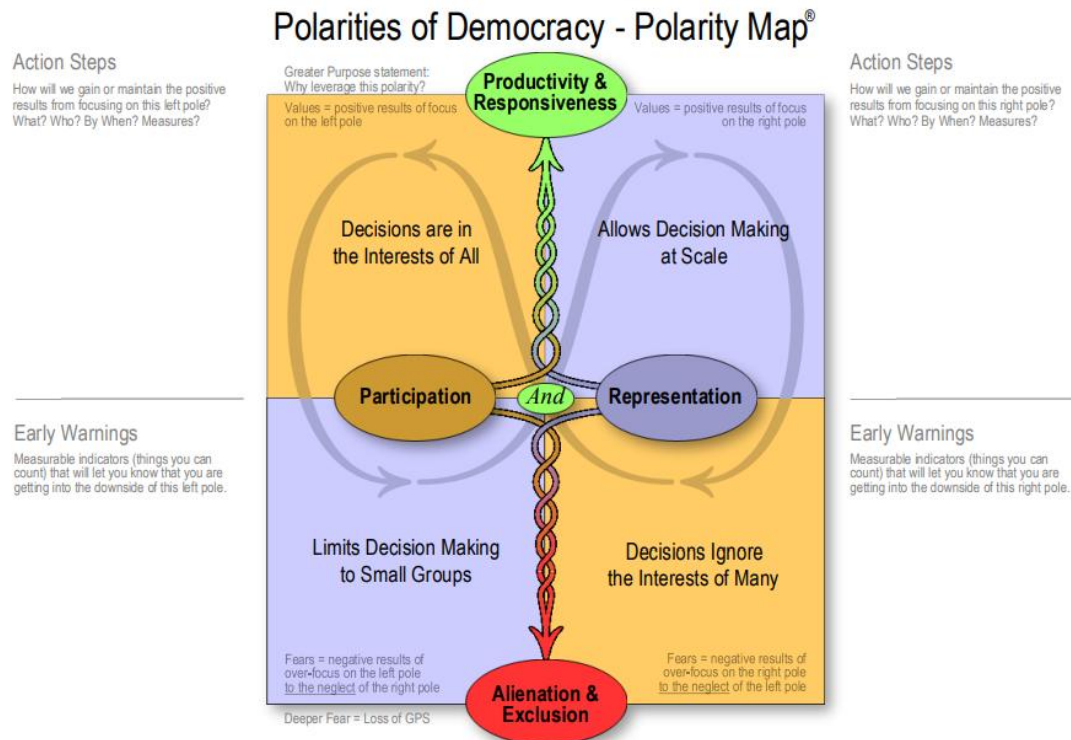
Similarly, Benet (2012) argued that representation provides workers the opportunity to be involved in decision-making in the workplace, contributing to increased worker self-confidence and organizational commitment. Benet also posited that representation allows for regeneration—a time to reflect, recharge, and refuel energy stores by stepping away and focusing on non-work participative efforts such as social interaction. Additionally, Benet argued that representation contributes to more diverse voices and experiences involved in policy decision-making. Yet, absent adequate participation, representation can be performative, and regeneration can linger unchecked,

leading to an eventual loss of interest and overall effect. Thus, the effective management of the participation and representation polarity pair is demonstrated in the workplace by worker's active and welcomed involvement in organizational decisions that shape organizational culture. The effective management of the participation and representation polarity pair is demonstrated in society by individuals' active and welcomed involvement in political activities that shape their communities.

Figure 7 is a Basic Map to visually identify the positive and negative aspects of the participation and representation value pair. The two quadrants above the x-axis identify the positive aspects, or upsides, of focusing on participation and representation: decisions are in the interests of all and allowing decision making at scale, respectively. The two quadrants below the x-axis identify the negative aspects, or downsides, of focusing on either participation and representation to the neglect of the other: limiting decision making to small groups and decisions ignoring the interests of many, respectively. The infinity loop represents the desired state: maximizing the upsides and minimizing the downsides of both values, thereby reaching the "greater purpose" of productivity and responsiveness while diminishing the "deeper fear" of alienation and exclusion.

**Figure 7**

*Polarity Map for Identifying the Positive and Negative Aspects of the Participation and Representation Polarity Pair of the Polarities of Democracy's Values*



*Note.* Image reproduced with permission of Polarity Partnerships LLC and the Polarities of Democracy Institute.

### ***Other Models of Democratic Concepts***

Benet (2006) performed an in-depth comparison of the polarities of democracy model with other models of democratic concepts from five broad categories of workplace and general democratic literature introduced earlier, namely, occupational stress (Karasek & Theorell, 1990), participation (Bernstein, 1976), worker control and empowerment (Blake & Mouton, 1987), concepts of ownership (Ellerman, 1990), and general

democratic theories (Butts, 1980). The polarities of democracy was shown to complement and strengthen each model. The polarities of democracy theory was further examined and found to be consistent with previously identified face and content validity criteria, to have implications for strengthening adult education strategies, especially for eliminating systemic oppression, attaining diversity, equity, and inclusion in the workplace, and achieving the promise of democracy for all people.

Benet (2006, 2012, 2022) posited that democracy is a solution to the problem of oppression. The principal proposition for using the polarities of democracy model is the identification and implementation of opportunities to manage workplace dilemmas that exist to overcome oppressive workplace cultures. Additionally, Benet espoused workplace democracy as a solution intended to “reduce or eliminate...the disparate negative impacts of occupational stress based on race, gender, and class...” (2006, p. 66). Accordingly, I used the polarities of democracy theory as the foundation to identify and analyze the perceptions of my study participants. I then drew on my analysis to determine which polarities of democracy are not being managed effectively, potentially manifesting as the source of perceived barriers for Black women who seek career advancement. This information may help me, and, in turn, public administrators, understand how workplace polarities can be leveraged effectively to maximize the upsides and minimize the downsides to support workplace democracy and reduce or eliminate workplace bias and occupational stress. My study also may reveal possible implications of strengthening workplace DEI programming to overcome oppressive workplace cultures and advance Black women into leadership roles. Additionally, the findings of my study may contribute

to potential ideas for changes in public policies to address systemic racism, strengthen anti-discrimination laws, and promote DEI in all sectors.

While there is a concise yet informative body of literature in which researchers have applied the polarities of democracy theory as a theoretical framework to explore and understand various social problems (e.g., Clarke, 2019; Hayes, 2019; McDaniel, 2019; Moran, 2022; Oluwadele, 2021; Nalumango, 2019; Sanchez, 2021; Strouble, 2015), none of the 30 studies to date have specifically explored the perceptions of Black women on the path to leadership. However, of these recent studies, McDaniel's (2019), Oluwadele's (2021), and Sanchez's (2021) qualitative studies are most closely related to this current study. McDaniel (2019) explored the effects of discrimination on the lived experiences of young Arab Americans after the 9/11 attacks and, focusing on the diversity and equality polarity pair, found that participants' reports of oppressive workplace environments were most consistent with an undemocratic society. Oluwadele (2021) explored Black Canadian immigrants' perceptions of workplace diversity management and, focusing on the diversity and equality polarity pair, found that participants' reports of diversity issues being addressed to the neglect of issues of equality. Sanchez (2021) examined the underrepresentation of Hispanics in the Illinois state government and, focusing on the participation and representation polarity pair, found that Hispanics felt excluded from fully experiencing the democratic process within their career pursuits within public administration. These findings are consistent with Benet's (2022) assertion that the effective management of the polarities of democracy can be used to address myriad

causes of social oppression and work toward making the promise of democracy a reality for all people.

These previous studies benefited my study by providing examples of how the effective, or ineffective, management of any of the paired values that comprise the polarities of democracy may contribute to the successes achieved and/or overcome the challenges faced by Black women in the workplace. Additionally, the findings of these previous studies benefited my study by highlighting the gaps in scholarship and practice addressing Black women's social equity challenges in public administration (see: Berry-James, et al., 2021; Hall, 2022) and their social capital challenges in society (see: Strouble, 2015).

### **Literature Review**

Despite recent global movements calling for social justice and a heightened focus on workplace DEI programs, longstanding systemic inequities facing Black women remain firmly intact, reigniting historical demands for social equity. Phelps (1972) introduced the statistical theory of racism and sexism which argued that Black people and women experience discrimination in the workplace because they are viewed as less qualified than their respective White and male counterparts. Expanding on this idea, Crenshaw (1989) reasoned that, due to Black women's intersecting identities within two historically ignored communities, racialized and misogynistic attitudes toward Black women in the workplace are deeply ingrained and amplified. Morgan (2020) reported findings consistent with Crenshaw's (1989) reasoning. Indeed, the plight of Black women's career advancement, and the resulting underrepresentation in executive

leadership roles, appears to have persisted over generations in nearly every industry. Thus, managing this dilemma, in part, may involve an intensified commitment to prioritize the identification of racist and sexist public policies and dismantle oppressive systemic structures that uphold policies which promote both workplace and societal inequities for marginalized populations, particularly Black women (Berry-James et al., 2021; Michener & Brower, 2020; Pandey et al., 2022).

### **Historical Demands for Social Equity**

Since the Civil War, there have been many strides toward achieving societal democracy. During the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, several significant legal and political advances were enacted: the Thirteenth Amendment (1865) outlawed slavery, the Fourteenth Amendment (1868) codified citizenship for Black individuals and guaranteed equal protection under the law, thereby extending the provisions of the Civil Rights Act of 1866, and the Fifteenth Amendment (1870), granted Black men the legal right to vote (Library of Congress, n.d.). It was not until 1920 that the passage of the Nineteenth Amendment granted women the right to vote. Although these later amendments were intended to place all American-born Black people on equal footing with White Americans, Berry & Gross (2020) reported that Black women have continued to face discrimination, bias, and prejudice, particularly from White women with whom they formerly had an allegiance during the women's suffrage movement of the late 1800's and early 1900's (Wilson & Russell-Cole, 1996).

Before contemporary scholarship on race, gender, class, and democratic ideals within American organizations highlighted the unique obstacles, challenges, and

disparities Black women experience in the workplace, early literature recognized deep-rooted, inequitable, and undemocratic societal practices which created an environment where discrimination against Black people flourished. At the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, DuBois (1903) wrote of the plight of the Black man in American society:

The history of the American Negro is the history of this strife—this longing to attain self-conscious manhood, to merge his double self into a better and truer self. In this merging he wishes neither of the older selves to be lost. He would not Africanize America, for America has too much to teach the world and Africa. He would not bleach his Negro soul in a flood of white Americanism, for he knows that Negro blood has a message for the world. He simply wishes to make it possible for a man to be both a Negro and an American, without being cursed and spit upon by his fellows, without having the doors of Opportunity closed roughly in his face (p. 4).

DuBois (1903) coined the term “double consciousness” to describe the challenge African Americans experienced in their attempts to fit into a white society (p. 3). Likewise, Addams (1905) called out racism and classism, but also noted how the effects of gender and occupational prejudices existed interdependently with race and class prejudices. Addams also argued that the prejudices that existed in society were immoral, proposing that every contributing member of society had an ethical obligation to uphold democracy and promote diversity through self-reflection and active learning about how to help others live a better life. These early scholars and social activists understood the detrimental effects of slavery on Black people and how oppression meant to hinder Black people

impeded the promise of a truly democratic society for all people. Yet, as Hannah-Jones (2021) argued, more than a century later Black America is still fighting against the same prejudices, discrimination, bias, and undemocratic practices, underscoring how pre-Civil War racist ideology continues to oppress Black people and how “the inhumanity visited on Black people by every generation of white America justified the inhumanity of the past and the inequality of the present” (p. 32).

### **Workplace Democracy**

Workplace democratization has long been a topic of civil discourse for many years (Bernstein, 1976). Although women’s roles have increased significantly in the workforce since the 1970’s, West (2004) argued that workplaces are often a microcosm reflective of the societal climate; therefore, the attitudes and behaviors in the workplace follow those of the public at large. Correspondingly, Hartman & Barber (2020) and Young et al. (2019) reported that attitudes and behaviors towards women in the corporate workplace have remained unfavorable and women were more likely than men to experience incivility in the workplace. Expanding on this point, Moon (2013) contended that, by ostracizing Black women and labelling them as problematic, both racism and sexism are perpetuated in the government workplace, albeit more subtly. Likewise, Nickels & Leach (2021) found that nonprofit organizations “are...socially constructed ... white space ... [and] not immune to the oppressive forces that shape institutional structures, decision-making, and organizational culture” (p. 517). In essence, incivility, and racist and/or sexist attitudes and behaviors may impede democratic processes in any workplace and, as a result, limit Black women’s advancement to decision-making

leadership positions. Thus, the disparity in leadership in general, and in the nonprofit space, specifically, continues to persist (Bowers, 2021; Davis & Sanchez-Hucles, 2010; Feeney & Camarena, 2021; Heckler, 2019).

### **Disparities in Nonprofit Leadership**

While many nonprofit organizations and associations, whether social service or professional, respectively, employ a workforce that is predominantly made up of women and people of color, leadership continues to be White male dominated (Biu, 2019; Heckler, 2019; Mangual, 2019; Thomas-Breitfeld & Kunreuther, 2017). In examining the career trajectory of nonprofit leaders, research has shown that women have pursued leadership as often as men but often encountered a “glass ceiling” (Carbajal, 2018; Field et al., 2020, Jauhar & Lau, 2018; Norris et al., 2018). Similarly, scholars have found that Black women who aspired to leadership roles encountered a “concrete ceiling” (Bowers, 2021; Cook, 2020; Fulton et al., 2019; Kubu, 2018, Morgan, 2020). Even more intriguing is the finding that Black women are often brought into middle management roles with high expectations, but when they hint at their own leadership aspirations, they encounter resistance in the form of, what Thomas et al. (2013) coined, the “pet to threat” phenomenon (Morgan, 2020; Sales et al., 2019; Thomas-Breitfeld, 2017). Indeed, Black women are interested in and prepared for attaining leadership positions in the nonprofit space; however, they have encountered many barriers to this aim, whether because they are women, because they are Black, or, more often, because they are ambitious Black women. Still, despite the oppressive marginalization and obstructive barriers placed in

their way, Sims & Carter (2022) argued that Black women should be encouraged to pursue leadership at every turn, from the schoolyard to the workplace.

### **Barriers Faced by Black Women in the Workplace**

Cirincione-Ulezi (2020) found that Black women continue to experience barriers to career advancement in the forms of bias, bullying, harassment, and microaggressions. Williams (2020) defined microaggressions as “deniable acts of racism that reinforce pathological stereotypes and inequitable social norms” (p. 4). Tran (2021) and Weiner et al. (2021) reported findings consistent with findings in Cirincione-Ulezi’s (2020) study. Both Tran’s (2021) and Weiner’s (2021) research found that both racial stereotyping and gender discrimination were the basis for microaggressions toward Black women and inhibitors to their career advancement. Likewise, Ammerman & Groysberg (2022) found that Black women experience biases in the workplace but also highlighted three distinct manifestations of bias which differed from those suggested by Cirincione-Ulezi (2020), Tran (2021), and Weiner et al. (2021). Ammerman & Groysberg (2022) discussed how unfair assumptions, unhelpful attention, and unequal access have the potential to derail the career trajectory of mid-career Black women. Indeed, research has shown that many biases and discriminatory experiences are unique to Black women, stemming from others’ insinuations that Black women’s career aspirations, responses to situations in the workplace, e.g., the pervasive “angry Black woman” trope (Liao et al., 2020; Motro et al., 2022), or how they wear their natural hair (Dawson et al., 2019; Donahoo & Smith, 2022; Pitts, 2021; White & White, 1995) are incongruent with accepted “professional” or “executive presence” norms. In fact, in the last 50 years, no other race, gender, or class of

people has been expected to continually defend their acceptability in the workplace, whether due to their choice of hairstyle, how they interact with others, or with whom they associate, more than Black women (Berry & Gross, 2020; Davis, 1982; hooks, 1990; Lorde, 1995; White & White, 1995).

### *Unfair Assumptions and Incongruent Narratives*

Building on the work of previous scholars (e.g., Crenshaw, 1989; Davis, 1982; Higginbotham, 1990/1995; hooks, 1990; Lorde, 1995), studies over the last decade have maintained the argument that, due to their intersecting identities, Black women must simultaneously contend with racism and sexism in the workplace (Attell et al., 2017; Bui, 2019; Curtis, 2017; Krivkovitch et al., 2022; Moon, 2013). For example, Sales et al. (2019) found that, because of race, Black women are viewed as incompetent or lacking ambition, while at the same time because of gender, Black women are viewed as weak or meek. In contrast, Liao et al. (2020) found that because of the pervasive “strong Black woman” schema, Black women are viewed as difficult or stubborn. These findings align with Higginbotham’s (1990/1995) argument that Black women “are addressed either as tangents to the ‘generic’ woman or as the ‘exceptional’ woman...” (p. 481).

Unquestionably, with every aspect of their existence profiled or policed, this incongruence in the narrative can be detrimental, leaving Black women feeling overworked, undervalued, and unappreciated, and less likely than their White and male counterparts to be promoted to leadership roles. From the research, it appears that perhaps this dilemma is consistent with the mismanagement of the justice and due process polarity pair (Benet, 2022). Hence, Black women face unique barriers to career

advancement when battling inequality regimes in the workplace and, therefore, must resort to employing unique strategies to overcome these oppressive, higher standards of professionalism on their path to leadership. (Brown, 2022; Chance, 2021).

### ***Unhelpful Attention, Invisibility, and Hypervisibility***

Black women are often forced to straddle between expressing their authentic identity and altering their personality, dress, and/or actions to conform to their professional persona. Liao et al. (2020) and Motro et al. (2022) found that Black women who show up as their authentic selves and challenge the status quo become hypervisible and labelled as angry or hostile. Motro et al. (2022) further argued that, because this behavior is often attributed to Black women's personality, evaluations of their performance, leadership ability, and career advancement opportunities are negatively impacted. Conversely, Higginbotham (1994) introduced the "politics of respectability [that] emphasized reform of individual behavior and attitudes both as a goal in itself and as a strategy for reform of the entire structural system of American race relations" (p. 187). Advancing this idea, Jones & Shorter-Gooden (2003) and Smith et al. (2019) reported that Black women often maneuver around the workplace by "shifting" their identities to avoid unwelcome attention. Furthering this point, Dickens & Chavez (2018) and Dickens et al. (2019) found that Black women employ "code switching" behaviors to minimize scrutiny, stigmatization, and stereotyping associated with discrimination and bias due to their intersecting identities. However, both Dickens et al. (2019) and Smith et al. (2019) reported that these conforming behaviors often prove stressful to maintain and can render Black women invisible and overlooked, potentially resulting in stalled career

advancement. Hence, whether Black women speak up or fade into the background, their actions and behaviors can either be targets for unhelpful attention or being overlooked, either of which may have an adverse effect on their everyday work experiences, physical and emotional health, and leadership trajectory. From the research, it appears that perhaps this dilemma is consistent with the mismanagement of the participation and representation polarity pair (Benet, 2022). Yet, research has shown that Black women have fewer opportunities to network or receive support to progress their professional development, mental health, and career aspirations (Cirincione-Ulezi, 2020; Johnson & Fournillier, 2021; Rho & Lee, 2018).

### ***Unequal Access and Insufficient Support***

Several studies have found that while Black women are ambitious and seek to ascend into leadership, many have reported insufficient support, mentorship, and networking opportunities in their workplaces (Fritz & van Knippenberg, 2020; Morgan, 2020; Rho & Lee, 2018). In further analyzing this dilemma, Brown (2022) and Chance (2021) also found that persistent and systemic organizational issues, including discriminatory policies, non-standardized promotion practices, and the lack of supervisor coaching or recognition, were contributory to stifling Black women's career growth. Moreover, workplace promotions may be closed opportunities available only to those "in the know" or in the right circles. From the research, it appears that perhaps this dilemma is consistent with the mismanagement of the diversity and equality polarity pair (Benet, 2022). Thus, without access to mentors, advocates, or networking opportunities afforded

their male or White female counterparts, Black women may be excluded from certain opportunities and may not experience the same potential for advancement.

### **Workplace Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Programming**

Affirmative action programs of the 1960's were designed to both remedy and prohibit discriminatory practices in the workplace. However, as West (1993/2017) argued,

[g]iven the history of this country, it is a virtual certainty that without affirmative action racial and sexual discrimination would return with a vengeance. Even if affirmative action...contributes to the persistence of racist perceptions in the workplace, without affirmative action...racism in the workplace would persist anyway (p. 64).

Osei-Kofi et al. (2010) posited that a social justice lens should be applied to workplace DEI initiatives to promote sustainability. Among the recent literature, Brown (2022), Hall (2022), and Pandey, et al. (2022) underscored how many leaders, feigning commitment to addressing workplace discrimination in the aftermath of 2020's social justice movements, focused their workplace DEI programming efforts on staff sentiment and organizational culture, rather than on dismantling racist and misogynistic systems of oppression that disproportionately affect Black women. Portocarrero & Carter (2022) also pointed out that current diversity initiatives evolved from affirmative action programs that may have already exacerbated negative attitudes toward Black women in the workplace.

Interestingly, while Black women were making headway on the front lines and at the helm of many grassroots social justice movements, workplace DEI initiatives were not

affording them the same satisfaction. Thus, many corporate workplace DEI programs, steeped in human resource management ideology, failed to make the impact needed for substantive or sustainable change in the representation of Black women in leadership roles (Combs, et al., 2019; Grissom, 2018; Krivkovitch, 2022).

D. P. Mason (2020) and Mor Barak, et al. (2022) reported that many workplace DEI programs were established as performative acts by leaders and not intended to challenge the status quo. Mor Barak, et al. (2022) also noted that many organizations placed the responsibility for diversity programming on Black women, e.g., as facilitators of employee resource groups, without adequate resources or training, additional compensation, or assurance of advancement. Essentially, Black women were being tasked with making the change they wanted to see happen. Consequently, without the full support of organizational leadership, sufficient and dedicated financial resources, and adequate training for diversity leaders, these programs lacked the means to effect change (Bernstein et al., 2020; Bohonos, 2023; Mor Barak, et al., 2022).

### **Recent Developments**

In the workplace and beyond, anti-DEI backlash has been building for years and finally reached the highest levels of government. In response to this anti-DEI rhetoric, United States Congresswoman Jasmine Crockett discussed the problems Black women face during a House Committee meeting (Black Discoveries, 2024). In her statement, Crockett highlights how anti-DEI views pit diversity against qualifications and argued that even highly skilled people can be treated unfairly due to their race and gender. In her argument, Crockett stated:

One of those topics is diversity in the workplace ... making sure that the next conservative Administration dismantles DEI apparatus by eliminating various Chief Diversity Officer positions, etc. ... as Black woman sitting here ... it almost seemed as if you either get diversity or you get qualifications. It did not seem as if my colleague understood that someone can be diverse and qualified. ... I'm sitting here and there seems to be this question of you're either diverse or you're qualified ... all I could think about was the fact that I currently hold an honorary doctorate, I also hold a Juris Doctorate, I also hold a Bachelors, I also technically hold the rank of Lieutenant Colonel in the Civil Air Patrol and I've actually practiced law for almost two decades, in addition to serving on various boards, in addition to being a prior State lawmaker, and there are those that would make some people believe that because I happen to be Black and or a woman that somehow, even though I can rattle off all the qualifications in the world, my Blackness makes me unqualified.

Ms. Crockett also emphasized the need to recognize and address these biases to ensure that everyone's qualifications are truly valued and appreciated. This viewpoint appears consistent with the effective management of the diversity and equality polarity pair (Benet, 2022).

On the other hand, the White House issued a presidential action, *Ending Illegal Discrimination and Restoring Merit-Based Opportunity* (Executive Order No. 14173, 2025), revoking Executive Order No. 11246 (1965), *Equal Employment Opportunity*. Executive Order No. 11246 (1965) explicitly directed federal agencies to "prohibit

discrimination in employment because of race, creed, color, or national origin, and to promote the full realization of equal employment opportunity through a positive, continuing program in each executive department and agency.” (Part I, Sec 101).

Executive Order 14173 (2025) directs federal agencies to terminate all DEI programs.

The order also contains a provision “encouraging the private sector to end illegal DEI discrimination and preferences.” (Executive Order No. 14173, 2025, Sec. 4).

Additionally, the order instructs agencies to identify their “plan of specific steps or measures to deter DEI programs or principles ...” (Sec. 4(b)(iii)). Furthermore, the order requires federal agencies to call out violators, stating:

As a part of this plan, each agency shall identify up to nine potential civil compliance investigations of publicly traded corporations, large non-profit corporations or associations, foundations with assets of 500 million dollars or more, State and local bar and medical associations, and institutions of higher education with endowments over 1 billion dollars ... (Section 4(b)(iii)).

The language in the order bolsters anti-DEI rhetoric, fueling reactionary measures in the corporate and nonprofit sectors and potentially setting back nearly 60 years of workplace DEI efforts. This action appears consistent with mismanagement of the diversity and equality polarity pair (Benet, 2022) and may directly affect the career trajectories for Black women in public, private and nonprofit workplaces.

Although recent public administration scholarship has examined the issue of social inequity, Hall (2022) acknowledges that a gap remains. “Race and gender shape social structures and consequently the leadership, management, and behavioral processes

that make up the bulk of research in our field. Consequently, theoretical/empirical accounts of social equity that do not bring an in-depth understanding of race and gender are likely to be incomplete” (Hall, 2022, p. 382). Several studies focused on illuminating the overt and covert discrimination against Black women leaders in private, government, higher education, and nonprofit workplaces (Bowers, 2021; Chance, 2021; Smith et al., 2019; Tran, 2021). For instance, Bowers (2021) and Tran (2021) examined the perceptions of Black women in nonprofit leadership. Chance (2021) explored the experiences of Black women in higher education leadership and Smith et al. (2019) investigated the effects of intersectionality on the career experiences of Black women leaders in the corporate space. Still other recent studies focused on workplace DEI programming (Combs et al., 2019; Grisson, 2018; D. P. Mason, 2020). Combs et al. (2019) and Grisson (2018) addressed the future applicability of organizational diversity initiatives. In contrast, Mor Barak et al. (2022) highlighted the ineffectiveness of workplace diversity programs. However, there is a dearth of scholarship specifically focused on the impact of workplace DEI programs on the underrepresentation of Black women in leadership in nonprofit national associations of regulatory boards.

By bridging the gap between research and practice, this current study on the perceptions of Black women leaders and the effectiveness of workplace DEI programming may help public administrators shape policies, programs, and practices that promote diversity, equity, and inclusion, challenge biases, and create opportunities for Black women to advance into leadership, despite anti-DEI backlash. While it remains to be seen what the outcome of federal, state, and local legislation will have on workplace

DEI programming, updated public policies that support all workers could potentially increase Black women's social equity and social capital in the workplace and society.

### **Summary and Conclusions**

Chapter 2 included a comprehensive literature review exploring the underrepresentation of Black women in executive leadership roles, experiences on their professional leadership journey, and the effectiveness of workplace DEI programs. The chapter commenced by introducing the significance of the research topic, highlighting the need to address the persistent disparities and barriers faced by Black women in advancing to executive leadership positions and the potential role of workplace DEI programs in addressing these challenges.

The theoretical foundation underpinning the research topic was established through an examination of Johnson's (1992) polarity management model as the conceptual framework and Benet's (2022) polarities of democracy theory as the theoretical framework for the study. Other potential theoretical frameworks contextualizing the unique challenges faced by Black women in leadership, intersectionality theory (Crenshaw, 1989), critical race theory (Bell, 1995), and social cognitive career theory (Lent, et al., 1994) were also briefly explored and discussed.

The review of empirical studies encompassed a range of research exploring the experiences, barriers, and opportunities encountered by Black women in leadership in general, and nonprofit organizations, more specifically. Through an examination of existing literature on organizational leadership, nonprofit leadership, intersectionality, and the experiences of Black women in the workplace, key findings emphasized the

presence of structural and systemic discrimination and biases, a lack of participation and representation, and a lack of diversity and equality, resulting in oppressive work environments and limited access to career advancement opportunities and social capital for Black women. These findings were consistent with Benet's (2022) research findings. Furthermore, the literature highlighted the pervasiveness of Black women's disillusionment with workplace DEI programming and its role in addressing these challenges (Mor Barak et al., 2022). Moreover, recent developments highlighted how anti-DEI sentiments promoted by the federal government emphasize "outing" public, private, and nonprofit organizations that ignore executive orders to dismantle DEI programs, while potentially resulting in an either/or scenario when evaluating Black women's work qualifications.

While there were some studies that examined the perceptions of Black women leaders, the research was conducted in corporate, nonprofit, and government settings. None focused on Black women in nonprofit national associations of regulatory boards. Additionally, none used the polarities of democracy theory as the theoretical framework. The synthesis of findings from the literature review also revealed significant gaps in understanding the specific impact of workplace DEI programming on the underrepresentation of Black women in leadership roles. By addressing these gaps, my study aims to contribute to the existing body of knowledge by examining the experiences and perceptions of Black women leaders at nonprofit national associations of regulatory boards, assessing the effectiveness of workplace DEI initiatives on their career advancement, and identifying strategies they can use to overcome the barriers to career

progression. Additionally, the findings of this current study may contribute to potential changes in public policy strategies regarding talent management and equitable advancement opportunities in the workplace.

Building upon the insights gathered in this literature review, Chapter 3 provides a detailed explanation of the research methodology and design I used for my study. Chapter 3 also outlined the specific steps I took to investigate the underrepresentation of Black women in leadership at nonprofit national associations of regulatory boards and the effects of workplace DEI programs on their career ascension.

### Chapter 3: Methodology

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore and better understand the perceptions of Black women who seek leadership positions in nonprofit national associations of regulatory boards, identify what strategies they use to overcome barriers to leadership, and explore what effect workplace DEI programming has on their experiences on the path to leadership. In this chapter, I discuss the research design for my study and provide the rationale for the choice of design. I also explain my role as the researcher and describe the methodology, including the participant selection logic, instrumentation employed, and procedures followed for recruitment, participation, and data collection processes. Additionally, issues of trustworthiness, including credibility, transferability, dependability, confirmability, and reliability, are discussed. I also address the ethical procedures I followed to ensure that participants were not harmed by their participation in my study. Finally, I summarize the main points of the chapter.

#### **Research Design and Rationale**

In exploring the underrepresentation of Black women leaders at nonprofit national associations of regulatory boards and the impact of workplace DEI programs on their leadership trajectory, I sought to answer the following research question: What has been the experience of Black women who have obtained leadership positions in nonprofit national associations of regulatory boards? To answer this research question, I employed a generic qualitative approach (see Caelli et al., 2003). A generic approach is characterized by its flexibility and openness, allowing for an inductive and context-sensitive exploration of my research topic (see Kostere & Kostere, 2021).

## **Justification for a Generic Qualitative Approach**

Researchers investigating race and gender inequities in public administration have employed various methodologies to understand the effects of racism and sexism in organizations and communities. For example, Bowers (2021) and Chance (2021) utilized a qualitative phenomenological approach, Mitchener and Bower (2020) employed a quantitative approach, and Strouble (2015) conducted a case study. Each approach has its strengths and weaknesses, and the choice of approach depends on the research objectives, available resources, and researchers' desired depth of analysis.

## **Qualitative Phenomenological Studies**

Phenomenological studies aim to uncover the essence and structure of participants' experiences related to the research topic (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Moustakas, 1994). Researchers engage in in-depth interviews or conversations with participants to gain a deeper understanding of their unique perspectives, perceptions, and interpretations. This approach allows for in-depth exploration of individual stories, providing rich and nuanced data.

### ***Strengths***

- capture individual narratives and lived experiences
- allow for exploration of personal perspectives, emotions, and contextual factors
- provide a platform for participants to share their stories and contribute to knowledge generation

***Weaknesses***

- findings may be subjective and influenced by participants' individual experiences and perspectives
- limited sample size may restrict generalizability
- potential for recall bias or social desirability bias in participants' responses

**Quantitative Studies**

Researchers use surveys and questionnaires to collect quantitative data about the problem. These methods allow for the collection of data from a larger sample size, enabling broader analysis and statistical comparison.

***Strengths***

- provide numerical data for statistical analysis and comparison
- allow for the examination of patterns, trends, and correlations
- enable the collection of data from a larger sample size, potentially increasing generalizability

***Weaknesses***

- may overlook nuanced experiences and subjective perspectives
- standardized response options may limit participants' ability to fully express their experiences
- potential for response bias or incomplete responses

**Case Studies**

Researchers conduct case studies of specific organizations, programs, or communities to understand the problem (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). This approach offers

a detailed examination of a particular context, providing insights into organizational, community, and societal practices and outcomes.

### ***Strengths***

- in-depth exploration of specific cases and contexts
- allow for a comprehensive understanding of organizational dynamics, practices, and outcomes
- provide rich qualitative data that can contribute to theory-building and practical recommendations

### ***Weaknesses***

- findings may not be easily generalized to other organizations or contexts
- limited sample size restricts the scope of analysis
- potential for researcher bias in selecting and interpreting case study data

### **Generic Qualitative Studies**

For my study, I examined perceptions of Black women leaders, focusing on understanding the attitudes, biases, and stereotypes associated with their leadership, as well as the factors that shaped these perceptions. The generic qualitative methodology employed in this study incorporates a range of qualitative methods to collect data and examine participants' perspectives. As described by Caelli et al. (2003), this approach is particularly useful when the research is not grounded in a specific qualitative tradition but seeks to explore complex experiences and meanings through flexible, yet rigorous, inquiry. The strengths of generic qualitative methods include their ability to capture nuanced perceptions, experiences, and attitudes of different participants. Generic

qualitative methods also allow for an in-depth exploration of the factors that shape perceptions of the participants and provide insights into strategies for challenging biases and stereotypes (Kostere & Kostere, 2021). Here are some common methods consistent with examining perceptions of participants within the generic qualitative methodology:

### ***In-Depth Interviews***

In-depth interviews are commonly used to explore participants' perceptions. Researchers conduct one-on-one interviews with individuals who have experience or knowledge relevant to the research topic. These interviews allow for a detailed exploration of attitudes, beliefs, and experiences, shedding light on the specific perceptions of Black women in leadership roles.

### ***Focus Groups***

Focus groups bring together a small group of individuals to engage in group discussions facilitated by a researcher. This method allows for the exploration of collective perceptions and shared experiences. In the context of perceptions of Black women leaders, focus groups can provide insights into societal and cultural influences, group dynamics, and the influence of intersectional identities.

### ***Content Analysis***

Content analysis involves systematically analyzing written, verbal, or visual data to identify themes, patterns, and meanings. Researchers can examine media representations, online discussions, or public discourse surrounding Black women leaders to understand prevailing perceptions and stereotypes. Content analysis can provide a broader understanding of societal attitudes and the narratives that shape perceptions.

### ***Narrative Analysis***

Narrative analysis involves analyzing personal stories, narratives, or biographical accounts. Researchers can collect narratives from Black women leaders about their experiences, challenges, and successes. By examining these narratives, researchers can gain insights into the complexities of perceptions and the lived experiences of Black women leaders.

While the generic qualitative approach proposed by Caelli, et al. (2003) could offer valuable insights for using a qualitative approach to explore the underrepresentation of Black women in leadership and the impact of workplace DEI programs, it also has some inherent weaknesses (Kahlke, 2014; Kostere & Kostere, 2021). Below are a few limitations I considered:

#### ***Lack of Standardization***

The generic qualitative approach lacks a standardized framework or set of guidelines, which can lead to inconsistencies in my data collection, analysis, and interpretation. This can make it challenging for me to compare findings across different studies or for other researchers to replicate my research process.

#### ***Subjectivity and Researcher Bias***

The generic qualitative approach relied heavily on my interpretation and analysis of data, introducing the potential for subjectivity and researcher bias. Any preconceived notions, personal perspectives, and prior experiences I may have could influence data interpretation, potentially impacting the objectivity of the findings.

***Limited Generalizability***

The generic qualitative approach typically involves a small sample size and focuses on in-depth exploration rather than making broad generalizations. Therefore, the findings of this current study may not be easily generalized to larger populations or contexts. The emphasis on individual experiences and unique perspectives may also restrict the broader applicability of the findings.

***Potential for Data Overload***

The generic qualitative approach often generates large volumes of qualitative data, such as interview transcripts or textual documents. Analyzing and managing such vast amounts of data can be time-consuming and overwhelming, increasing the risk that I may overlook important insights or themes.

***Lack of Quantitative Data***

The generic qualitative approach did not incorporate quantitative data, which limited my ability to perform statistical analysis or draw numerical conclusions. This made it challenging for me to assess the prevalence or magnitude of certain phenomena or to establish causal relationships.

***Limited Structure and Reproducibility***

The generic qualitative approach emphasizes flexibility and adaptability, allowing the research process to evolve dynamically. While this flexibility can be advantageous, it also reduces the structure and reproducibility of the study. Other researchers may have challenges replicating the exact methodology or following the same analytical procedures that I employed.

By employing methods within the generic qualitative methodology, I aimed to gain a deeper understanding of the perceptions of Black women leaders at nonprofit national associations of regulatory boards, what strategies they use to overcome barriers and challenge stereotypes, and the impact of workplace DEI programs on promoting diversity, fostering equitable and inclusive workplaces, and eliminating oppression in support of their leadership aspirations. Despite its weaknesses, the generic qualitative approach offered valuable insights and contributed to a deeper understanding of the underrepresentation of Black women in leadership. Still, I remained mindful of its limitations and took steps to address them through rigorous methodology, transparency in reporting, and reflexive engagement with the research process.

### **Role of the Researcher**

In this qualitative study, I served as the tool for data collection and analysis. My background and experience in the subject area were essential in shaping the research process. A thorough understanding of the subject matter facilitated nuanced data collection and analysis. By continuously reflecting on my role, biases, and experiences during the interviews, I maintained reflexivity, recognizing and acknowledging the potential influence of my personal beliefs, values, and experiences on the research process and findings. I adjusted as needed to enhance the quality and objectivity of data collection as this was crucial for interpreting and contextualizing the research findings.

As a researcher, I remained cognizant of possible ethical considerations when designing my qualitative study and developing the interview questions to ensure ethical compliance, maximum benefits, and minimal harm. In conducting a study of the lived

experiences of people, Burkholder, et al. (2020) advised researchers to adhere to the ethical principles of respect for persons, beneficence, and justice. Accordingly, I ensured that participants understood that they had a choice of whether to participate and were treated with integrity. I also informed participants that, while there are potential risks of harm in participating in research studies, e.g., privacy, psychological, relationship, legal, economic, professional, and physical, the risks of participating in my study would not go beyond the risks of daily life. The best way to accomplish this was with an informed consent which detailed the purpose and procedures, outlines the risks and benefits, and emphasizes the voluntary and confidential nature of the study, for the protection of myself and the participants (see Kostere & Kostere, 2021).

When operating as the research tool, researchers are tasked with recording the information gathered during the data collection process (see Henderson, 2017; Kahlke, 2014). Therefore, I used my handwritten notes, recordings of the interview sessions, and verbatim transcriptions of the participants' responses to the interview questions to collect the data. To maintain consistency in the collection process, I also prepared an interview guide (see Appendix A). The guide was used to ask participants questions from the intent of the problem statement, research question, and the theoretical framework. Percy, et al. (2015) tells us that when attempting to access the thoughts, feelings, and meaning participants ascribe to their experiences, protecting their confidentiality and ensuring the validity of data with the purpose of producing new information is paramount. As a result, during and after the interview process, I took the necessary precautions to protect the data and maintain the participants' comfort and confidentiality. Rubin & Rubin (2012) remind

us that during in-depth interviews participants may be asked to detail and relive experiences that may be traumatizing or embarrassing, which may be challenging for them to do. Additionally, some of the interview questions could be considered personal and may be embarrassing or trigger memories of bad experiences. With these considerations in mind, I remained aware of the participants' expressions, tone, and body language to gauge their comfort level in continuing to participate. Throughout the interview process, I reiterated the confidentiality measures in place to assure the participant that her responses would be secure.

In conducting participant interviews, Kostere & Kostere (2021) tell us that bringing personal experience to questioning the participants or reacting to their answers has the potential to introduce unintentional interviewer bias. I recognized and acknowledged the risk of introducing my own inherent bias into the research. Caelli, et al. (2003) advise us that one way to resolve this risk is by practicing reflexivity, or bracketing. Therefore, I remained cognizant of my motives and biases and carefully monitored my own interpretations of my personal experiences and how they may influence the research. One way I accomplished this was by utilizing a journal. In it I documented my thoughts, concerns, and any issues I encountered with participant responses during the study. While there were no stories of illegal activity on the part of the study participants, should such activity have been revealed to me, if required by law or ethics, I would have reported the illegal activity to the appropriate authorities.

## **Methodology**

The methodology section includes the participant selection logic, instrumentation, and procedures for recruitment, participation, and data collection. It also includes the plans for sampling, recruitment and participation, and data collection, analysis, and coding.

### **Participant Selection Logic**

I used purposeful sampling to identify a target population of 10-15 participants. Kostere & Kostere (2021) tell us that this sampling method allows for selection of the best participants to provide information-rich responses about their experiences and perceptions. Since I am familiar with the U.S.-based nonprofit national associations of regulatory boards and Black women they employ, I was able to reach out to these women without any assistance. Next, I identified and thoroughly explained my choice to address potential credibility issues and limitations of its use, as recommended by Kahlke (2014). The following criteria governed the participants to be included in my study:

- self-identifies as a Black (or African American or Black, Indigenous, Person of Color [BIPOC]) woman
- completed at least a bachelor's degree program
- holds a leadership position within four levels removed from the top executive
- had experience with workplace diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) programming

These women were valuable resources to provide rich, detailed responses regarding their respective leadership journeys. These women also may have experienced obstacles in

their career journey related to their race and/or gender that highlighted opportunities to discuss their perceptions of the effectiveness of workplace DEI programs. Ultimately, the goal was to interview Black women leaders who could provide details about their lived experiences and perceptions that may uncover patterns and themes among the participant group that might lead to recommendations for strengthening public policies.

### **Instrumentation**

A semistructured interview guide (see Appendix A) was the primary instrument for data collection. The guide consisted of open-ended questions and prompts designed to encourage participants to share their experiences, opinions, and perspectives in-depth. The interview guide was discussed in concert with my committee chair, who is the author of the polarities of democracy theory, and carefully crafted to align with the 10 essential values of the theory. The interview guide was structured to align with the frameworks analysis, address the research question, and cover key themes, allowing for flexibility to explore emerging ideas during the interview process. The interview guide encompasses the following components:

#### ***Introduction and Icebreakers***

Opening questions to introduce the participant to the research topic and create a comfortable atmosphere for the interview.

#### ***Core Research Questions***

In-depth questions aligned with the research objectives, aimed at gathering detailed insights and perceptions from the participants.

### ***Probing and Clarifying Prompts***

Follow-up questions and prompts to encourage participants to elaborate, clarify, or provide additional context regarding their initial responses.

### ***Closure and Summary***

Concluding questions summarizing the discussion and providing participants with an opportunity to add any final thoughts or comments.

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

Kostere and Kostere (2021) recommended that the procedures for recruitment and participation support the research question, align with the generic qualitative approach, and allow for the collection of data sufficient to be meaningful. Therefore, for my study I employed a purposeful, homogeneous group sampling strategy wherein I recruited 10 participants who met the criteria for inclusion. Additionally, I asked participants to suggest other eligible participants for this current study, a method termed snowball sampling by Patton (2015).

After some consideration, I determined that the best sources for finding participants who fit the criteria for inclusion in the sample population for my research study were social media, e.g., LinkedIn, regulatory association networking communities, the Walden University participant pool, and my personal contacts within the professional licensing and regulatory association industry. For recruiting on LinkedIn, I used my personal account; therefore, I did not need to contact my employer to obtain permission to distribute my announcement. Nor did I need permission to utilize a snowball method to request leads to other potential participants from my personal contacts. As Patton (2015)

further informed us, the snowball method of recruiting “generates a chain of interviewees based on people who know people who know people who would be good sources given the focus of inquiry” (p. 298).

### ***Participant Recruitment and Participation***

To recruit participants, I prepared an email invitation (see Appendix B), a social media invitation (see Appendix C), and a recruitment flyer (see Appendix D). Utilizing purposeful sampling, I sent the recruitment email to Black women I know in the professional licensing and regulatory association industry who meet one, some, or all the criteria for inclusion requirements. As suggested by Burkholder, et al. (2020), Patton (2015), and Rubin & Rubin (2012), the description of the activity must focus on what the interviewees would be asked to do, in clear and simple language, so they understand the extent of their participation. Therefore, I provided details of the activity in the recruitment email, including the purpose, process, participant expectations, and timing of the interview. Before proceeding with the interview, I sent another email to participants to provide the informed consent for the activity, using the exact verbiage provided by the IRB’s Office of Research and Compliance (Walden, n.d.; see Appendix E).

### ***Data Collection***

**Individual Interviews.** The primary data collection method for my study consisted of in-depth, semistructured interviews conducted via a video conferencing platform with a purposive sample of Black women. I took the following steps to schedule the interviews:

1. obtained informed consent from participants via email, explaining the purpose of the study, the interview process, and confidentiality measures,
2. coordinated with participants via email to schedule a suitable time for the interview, and
3. provided participants with details such as the date, time, video conferencing platform link, and expected duration of the interview.

When the time and date for the interview arrived, I used the prepared interview guide (see Appendix A) to conduct the interviews via the video conferencing platform, Zoom. This allowed individual participants to be anywhere they chose during the interview. I conducted the interviews from my private home office and used headphones to maintain participant confidentiality. The interviews were audio recorded; however, since the Zoom video conferencing platform automatically records video feed when an audio recording is made, I deleted the video recording immediately after each interview and only retained the audio recording. Below is a general outline of how the interviews were conducted for my study:

1. I began the interview by introducing myself, explaining the purpose of the study, and reiterating the confidentiality measures.
2. I confirmed the participant's consent to proceed with the interview.
3. I followed the interview guide (see Appendix A) and asked questions in a clear and neutral tone.
4. I allowed participants sufficient time to respond and avoid interrupting them.
5. I used probing techniques to explore responses in more depth if needed.

6. I listened attentively to participants' responses and took notes, as necessary.
7. I clarified any ambiguous or unclear answers to ensure accurate data collection.
8. I summarized the key points discussed during the interview.
9. I offered participants an opportunity to ask questions or provide additional comments.
10. I thanked participants for their time and participants.

As Patton (2015) tells us, a detailed record of the response data is necessary to get as close as possible to the participant's experience. Therefore, after each interview, I utilized the video conferencing platform's transcription service. Then, I edited the transcript while simultaneously listening to the audio recording. Finally, I sent the recording and the transcript to the participants for their review and verification of accuracy. After verifying the accuracy of each transcript, I began the coding process.

**Coding Plan.** Saldaña's (2016) proposed guidelines for coding interview data are used to organize and group the data into various categories, potentially uncovering any themes which may emerge among the participants' reported perceptions. Saldaña divides coding into two phases: First Cycle coding and Second Cycle coding. Although there are multiple approaches to First Cycle coding, I began with In Vivo coding. Since my study was an exploration of participants' perceptions, In Vivo coding was appropriate because it uses the participant's own language as codes. In this way, In Vivo coding can "prioritize and honor the participant's voice" (Saldaña, 2016, p. 295). At a minimum, I

manually hand-code the transcript, clustering significant words or statements into categories and, ultimately, larger themes.

### **Data Analysis Plan**

Burkholder, et al. (2020) stated, “qualitative data analysis refers to deliberate, systematic, and structured acts of interpreting data and then describing data in ways that reflect both process and insight” (p. 218). In a generic qualitative design, thematic analysis is the best approach for data analysis (Caelli et al., 2003; Clarke & Braun, 2017; Merriam & Tisdale, 2016). Clarke & Braun (2017) developed a data analysis guide for thematic analysis. I used this recursive analysis framework to generate codes and identify themes and patterns in the data. The six phases of the analysis guide are as follows:

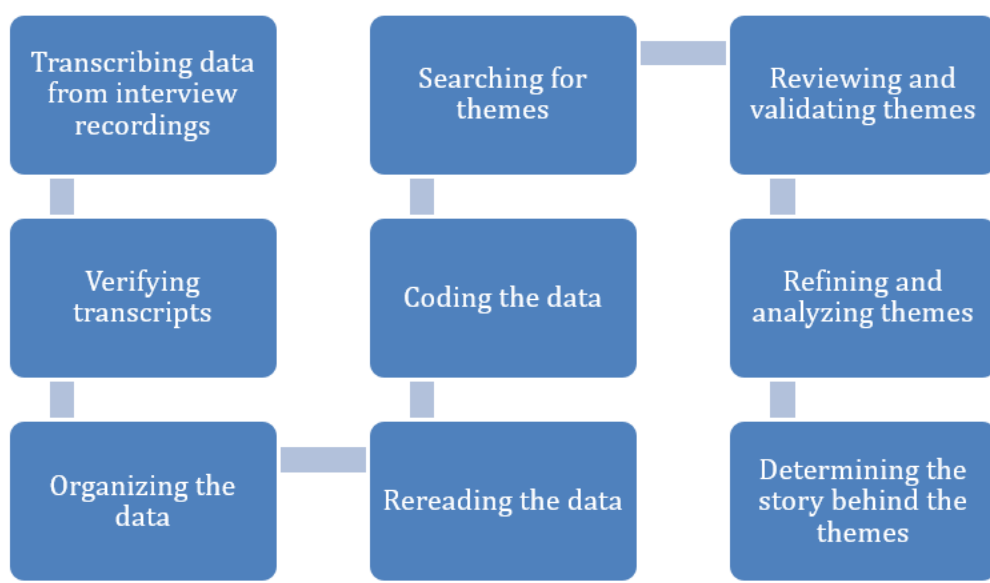
1. Data familiarization: taking time to become familiar with the breadth and depth of the data through transcription, multiple readings, and notetaking (p. 87).
2. Initial code generation: extracting, organizing, and collating the raw data into meaningful groups (p. 88).
3. Searching for themes: sorting the coded data into themes, collating the data extracts within the themes, and determining relationships between codes, themes, and subthemes (p. 89).
4. Reviewing themes: reviewing and refining the coded data extracts and the generated themes across the data set; determining validity of individual themes in relation to the data set; and developing the “thematic map” (p. 91).

5. Defining and naming themes: defining, refining, and analyzing the themes to determine the “story” behind the themes (p. 92).
6. Producing the report: providing a “concise, coherent, logical, non-repetitive and interesting account of the story the data tells within and across themes” (p. 93).

Figure 8 is a flowchart to visually identify the steps taken during data analysis.

**Figure 8**

*Flowchart for Data Analysis*



As Caelli et al. (2003) posited, it is fundamentally important that codes “show what meaning lies beyond the themes. It is these meanings that need to be embedded in the theoretical and historical context of the research and the topic researched” (p. 9).

Thematic coding involves identifying recurring patterns, themes, and categories in the data elicited from the participants’ interviews. Initial codes were generated, refined, and organized into meaningful themes that captured the essence of the participants’

perceptions of any barriers to their career advancement, strategies they employed to overcome these barriers, and the effect of workplace DEI programming on their leadership journey. The constant comparison method suggested by Glaser (1965) was then used to compare emerging themes within and across data sources, facilitating a deeper understanding of the relationships and connections in the data.

### **Issues of Trustworthiness**

In conducting this qualitative study, ensuring the trustworthiness of the research and maintaining rigorous ethical procedures were paramount to the integrity, validity, and ethical soundness of findings (see: Kahlke, 2014; Kostere & Kostere, 2021; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Various strategies and practices were implemented to address the dimensions of trustworthiness—credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability—together with stringent adherence to ethical principles. The integration of these measures fortified my study’s contribution to existing knowledge and its ethical implications within the academic and broader communities.

#### **Credibility**

Credibility, or internal validity, can be established through a combination of triangulation, peer debriefing, and member-checking (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Spall, 1998). Triangulation involves utilizing multiple data sources to corroborate and cross-verify findings (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Peer debriefing is used to confirm that “the interpretations are worthy, honest, and believable” (Spall, 1998, p. 280). Member-checking provides participants with the opportunity to validate the accuracy of the data and challenge any interpretations of their interview responses

(Lincoln & Guba, 1985). After coding and categorizing the interview transcripts, I coordinated debriefing with my committee and member-checking by the participants to establish credibility of the data I collected.

### **Transferability**

Transferability, or external validity, of findings is established through thick description (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) and purposeful sampling (Kostere & Kostere, 2021). Lincoln & Guba (1985) describe thick description as the detailed capture, description, and interpretation of participants actions, thoughts, and emotions during the interview. Through thick description I provided a detailed account of the context of my study and participants' experiences, enabling other researchers to assess the applicability of findings to their respective studies. Kostere & Kostere (2021) describe purposeful sampling as the intentional recruitment of participants who have had experience with the topic of interest and are amenable to describing their experiences. My use of purposeful sampling (as described above) was intended to ensure I selected participants who could offer rich and relevant information regarding the research question.

### **Dependability**

Dependability can be established by employing external audits by outside researchers (Kostere & Kostere, 2021; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). External audits involved discussions with my committee to review and validate the research process, challenge my findings, and provide feedback to ensure the data supports my interpretations and conclusions.

### **Confirmability**

Confirmability can be established through the creation of a detailed audit trail, maintaining reflexivity, and employing peer reviews (Kostere & Kostere, 2021; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). By utilizing a journal, I documented my research decisions, processes, and any modifications made during the study so other researchers can follow my research techniques. Also, by practicing reflexivity throughout the research process, I remained acutely aware of my potential biases, assumptions, and preconceived notions that might have influenced the research. To further mitigate any researcher bias, I sought out my committee to provide an external perspective and validate my findings.

### **Ethical Procedures**

Research studies involving human subjects must follow stringent ethical standards (Walden, n.d.). Researchers must also protect the rights, privacy, and well-being of participants (Burkholder et al., 2020, Kostere & Kostere, 2021). Walden University requires researchers to utilize a prescribed Informed Consent form (Walden, n.d.). Approval for my study was obtained from the Walden University Institutional Review Board (IRB Approval # 02-05-24-0288458). An informed consent was obtained from all participants, clearly outlining the purpose, risks, and benefits of my study. Participants also were informed of their right to withdraw from this study at any stage without consequences. Additionally, I maintained the confidentiality of participants by using pseudonyms and the de-identification of employers. Electronic files were stored on my password-protected computer and backed up on a password-protected hard drive.

## Summary

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore and better understand the perceived barriers faced by Black women who seek leadership positions in nonprofit national associations of regulatory boards, identify what strategies they use to overcome barriers to leadership, and what effect workplace DEI programming has on their experiences on the path to leadership. The polarities of democracy theory served as the theoretical framework for the study. Methodological approaches employed in previous studies investigating race and gender inequity in public administration were critically evaluated, providing insights into their methods, strengths, and limitations. This assessment guided the selection of a generic qualitative research methodology (see Caelli, et al., 2003; Kahlke, 2014; Kostere & Kostere, 2021). I selected a generic qualitative study as it presents the greatest flexibility in capturing nuanced perceptions, experiences, and attitudes of a select group of participants within the targeted industry. Data collection entailed conducting interviews via a video conferencing platform with Black women leaders at nonprofit national associations of regulatory boards. Only audio recordings of the interviews were retained. I coded the data and performed iterative analyses, being attentive to the emergence of themes, patterns, and connections. Throughout the data collection and analysis process, I utilized various procedures to ensure trustworthiness and adherence to IRB ethical guidelines. In Chapter 4, I present the findings of my research.

## Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of this generic qualitative study was to examine and better understand the perceived barriers faced by Black women who seek leadership positions in nonprofit national associations of regulatory boards. After an exhaustive review of the extant literature, I identified a gap and designed the research question to explore the experiences of Black women leaders at nonprofit national associations of regulatory boards. I explored Black women's perceptions related to the study's research question: What has been the experience of Black women who have obtained leadership positions in nonprofit national associations of regulatory boards? The results of this study may encourage these national associations to hire and support the growth and career trajectories of Black women looking to pursue leadership positions within the regulatory association industry.

To ground my study, I utilized the polarities of democracy theory (see Benet, 2006, 2012, 2022) as the theoretical framework and the polarity management model (see Johnson, 1992) as the conceptual framework. Applying these frameworks served to explore how well the polarity pairs were being managed to support workplace democracy and Black women's leadership aspirations. The goal of this current study was to contribute to the body of literature on the experiences of Black women on the path to leadership in nonprofit national associations of regulatory boards, understand how perceived biases impact Black women's career trajectory, and present findings that may offer insights to support public policies that prioritize and/or strengthen workplace DEI programming to support Black women's career advancement in spite of corporate America's retreat from DEI.

In this chapter, I provide a description of the study setting and the participant recruitment process. Then, I present participant demographics relevant to the study. Next, I describe the data collected from the semistructured interview protocol (see Appendix A), the data analysis process, and the thematic analysis of the collected data. After that, I describe how the evidence supports trustworthiness, describe the results of the generic qualitative study, and present data to support the various emergent themes. Finally, I summarize the chapter.

### **Setting**

To answer my research question, I recruited Black women who held leadership positions in nonprofit national associations of regulatory boards in the United States of America. At the time of data collection, all participants were required to live and work in the United States of America. All interviews were conducted via the video teleconferencing platform Zoom because many of the participants were working remotely. Based on the detailed eligibility and selection criteria, there were no factors impacting the recruitment process and procedures.

Participants were recruited via targeted emails (see Appendix C) that were sent to Black women within my professional network, using purposive and snowball sampling. The emails were sent from my official Walden University student email address and followed the official IRB email template. The emails included a description of my study, participant demographic requirements, and a copy of the official Walden University consent form. After obtaining and acknowledging written consent, I scheduled each participant with the standard Zoom-video teleconference platform-generated invitation

sent via email. The participants were made aware of the confidentiality of the data collection process both at the time of scheduling and immediately preceding the start of the interview. In addition to providing written consent, all participants verbally agreed to participate in the interview without issue or incident.

### **Demographics**

The sample consisted of 10 Black women working at nonprofit national associations of regulatory boards across the U.S. The criteria for eligibility dictated that participants met the following requirements: (a) 18 years old or older; (b) self-identified as a Black (or African American or BIPOC) woman; (c) completed at least a bachelor's degree program; (d) held a leadership position within four levels removed from the top executive in a nonprofit national association of regulatory boards; and, (e) had experience with workplace diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) programming.

Of the 10 study participants, one participant held the top executive position, one participant held a position within one level of the top executive, five participants held positions within two levels of the top executive, two participants held positions within three levels of the top executive, and one participant held a position within four levels of the top executive. Four participants were over 50 years of age and six were under 50 years of age. All 10 participants self-identified as Black and/or African American, held a minimum of a bachelor's degree, and had direct experience with workplace diversity, equity, and inclusion programming. Table 1 provides an overview of the participants' demographic information.

**Table 1***Participant Demographics*

Participant	Age	Self-identity	Minimum education	Level from CEO	DEI experience
P1	40–49	African American	Bachelor's	4	Yes
P2	40–49	African American	Bachelor's	2	Yes
P3	40–49	African American	Bachelor's	2	Yes
P4	40–49	African American	Bachelor's	2	Yes
P5	>50	African American	Bachelor's	1	Yes
P6	>50	Black	Bachelor's	0	Yes
P7	>50	African American	Bachelor's	2	Yes
P8	40–49	Black African American	Bachelor's	3	Yes
P9	>50	African American	Bachelor's	2	Yes
P10	40–49	Black American	Bachelor's	3	Yes

Nine of the 10 participants were known to me prior to the recruitment through professional relationships throughout my career, and one of the 10 participants was referred to me by one of the other participants as fitting the desired eligibility profile. None of the participants are my coworkers nor do they have any employment relationship with me. Each participant was assigned a pseudonym to ensure confidentiality.

### **Data Collection**

The 10 participants were interviewed via the videoconferencing platform, Zoom, to share their perceptions and experiences working within their respective associations regarding leadership positions, career advancement opportunities, and the role of workplace diversity initiatives on Black women's professional development. This allowed individual participants to be anywhere they chose during the interview. The auto-generated video recording was deleted immediately after the interview and only the audio recording was retained.

### **Data Analysis**

Data were analyzed using thematic analysis with the aim of capturing the depth and diversity of perspectives on the topic. Data analysis followed the six-phase process for thematic analysis as proposed by Braun and Clarke (2017), which includes familiarization with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the report. Participants' responses were transcribed verbatim and manually coded to develop themes and subthemes. After coding and categorizing participants' responses, five main themes emerged from the data: conceptualization of leadership, discrimination despite positive experiences, minimal effects of DEI programming, recommendations for other Black women in leadership, and recommendations for designing workplace DEI programming. These themes represent both the challenges and insights participants shared regarding their experiences in leadership as Black women. Table 2 provides a summary and overview of the thematic analysis.

**Table 2***Data Analysis Summary*

Theme	Category	File*	Reference*
Theme 1: Conceptualization of leadership shaped by models with empathy and taking care of others as predominant traits	What it means to be a leader/exhibit leadership traits	10	44
	Leadership models	10	22
	First memory of being called a leader	10	15
		5	7
		10	57
Theme 2: Despite positive experiences, the majority of participants faced discrimination with minimal supportive response from supervisors	Positive experiences contributing to career growth	7	9
	Experienced workplace discrimination	10	22
	Feelings about bias-discrimination	8	11
	Actions-response to discrimination	8	9
	Actions-response of HR/supervisor	6	6
Theme 3: DEI programming was minimal and had little effect on leadership development, career growth, or overcoming workplace discrimination		10	41
	How workplace DEI programming was introduced	9	9
	Thoughts regarding programming	9	9
	Support provided to participate in programming	3	3
	How program enhanced leadership development opportunities	3	3
	Resources for career growth available through program	2	2
	Ways programming aided in overcoming barriers-discrimination	10	11
Theme 4: Recommendations for Black women aspiring to leadership focused on seeking community of Black women and undertaking continuous development		10	12
Theme 5: Participants articulated a wide range of actions they would recommend when designing a workplace DEI program		10	13

*Note.* \* indicates aggregated total.

## **Evidence of Trustworthiness**

Ensuring the trustworthiness of qualitative research is crucial to maintaining the rigor and integrity of the findings. In this study, trustworthiness was established by addressing the criteria of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability, as outlined by Lincoln and Guba (1985).

### **Credibility**

Credibility refers to the confidence in the truth of the data and its interpretation. In this study, credibility was enhanced through multiple strategies. First, prolonged engagement was achieved by conducting in-depth interviews with participants, allowing them to share detailed experiences and reflect deeply on their leadership journeys. This was followed by member checking, where participants were invited to review and confirm the accuracy of their transcribed interviews and the preliminary findings. This process ensured that the themes and interpretations accurately reflected the participants' perspectives. Additionally, peer debriefing was utilized to ensure credibility. I consulted with a Walden University designated research expert experienced in qualitative research, discussing the coding process, emerging themes, and possible biases. This individual provided critical feedback, which helped me refine the analysis and interpretations.

### **Transferability**

Transferability refers to the extent to which the findings of the study can be applied to other contexts or groups. To enhance transferability, detailed descriptions of the research context, participant demographics, and data collection methods were provided. Thick description was used to present rich, detailed accounts of participants'

experiences, allowing other researchers to determine whether the findings are applicable to similar settings or populations.

### **Dependability**

Dependability relates to the consistency of the research process and the ability to replicate the study's procedures. To ensure dependability, a comprehensive audit trail was maintained throughout the study. This included detailed documentation of the research design, data collection procedures, and the steps taken during data analysis. I also maintained a journal and recorded my reflective notes to track the evolution of the themes and coding process.

### **Confirmability**

Confirmability refers to the objectivity of the findings and the degree to which they are shaped by the participants rather than the researcher's biases or assumptions. To establish confirmability, I engaged in reflexivity throughout the research process. Reflective notes were maintained to acknowledge and minimize potential biases, ensuring that my personal assumptions did not influence the data analysis. In addition, triangulation of data sources was employed to enhance confirmability. The study drew on multiple data points, including participants' direct quotes, thematic analysis, and member-checked feedback, to corroborate the findings and reduce the influence of researcher bias. The audit trail mentioned earlier also contributes to confirmability by providing a transparent account of how the data were collected and analyzed.

By addressing the criteria of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability, this study ensured the trustworthiness of its findings. These strategies

helped to validate the interpretations and contributed to the overall rigor of the research. As a result, the insights gained from this study can be considered reliable and valuable contributions to understanding the experiences of Black women in leadership roles in nonprofit national associations of regulatory boards.

## **Results**

The analysis of the interview data yielded five primary themes that provide a comprehensive understanding of the leadership experiences of Black women in organizational settings. These themes emerged from an iterative coding process and reflected the complex interplay of personal leadership philosophies, experiences of discrimination, and perceptions of organizational DEI efforts. The key themes identified were conceptualization of leadership, discrimination despite positive experiences, minimal effects of DEI programming, recommendations for other Black women in leadership, and recommendations for designing workplace DEI programming. These five themes offer insight into the complexities of the leadership experiences of these 10 Black women.

### **Theme 1: Conceptualization of Leadership**

The first theme that emerged from the data, conceptualization of leadership, revealed that participants viewed leadership as a collaborative and empowering process, with an emphasis on practicing empathy, encouraging resilience, and fostering inclusivity. This theme encapsulates participants shared experiences related to their definitions of leadership and who they first identified as a leader and why. All 10 participants discussed how they saw leaders as people in their everyday lives. Participants

emphasized qualities such as empathy, resilience, and adaptability as central to their definition of leadership. For example, Participant 1 spoke about her father's presence and leadership as head of the household:

my dad, as head of our family, will probably be the first person that I would think of as a leader. Well, one, again he was there, you know. A lot of people did not, you know, grow up with [sic] their father. So he was there. He was a provider you know, he made the decisions.

Similarly, Participant 8 spoke of her father as being her role model, stating, "he started from the bottom and worked his way all the way to the top" in his military career.

Participant 3 noted that her grandmother was the matriarch of the family and "encouraged everybody in the family to get ... into government, or, you know, go to school, buy a house ... she encouraged greatness from everybody." Participant 9 shared that her grandfather was "a trailblazer. He always looked for ways to help the black community in his town in Oklahoma. He was an entrepreneur, so he always carved out his own niche ... he didn't try to fit in. He created his own right."

Several other participants also shared similar sentiments about non-family members' encouragement was important to them. For example, Participant 2 shared that her former manager, "was ... a very warm person, but was willing to share ... honest feedback with you, but not in a way to demean you ... and I always remember that, and it stuck with me." Likewise, Participant 5 said of her former manager,

she was inspiring to her entire team of people around her, and her commitment to that organization was just ... it was priceless. And she believed in letting her

people around her grow so it ... wasn't always her way or the highway.

Sometimes she just let you run with it. Even when later, you would find out, you knew it was probably not going to work out, she was the type of leader that would step back and let you experience that.

In the same way, Participant 7 described her experience with a former supervisor in this way:

So back at the beginning of my career, there was a person that I can say who was my supervisor, who exhibited skills like leadership skills in the sense that they looked out for me. They wanted to make sure that they took my best interest at heart, not just me, but, generally speaking, they were a people person, and they genuinely cared about people. And they cared about people being treated fairly.

Participant 4 shared that her high school coach “really pushed me outside of my comfort zone ... and it's just kind of stuck with me ever since.” This theme was significant because it highlighted that participants' definition of leadership is borne out of personal experiences with individuals who showed care and concern for the growth and development of others.

For these 10 participants, leadership involves being a role model, empowering and advocating for others, and fostering a sense of inclusivity. Participants noted that their leadership styles were shaped by their unique experiences as Black women, allowing them to lead with compassion and understanding, particularly in navigating adversity. Participants also described leadership not merely as exercising authority but as creating spaces where everyone feels valued. As Participant 10 asserted, “I think that's

also something that leaders need to know and understand is ... how to advocate for their people.” This theme highlights the distinct perspectives Black women bring to leadership roles and how their lived experiences influence their leadership approaches.

### **Theme 2: Discrimination Despite Positive Experiences**

The second theme, discrimination despite positive experiences, highlighted the challenges participants faced in the workplace, even when they were recognized as effective leaders. Despite reporting generally positive workplace experiences, most participants described encountering various forms of discrimination. These ranged from overt racism to microaggressions, often masked behind positive feedback or praise.

Participant 1 reflected on her experience:

It was always like, like running a race with something like my hands or my foot tied behind my back or not given the recognition that my team deserves, like we're working doubly hard, or we clearly doing really well and not being invited to the party. It was always like little microaggressions like that.

Several participants shared experiences how their race and gender were subtly undermined in professional settings, with discrimination often taking the form of being overlooked for key opportunities, being stereotyped, or having their capabilities questioned despite their achievements. Participant 8 explained:

It has been my experience that we all know that 'twice as good, half as much' speech, and I experienced that a great deal. I really feel like, initially I had to prove myself. I had to prove that I earned my degree. I knew English, I knew [my

job duties] ... I had to do a lot more leaps and bounds than my non-Black counterparts or non-people of color counterparts.

Similarly, Participant 3 commented:

I checked all the boxes of ... that position and what they were looking for, and I know I could have taken that agency to ... the highest of highs. But there was an older White male who they ultimately gave the position to, and he was not licensed.

Similarly, Participant 6 asserted, “I am here because I’ve earned the right to be here ... while my blackness is an integral part of who I am, you better not make that overshadow ... the accomplishments and all of the work that I did.” Despite receiving positive feedback on their work performance and leadership abilities, many participants reported encounters with various forms of discrimination, including microaggressions and exclusion from key opportunities. This theme illustrates the duality of participants’ experiences—they are being privately praised for their capability but still facing biased treatment regarding professional advancement—and illustrates the complex nature of being a Black woman seeking a leadership role.

### **Theme 3: Minimal Effects of DEI Programming**

The third theme, minimal effects of DEI programming, uncovered participants’ disappointment with current DEI initiatives in their workplaces. Participants reported the perceived ineffectiveness of DEI programming in addressing the real issues of discrimination and inequity. Most participants also expressed frustration with their associations’ DEI initiatives, which they described as surface-level efforts that failed to

produce meaningful change. As Participant 2 commented about her organization's program,

It's truly not a DEI program meant to support diversity and inclusion within our organization. It's meant to ... check off a box like, 'Oh, look! We did something.' And it's volunteer. You're asking the same people that you're oppressing to do something about it.

Likewise, Participant 5 remarked, "our DEI program was put into place as a reaction to the socio-political and economic state of the country. At that time I don't think it was planned well, and the direction was a little wonky." Participants noted that while DEI programming often mentioned general issues of diversity, they did not focus enough on the specific challenges Black women face regarding their career advancement. This led to a sense of disillusionment and skepticism about the true impact of these initiatives. Participant 9 stated:

The DEI program was never, I don't think, truly embraced by the C-suite, anyway, I think, particularly after George Floyd was murdered. There was, as with a lot of companies, there was all of a sudden this, quasi-concern over how the perception of how African Americans were being treated within society ... within the organization ... But I don't think there was really any genuine concern about that. To be honest with you, I think they were giving it a lot of lip service.

This theme suggests that while DEI programming exists within nonprofit national associations of regulatory boards, there may be a significant gap between the stated intentions of these initiatives and their actual outcomes. Participants suggested that these

programs were performative or surface-level and did not result in substantive changes to organizational culture or address the specific challenges faced by Black women.

Participants called for more accountability and sustained efforts to address racial and gender inequality, expressing skepticism about the true impact of existing DEI efforts.

#### **Theme 4: Recommendations for Other Black Women in Leadership Positions**

The fourth theme, recommendations for other Black women in leadership, demonstrated the participants' willingness to share strategies and lessons learned from their own leadership journeys. The recommendations shared were grounded in the participants' own experiences of overcoming challenges and learning how to navigate often hostile or unsupportive environments. Common advice included the importance of self-advocacy. Participant 10 advised, "the first thing I would say ... is advocate for yourself. Force them to tell you why you don't deserve something if you feel like you do." Another common piece of advice was the importance of building a support system. Participants emphasized the need to seek out mentors, especially other women of color, and to create a network of individuals who could offer guidance and encouragement. Participant 1 recommended, "find a community, because ... we as Black women, we will take on the world and do all this, but we also know how to be there for each other and support each other." Likewise, Participant 2 advocated for networking and mentorship:

So if you are a Black woman navigating that space in a leadership capacity ... find like-minded Black women and Black men ... to cushion that feeling of alienation. Sometimes ... you have to have a team outside of your team that gives you that feeling like it's okay, we ... see the value, we see you. It can be

demoralizing to be the only one, and it can be demoralizing when you're working hard, and you know you brought value, and there's either no recognition or ... your accomplishments are downplayed. So for women of color or Black women going into leadership roles, I recommend ... bolstering your resilience, creating a really good network for yourself, some relationships for yourself ... so you can maintain that feeling of connectedness to yourself.

Similarly, Participant 4 advised, "definitely align yourself with other women like you, that look like you, and definitely get you a circle of support ... as of self-advocacy, resilience, and community for Black women striving for leadership roles." Overall, participants encouraged other Black women to be resilient, seek mentorship, and connect with a community of like-minded individuals who could offer guidance and encouragement.

### **Theme 5: Recommendations for Designing Workplace DEI Programming**

Finally, the fifth theme, recommendations for designing workplace DEI programming, reflected participants' suggestions for creating more effective and meaningful DEI initiatives. Specifically, participants offered valuable insights into how DEI programming could be improved to better serve Black women in the workplace. A recurring suggestion was the need for programs to be more intentional and focused on the specific challenges faced by Black women, rather than taking a broad, generalized approach. Participant 9 asserted:

Diversity and equity and inclusion have to be intentional actions. They can't just happen by chance, because if it's allowed to just happen by chance ... folks who

are in positions of authority will do what's more comfortable ... where they don't have to come outside of their bubble or their comfort zone.

Participants also emphasized the importance of involving Black women in the design and implementation of DEI programming to ensure that their voices are heard and their experiences are represented. Participant 1 emphasized, "if you're leading ... based on this group's mission of diversity, it's probably best that you actually have some experience with discrimination and bias ... that you have some collateral in the mission that you're leading. Otherwise ... how can you ... identify with it?" Likewise, Participant 3 suggested:

I would start by including Black women ... have us at the table. I don't know how you would build it without us. And I think, unfortunately, when people want to ... they'll do things without having the right people at the table. So you have to have somebody at the table who has ... been there done that.

This theme points to the need for a more inclusive, intersectional approach to DEI programming, where the voices of Black women are not only included but prioritized in the conversation. Participants emphasized the need for DEI programs to focus specifically on the intersectional experiences of race and gender, particularly those of Black women. Additionally, participants recommended that Black women be involved in the design and implementation of these programs to ensure that their voices and perspectives are included.

## Summary

Chapter 4 presented an overview of the process utilized to gather and manage the data collected during interviews with 10 Black women in leadership roles in nonprofit national associations of regulatory boards conducted via Zoom. This led to a comprehensive analysis of the experiences of these women on their respective leadership journeys to answer the study's research question: What has been the experience of Black women who have obtained leadership positions in nonprofit national associations of regulatory boards?

The thematic analysis of the interviews identified five key themes that provide insight into how these women navigate leadership, encounter discrimination, and perceive the effectiveness of workplace DEI programming and led to thick, rich data on the lived experiences of Black women leaders at nonprofit national associations of regulatory boards. The five themes identified were conceptualization of leadership, discrimination despite positive experiences, minimal effects of DEI programming, recommendations for other Black women in leadership, and recommendations for designing workplace DEI programming. This chapter also explored the recommendations for other Black women aspiring to leadership and offered their perspectives on improving DEI initiatives. Furthermore, this chapter outlines the steps taken to ensure the trustworthiness of the study's findings.

To ensure the trustworthiness of the study, I employed several strategies across the criteria of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

In conclusion, the findings from this chapter provide valuable insights into the leadership experiences of Black women, including the challenges they face and their strategies for success. The themes identified not only contribute to understanding the lived experiences of Black women in leadership but also offer practical recommendations for improving DEI programming in the workplace. By focusing on the intersection of race and gender and involving Black women in workplace DEI initiatives, organizations may create more inclusive environments that support the leadership and professional growth of Black women and other marginalized groups.

In Chapter 5, I interpret the study findings, comparing and contrasting the findings with the literature review described in Chapter 2 and Benet's (2006, 2012, 2022) polarities of democracy theory, a framework designed to promote democracy as an either/or solution to the problem of oppression.

## Chapter 5: Discussion, Implications, and Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to explore the leadership experiences of Black women leaders at nonprofit national associations of regulatory boards. Through interviews with 10 Black women who are leaders at nonprofit national associations of regulatory boards, the study aimed to understand the unique challenges they faced and provide insights to support public policies that prioritize and/or strengthen workplace DEI efforts to support Black women's career advancement despite federal anti-DEI legislation. The study focused on how participants conceptualized leadership, navigated biases and discrimination on their leadership journey, and evaluated their respective workplace DEI programs. Five themes emerged: conceptualization of leadership, discrimination despite positive experiences, minimal effects of DEI programming, recommendations for other Black women in leadership, and recommendations for designing workplace DEI programming.

This chapter provides an interpretation of the findings presented in Chapter 4, including critical dimensions of how Black women conceptualize leadership, navigate discrimination, evaluate the impact of DEI programs on their leadership trajectory, and offers recommendations for organizational change and public policy development. The findings are analyzed through the lens of the extant literature reviewed in Chapter 2 and Benet's (2006, 2012, 2022) polarities of democracy theory, a framework designed to promote democracy as an either/or solution to the problem of oppression. According to Benet (2006, 2012, 2022), achieving the promise of democracy requires leveraging 10 values in their five polarity pairs: freedom and authority, justice and due process,

diversity and equality, human rights and communal obligations, and participation and representation. The effective leveraging of these five polarities can also lead to creating more sustainable solutions when navigating tensions inherent in organizational and societal dynamics. Chapter 5 begins with a discussion of key findings in relation to the identified themes and the individual polarity pairs within the theory, followed by implications for practice and policy. Finally, limitations of the study are addressed, and concluding thoughts are presented.

### **Interpretation of the Findings**

#### **Findings in Relation to Existing Literature**

The results of my study revealed five themes—conceptualization of leadership, discrimination despite positive experiences, minimal effects of DEI programming, recommendations for other Black women in leadership, and recommendations for designing workplace DEI programming—that appear to confirm and extend prior research on Black women’s leadership experiences and DEI challenges.

#### ***Conceptualization of Leadership***

Black women leaders consistently articulated a leadership framework that departs from traditional hierarchical models, instead emphasizing relational, adaptive, and community- and family-centered practices, and appears to align with transformational leadership principles identified by Brown (2022) and Hood (2022). Participants also viewed leadership as collaborative and inclusive, stemming from their personal experiences with people outside of the workplace who encouraged them to do their best, helped them succeed, and removed barriers to their success. This aligns with Sales, et

al.'s (2019) conceptualization of women leaders' perceptions of empowerment in which women lead through care, justice, and the transformation of oppressive structures. These findings challenge dominant paradigms that define leadership in terms of positional power and individual achievement. Rather, participants' conceptualization of leadership reflected a commitment to shared success, emotional labor, and values-based action—elements often absent from mainstream leadership frameworks, consistent with findings by Smith, et al. (2019). However, participants also reported that their experiences in the workplace differed significantly and were more oppressive in nature than those they observed happening to colleagues from other demographics, consistent with what was identified by Hartman & Barber (2020), Morgan (2020), and Nickels & Leach (2021).

### ***Discrimination Despite Positive Experiences***

Despite notable achievements, participants reported persistent experiences of discrimination in the workplace, attributing it to the organizational culture, in which they were viewed as less qualified than their respective White and male counterparts, consistent with findings of Phelps (1972), Tran (2021), and Weiner (2021). Participants also shared accounts of being celebrated for performance outcomes while simultaneously facing microaggressions, tokenism, and exclusion from formal leadership networks. These findings echo Bell's (1995) and Crenshaw's (1989) critical race theories which describe the dual burden of being recognized as effective leaders while managing the psychological toll of microaggressions and racial bias. Additionally, participants reported that this bias inhibited their career advancement, consistent with findings from Ammerman & Groysberg (2022) and Cirincione-Ulezi (2020). This paradox reveals a

deeper organizational contradiction: success does not protect Black women from the realities of racialized leadership spaces. Instead, their accomplishments often coexist with unacknowledged labor, emotional fatigue, and structural marginalization. Moreover, these findings align with existing scholarship on the invisibility and hypervisibility experienced by Black women in positions of power identified by Dickens, et al., (2019), Liao, et al. (2020), Motro, et al. (2022), and Smith, et al. (2019), reinforcing the need for organizational interventions and public policies that address both outcomes and context.

### ***Minimal Effects of DEI Programming***

Even before the recent surge in legislative restrictions, participants expressed skepticism toward the effectiveness of existing workplace DEI programs, which they described as superficial and disconnected from the structural realities of their work environments, reflecting concerns about the decoupling of policies from actual practice raised in diversity research by Mor Barak, et al. (2022) and Zheng (2022). Participants' critique of their workplace DEI programs also reflected literature on this gap between DEI policy and practice identified by Brown (2022), Hall (2022) and Mor Barak, et al. (2022). Participants' comments echoed that of Pandey, et al (2022) and Portocarrero & Carter (2022) who found that workplace initiatives were often performative and not aimed at dismantling racist and misogynistic systems of oppression that disproportionately affect Black women. While many institutions outwardly endorsed DEI, participants noted the absence of meaningful change in leadership demographics, organizational culture, and everyday workplace interactions. These findings align with critiques of "policy-practice decoupling," wherein there is a disconnect between policies

and practical application and organizations prioritize surface-level representation over substantive equity posited by Mor Barak, et al. (2022).

The ineffectiveness of DEI programming, as described by participants, underscores the necessity for initiatives that are rooted in anti-racist practice, intersectionality, and accountability asserted by Crenshaw (1989), Morgan (2020) and Pandey, et al. (2022). Without these components, DEI efforts may risk reinforcing the very systems they purport to dismantle. Moreover, a rapidly evolving legislative landscape—particularly in Republican-led states—has resulted in bans on DEI offices and programs. Coupled with the enactment of Executive Order 14173 (2025) and DOJ guidance (United States Department of Justice, 2025), which effectively eliminated affirmative action obligations and framed DEI as antithetical to “merit-based” opportunity, these policy actions signal that DEI is not only minimally impactful but also politically unstable—validating participant critiques of DEI as symbolic rather than transformative.

### ***Recommendations for Other Black Women in Leadership***

Participants shared intentional strategies and recommendations aimed at supporting other Black women navigating leadership roles. Consistent with findings from Bowers (2021), Branche & Ford (2022), and Brown (2022), participants emphasized the need for Black women to practice self-advocacy, maintain authenticity and resilience, and to regularly connect with other Black women in established networks of solidarity and culturally affirming mentorships to maintain their mental health and counter the effects of dealing with discriminatory workplace interactions. These strategies reflect not

only survival tactics but also expressions of collective care and intergenerational knowledge transfer. Such intra-community guidance aligns with Black feminist traditions of communal responsibility and resistance identified by Chance (2021), Cook (2020), Crenshaw (1989), Davis (1982) and hooks (1984). Rather than focusing solely on individual advancement, participants emphasized a leadership approach rooted in collective empowerment, underscoring the relational dimensions of leadership often ignored in dominant paradigms (Berry & Gross, 2020). These practices represent critical forms of cultural resistance and knowledge creation within leadership spaces.

### ***Recommendations for Designing Workplace DEI Programs***

Participants offered explicit recommendations for how organizations should redesign workplace DEI programs to create lasting impact. Involving Black women in DEI design and implementation was recommended, a suggestion aligned with the need for meaningful inclusion posited by Sims & Carter (2022). They also advocated for approaches that are structurally embedded, culturally responsive, and accountable to outcomes consistent with recommendations by Mor Barak, et al. (2022). Key recommendations included transparent promotion processes, equity-focused leadership development, regular assessments of racial climate, and inclusive decision-making structures.

These calls reflect a shift from performative DEI to justice-oriented organizational change. In line with Zheng (2022), participants emphasized that meaningful DEI work must be led by those most affected by exclusion and informed by critical inquiry. Participants suggested that designing DEI programs through the lens of Black women's

lived experiences may provide a pathway toward more ethical, equitable, and sustainable institutional practices. Yet, newly enacted legal restrictions actively contradict these aims. Federal directives and corporate capitulation, or “anticipatory obedience” (Snyder, 2017) can create a direct conflict with participants’ calls for DEI programs grounded in Black women’s lived experiences. Where the themes recommend programs built on accountability, belonging, and structural equity, current legal and political forces may dismantle the feasibility of such interventions—making theoretical recommendations difficult to implement in organizational and public policy contexts.

Taken together, these five themes reveal that while Black women continue to lead with strength, creativity, and strategic insight, they remain embedded in organizational systems that often fail to affirm or support their leadership in meaningful ways. Their experiences reflect both the persistence of structural inequities and the radical potential of community-based, culturally grounded leadership practices identified in the extant literature on Black women’s leadership experiences. Moreover, the five themes identified in the study appear to have strong alignment with Benet’s (2006, 2012, 2022) polarities of democracy theory.

### **Findings in Relation to the Theoretical Framework**

Benet’s (2006, 2012, 2022) polarities of democracy theory identifies 10 values, arranged in five polarity pairs, that exist in democratic societies, each representing a tension that must be managed rather than solved. These polarity pairs are freedom and authority, justice and due process, diversity and equality, human rights and communal obligations, and participation and representation. In the context of this study, several of

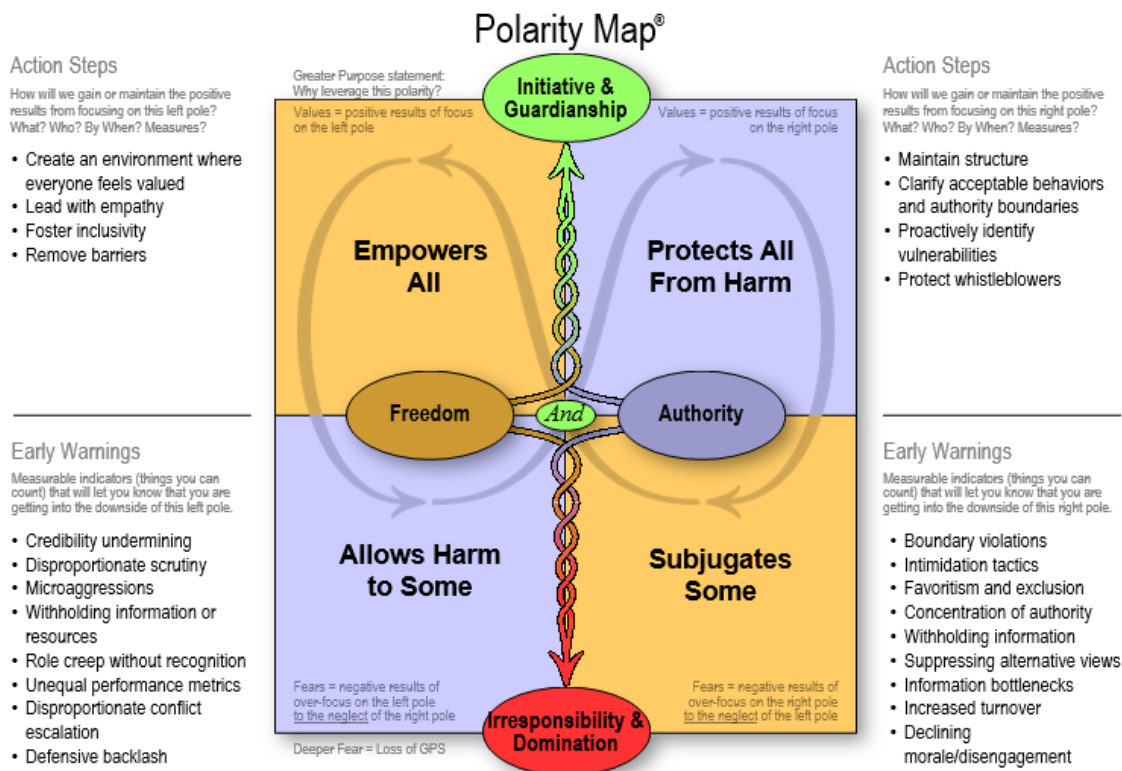
these polarities align with the experiences of Black women in leadership and their reflections on leadership, discrimination, and DEI programming.

### ***Freedom and Authority***

The tension between freedom and authority was evident in the participants' experiences of leadership, particularly in how they conceptualized leadership as an act of empowering others (freedom) while simultaneously navigating organizational hierarchies (authority). Participants emphasized the importance of leading with empathy and fostering inclusivity, reflecting a leadership approach that seeks to maximize the positive and minimize the negative aspects of the freedom employees have to express their ideas and contributions with the need for leaders to maximize the positives and minimize the negatives of exercising authority and maintaining structure. As Participant 5 stated, "leadership to me is not about being in charge, it's about bringing others along with you and creating an environment where everyone feels valued." This view aligns strongly with Benet's (2012) concept of managing the polarity between freedom and authority by fostering environments where leadership supports individual empowerment without undermining organizational stability. Figure 9 is a Basic Map to visually identify the positive and negative aspects of the freedom and authority value pair including actions steps and early warnings identified from the study.

**Figure 9**

*Polarity Map for Identifying the Positive and Negative Aspects of the Freedom and Authority Polarity Pair of the Polarities of Democracy's Values Including Action Steps and Early Warnings*



### ***Justice and Due Process***

The participants' experiences of discrimination despite positive experiences relate to the polarity between justice and due process. Many participants reported feeling that, while they were often praised for their leadership abilities, they still faced systemic barriers to promotion and equal recognition due to their race and gender. This tension reflects the broader challenge of ensuring justice (equitable treatment and outcomes)

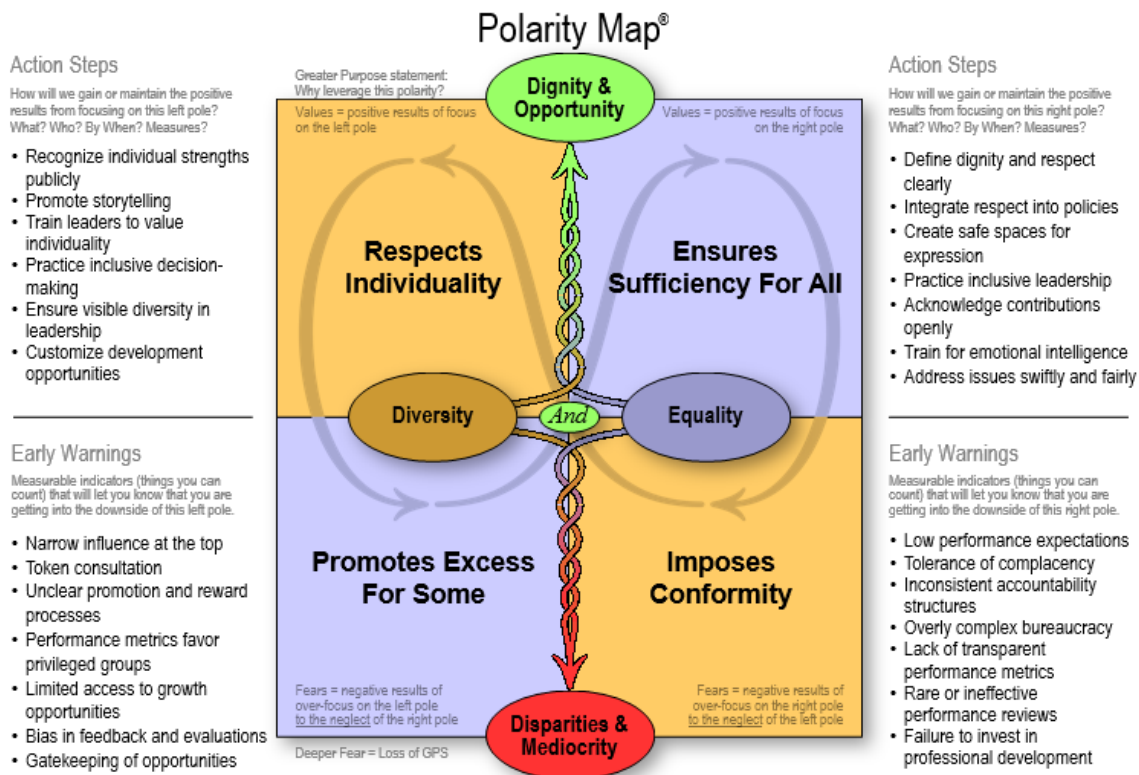
while navigating due process (organizational policies and procedures). Participant 1, for example, noted, “even when I’m successful, I feel like people still see me as a Black woman first. I’ve been told I’m a great leader, but then I get treated differently when it comes to promotions or recognition.” This aligns with Benet’s (2006) emphasis on balancing justice and due process—ensuring fairness in outcomes (justice) while ensuring that institutional processes (due process) are not discriminatory. The participants’ experiences suggest a need for organizations to reassess how procedural fairness is applied to ensure justice for underrepresented leaders. Figure 10 is a Basic Map to visually identify the positive and negative aspects of the justice and due process value pair including actions steps and early warnings identified from the study.



inequalities that Black women face in leadership roles. As Participant 9 remarked, “the DEI programs feel like a checkbox activity. Yes, they talk about inclusion, but I don’t see real change happening, especially for Black women like me.” Benet’s (2022) work on managing the diversity and equality polarity emphasizes the need for organizations to recognize and value differences (diversity) while ensuring that these differences do not perpetuate systemic inequalities (equality). The findings suggest that while organizations may be prioritizing diversity, they are failing to adequately balance this with the necessary work of achieving equality in opportunities for Black women. Figure 11 is a Basic Map to visually identify the positive and negative aspects of the diversity and equality value pair including actions steps and early warnings identified from the study.

**Figure 11**

*Polarity Map for Identifying the Positive and Negative Aspects of the Diversity and Equality Polarity Pair of the Polarities of Democracy's Values Including Action Steps and Early Warnings*



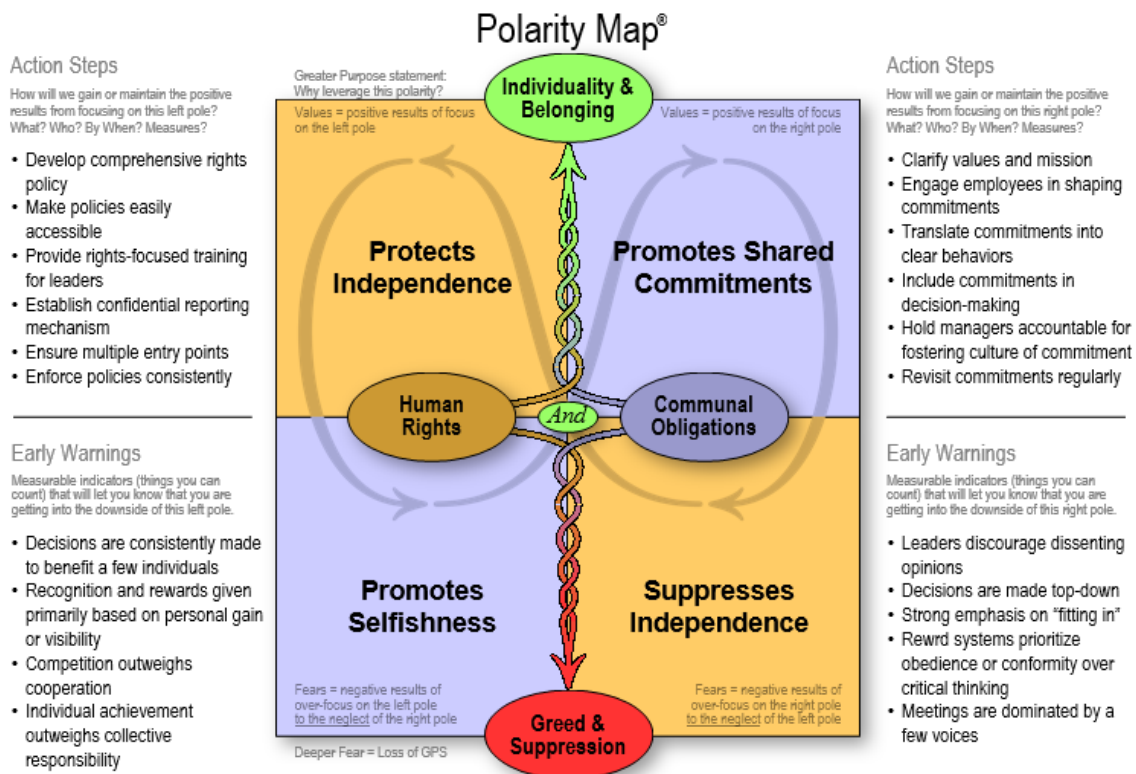
### ***Human Rights and Communal Obligations***

The advice for other Black women and ideas for designing workplace DEI programming offered by participants can be understood through the polarity of human rights and communal obligations. Many participants emphasized the importance of self-advocacy, resilience, and building personal networks (human rights), while also highlighting the need for creating supportive communities and fostering collective action

(communal obligations) within and outside of the workplace. As Participant 6 shared, “you have to be your biggest advocate. Don’t wait for someone to give you an opportunity, go out and take it. But also know when it’s okay to step back and take care of yourself.” This reflects Benet’s (2006, 2012) call to manage the complexity of honoring individual rights with the obligation to support the larger community. The participants advocated for both individual empowerment and communal support, suggesting that Black women must navigate the tension between pursuing personal advancement and contributing to the collective uplift of their peers. Figure 12 is a Basic Map to visually identify the positive and negative aspects of the human rights and communal obligations value pair including actions steps and early warnings identified from the study.

**Figure 12**

*Polarity Map for Identifying the Positive and Negative Aspects of the Human Rights and Communal Obligations Polarity Pair of the Polarities of Democracy’s Values Including Action Steps and Early Warnings*



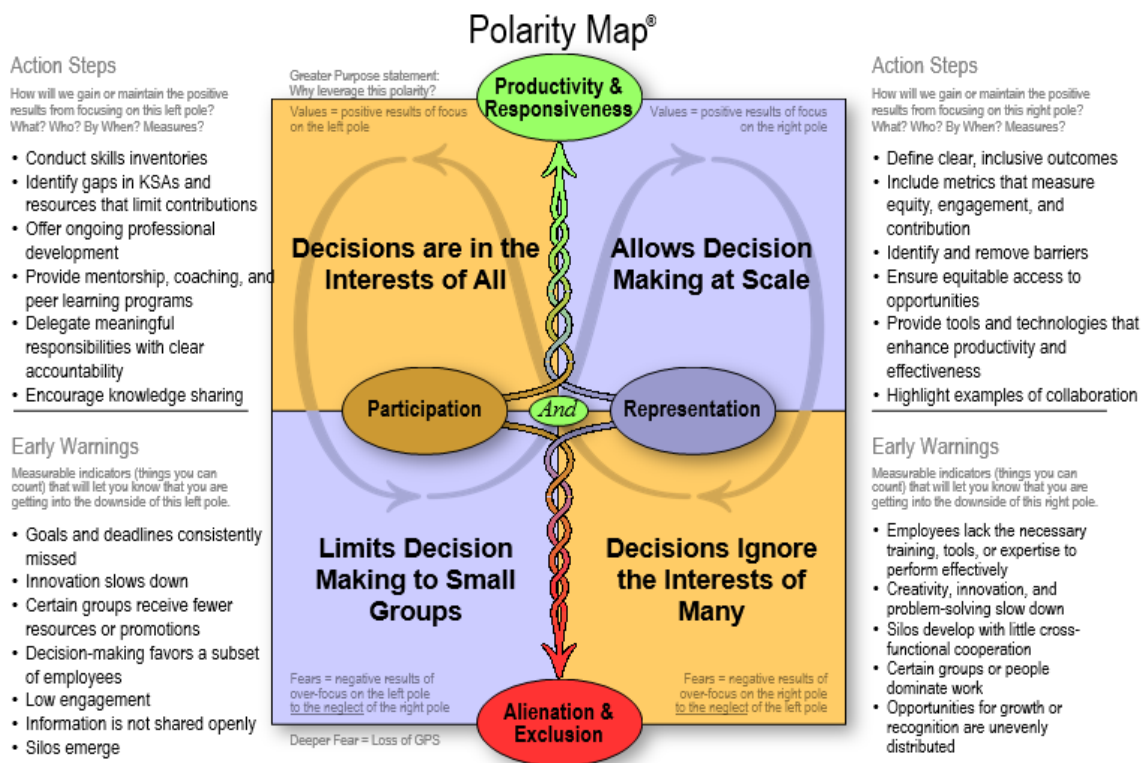
***Participation and Representation***

The final polarity of participation and representation connects to participants’ suggestions for improving DEI programming. Several participants emphasized the importance of involving Black women in the design and implementation of DEI initiatives to ensure that their voices are represented in organizational decision-making processes. As Participant 2 explained, “the people most affected by discrimination should

be the ones shaping these programs. We need to be in the room when these decisions are being made.” This insight resonates with Benet’s (2022) theory of managing the participation and representation polarity—ensuring that all voices, particularly those of marginalized groups, are both heard (participation) and have the power to influence decisions (representation). The findings suggest that for DEI programming to be effective, organizations must prioritize not only the inclusion of diverse voices but also their representation in leadership and decision-making roles. Figure 13 is a Basic Map to visually identify the positive and negative aspects of the participation and representation value pair including actions steps and early warnings identified from the study.

**Figure 13**

*Polarity Map for Identifying the Positive and Negative Aspects of the Participation and Representation Polarity Pair of the Polarities of Democracy's Values Including Action Steps and Early Warnings*



### Limitations of the Study

This study has several limitations. First, the sample size was limited to 10 participants, which, while providing in-depth insights, may not fully represent the experiences of all Black women in leadership roles across various sectors. Additionally, the study was conducted through Zoom interviews, which may have influenced participants' comfort or willingness to share and discuss more sensitive information.

Furthermore, as Lincoln & Guba (1985) assert, the findings in qualitative research are context-specific. Therefore, the findings of this study may not be generalizable to all Black women leaders. These limitations align with previous critiques of qualitative methodology by Caelli, et al. (2003).

### **Recommendations**

Future research should expand the sample to include Black women from a broader range of industries and leadership levels. Additionally, longitudinal studies could explore how DEI initiatives evolve over time and whether they result in meaningful changes in the leadership experiences of Black women. Research could also further investigate how organizations can better manage the polarities identified in this study to promote more inclusive and equitable workplaces, despite the current anti-DEI legislative wave.

### **Implications**

The findings of this study, when viewed through the polarities of democracy theory framework, provide several practical and policy implications for organizations seeking to improve leadership opportunities for Black women and to design more effective DEI programs. As Black women in leadership continue to experience systemic marginalization—even within environments professing a commitment to equity—there emerges a clear call for policies that move beyond symbolic compliance and address structural inequities through legislation, funding priorities, and accountability mechanisms.

From a practice standpoint, organizations should create policies that align with Benet's (2022) polarities of democracy theory framework, particularly in maximizing the

positive aspects and minimizing the negative aspects of the participation and representation polarity pair by ensuring that marginalized groups, especially Black women, are involved in creating and implementing policies that directly affect their careers. Furthermore, policies should address the justice and due process polarity pair, ensuring that systems of accountability and promotion are fair and transparent. This will require revising existing DEI policies to ensure they focus not only on diversity but also on creating structural equity. Moreover, addressing policies at the intersection of the diversity and equality polarity pair and the justice and due process polarity pair, may ensure that changes to workplace policies are considered in a more equitable manner. Some examples might include the following:

### **Leadership Development**

Organizations should focus on leadership development programs that affective leverage freedom and authority, empowering Black women to lead authentically while navigating the authority structures of their organizations. In 2025, federal executive orders (Executive Order No. 14173, 2025) rescinded affirmative action mandates and banned DEI programs. In response, state and local governments should explicitly defend institutions' and organizations' rights to deliver leadership and equity training rooted in lived experience. This might include enacting or affirming protections for academic freedom in public higher education governance or issuing state-level guidance or directives confirming that institutions and organizations retain the legal ability to promote inclusive leadership as a public good, regardless of federal pressure.

**Fairness in Promotions and Recognition**

Emerging policies often enforce a one-size-fits-all neutrality, rejecting intersectional frameworks. To address the justice and due process polarity, organizations must reassess their promotion and recognition practices to ensure that Black women receive equitable treatment and advancement opportunities. Additionally, policymakers designing workforce development, grant, or educational standards must mandate intersectional data collection and impact assessments. Practical tactics might include requiring desegregated demographic reporting in leadership pipelines or adopting equity impact reviews for policy proposals at state agencies to reveal and address disparities affecting Black women.

**Effective DEI Programming**

Study participants described DEI programming as largely ineffective in its current form, echoing critiques that many such efforts serve institutional image management rather than substantive equity, as suggested by Mor Barak, et al. (2022) and Zheng (2022). In their eyes, DEI initiatives should go beyond surface-level diversity efforts by addressing the intersection of the diversity and equality polarity pair and the justice and due process polarity pair, ensuring that structural inequalities are confronted and that diversity efforts lead to true equity. This suggests the need to move beyond compliance-oriented mandates toward transformational equity policies that are enforceable, measurable, and centered on lived experience. Additionally, Black women should play an active role in shaping DEI programming, ensuring that both their participation and representation are prioritized and effectively leveraged in organizational decisions.

From a policy standpoint, the study's findings—particularly around the limited efficacy of DEI programming (Theme 3) and recommendations for designing more justice-oriented DEI programming (Theme 5)—must now be interpreted within a markedly constrained policy defined by sweeping anti-DEI laws and rhetoric. To preserve DEI programming aligned with Black women's lived experiences in this environment, policymakers should seek legal protections through affirmatively framing equity initiatives as civil rights compliance, modeled after Title VII protections. This may include actions such as repealing or amending state language that categorizes DEI as disallowed, and/or ensuring statutes allow institutions to implement culturally responsive leadership pathways and mentorship programs without fear of funding loss.

### **Mentorship and Community Building**

Supporting Black women in leadership roles requires programs that effectively leverage human rights and communal obligations, encouraging both self-advocacy and the creation of supportive communities for collective success. Participants' calls for transparent leadership pathways and culturally responsive mentorship indicate a policy gap in protecting equitable access to professional advancement. With recent legal attacks targeting race- and gender-conscious initiatives, public policies must protect proactive equity efforts from erasure. Without legal safeguards, organizations may abandon mentorship initiatives designed to address historical underrepresentation, fearing litigation or loss of funding. Public funding agencies can address this concern by conditioning grants, contracts, etc., on measurable equity outcomes and tying

discretionary findings to mentorship programs that lead to improvements in leadership representation, retention, and satisfaction metrics among underrepresented groups.

### **Conclusion**

This chapter has interpreted the findings of Chapter 4 through the lens of Benet's (2006, 2012, 2022) polarities of democracy theory framework, illustrating how Black women in leadership at nonprofit national associations of regulatory boards navigate tensions such as freedom and authority, justice and due process, diversity and equality, human rights and communal obligations, and participation and representation. When effectively managed, these polarities offer a path toward the promise of democracy as an either/or solution to the problem of oppression in the workplace.

The current anti-DEI legislative wave significantly disrupts organizational and institutional capacity to implement participant-endorsed frameworks for equity and leadership advancement. Policies targeting DEI offices, banning identity-based support, and threatening funding impose structural imitations that undermine participant-driven recommendations for accountability, intersectional responsiveness, and culturally driven leadership pipelines. Yet, as the study highlights, Black women leaders offer grounded strategies to foster equity-provided supportive policy systems exist. Public policy must now pivot from neutral rhetoric and symbolic compliance to enforceable equity measures, legal protections for inclusive programming, and organizational independence from ideological rollback. Public policy must also evolve in ways that not only permit but require organizations and institutions to operationalize equity for historically excluded populations, including Black women in leadership.

The study's findings also suggest that meaningful progress depends not merely on internal organizational will, but on an enabling policy environment—one that embeds equity into the legal, fiscal, and cultural infrastructure of public life. The current political climate—characterized by sweeping anti-DEI rhetoric and rollback of protections—poses a direct threat to this progress. By addressing the practical and policy implications identified in this study, organizations can create environments that not only support Black women in leadership but also foster broader organizational equity. Moreover, by embedding accountability, intersectional metrics, and legal safeguards into public funding, policymakers can enable DEI design rooted in lived experience to persist, despite current legislative backlash. Therefore, it is incumbent upon policymakers, advocates, public institutions and organizations to resist regressive trends and champion policies that affirm diversity, equity, and inclusion as both democratic and a measurable public responsibility.

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## Appendix A: In-Depth Interview Guide

### **Step 1: Welcome, Introduction, Study's Purpose, and Interview Procedures**

Good morning/afternoon. Thank you for agreeing to participate in this interview. In my proposed research study, I'm seeking to understand the perceptions of Black women who aspire to leadership positions in nonprofit national associations of regulatory boards, the barriers they encounter, and what effect workplace diversity, equity, and inclusion programming has on overcoming these barriers to leadership. This interview session should last approximately 60-75 minutes.

The informed consent details all the specifics of your participation. During the interview, I will ask you approximately 15 questions related to the study's topic and purpose in addition to any probing questions for clarification or additional information. Audio recording will be used to capture your exact response while I take notes.

Any information you provide will be secured under lock and key and will remain confidential. Pseudonyms will be used to protect your privacy, confidentiality, and identity. Your place of employment will also be de-identified via alpha-numeric coding, e.g., "Participant 1" and "Company A" in all published documents. Do you have any questions? Do you consent to this interview?

### **Step 2: Turn on audio-recorder**

### **Step 3: Demographic information**

Let's begin with a few background questions.

1. What is your age range? Chooses from the following: < 30; 30-39; 40-49; 50+.
2. How do you identify your race and ethnicity?

3. Where did you grow up?
  - a. What was your childhood like?
  - b. What was your family like?
4. Where did you go to high school/college?
  - a. What was your most memorable experience in school/college?
5. How many years have you worked in the national association industry?
  - a. What is your current title?
  - b. How did you come into this line of work?
  - c. What do you like most about your work?

#### **Step 4: Interview questions**

*I will pose each interview question. I may also pose one of the probing questions below for additional information and/or clarification.*

*Probing Questions:*

*I heard you say...*

*Tell me more about that...*

*Describe what you mean by...*

#### **Beginning questions**

1. What is your definition of what it means to be a leader?
  - a. Tell me about the first person you thought of as a leader.
  - b. What is your first memory of being called a leader?
2. Who were your leadership role models?
  - a. What were the leadership trait(s) you admired most in them?
  - b. What about them made you want to become a leader?
3. Describe your path to your current leadership role?
  - a. Could you describe positive experiences that contributed to your career growth?
  - b. What were some negative experiences that affected your career path?

- c. How did those experiences make you feel?

### **Middle questions**

1. Have you experienced bias or discrimination in the workplace? (If no, skip to question #2)
  - a. What was your first experience with bias or discrimination?
  - b. How did you feel?
  - c. What did you do about it?
  - d. What did your job (HR, CEO, supervisor?) do about it?
2. How was the workplace diversity, equity, and inclusion programming introduced to you?
  - a. What do you think of the programming?
  - b. What type of support were you provided to participate in the programming?
3. How did the program enhance your leadership development opportunities?
  - a. What resources for career growth were made available through the program?
  - b. In what ways did the program help you overcome the barriers you identified?

### **Ending questions**

1. What advice would you offer to Black women that aspire to obtain a leadership role?
2. If you could change anything about the advances you've made so far, what would it be?
3. How would you design a workplace diversity, equity, and inclusion program?
4. Have we missed anything that you would like to discuss further?

### **Step 5: Conclusion**

Thank you again for your participation in this interview. Your responses will be used as data to address the research purpose, problem, and questions for my study.

Your and your company's identity will remain confidential by using pseudonyms. I will take reasonable measures to protect the security of all your personal information, but I cannot guarantee confidentiality of your research data. Only my committee and I will have access to your data.

I will send you a copy of the transcript via email for your review and approval as accurate. If you have questions or wish to expand on or clarify any of your responses, please call me on 202-369-4664 or email me at [staci.mason@waldenu.edu](mailto:staci.mason@waldenu.edu). I will securely store your data for the duration of my time at Walden; then, I will delete all electronic data and destroy any paper data. Once my dissertation is completed and accepted for publication, I will provide you with a copy of it. Do you have any questions for me? Again, thank you for your time and your participation.

## Appendix B: Consolidated Criteria for Reporting Qualitative Studies (COREQ): 32-item

## Checklist (Tong, 2007)

No	Item	Guide questions/description
<b>Domain 1: Research team and reflexivity</b>		
Personal Characteristics		
1.	Interviewer/facilitator	Which author/s conducted the interview or focus group?
2.	Credentials	What were the researcher's credentials? <i>E.g. PhD, MD</i>
3.	Occupation	What was their occupation at the time of the study?
4.	Gender	Was the researcher male or female?
5.	Experience and training	What experience or training did the researcher have?
Relationship with participants		
6.	Relationship established	Was a relationship established prior to study commencement?
7.	Participant knowledge of the interviewer	What did the participants know about the researcher? <i>e.g. personal goals, reasons for doing the research</i>

No	Item	Guide questions/description
8.	Interviewer characteristics	What characteristics were reported about the interviewer/facilitator? <i>e.g. Bias, assumptions, reasons and interests in the research topic</i>
<b>Domain 2: study design</b>		
Theoretical framework		
9.	Methodological orientation and Theory	What methodological orientation was stated to underpin the study? <i>e.g. grounded theory, discourse analysis, ethnography, phenomenology, content analysis</i>
Participant selection		
10.	Sampling	How were participants selected? <i>e.g. purposive, convenience, consecutive, snowball</i>
11.	Method of approach	How were participants approached? <i>e.g. face-to-face, telephone, mail, email</i>
12.	Sample size	How many participants were in the study?
13.	Non-participation	How many people refused to participate or dropped out? Reasons?
Setting		

No	Item	Guide questions/description
14.	Setting of data collection	Where was the data collected? e.g. <i>home, clinic, workplace</i>
15.	Presence of non-participants	Was anyone else present besides the participants and researchers?
16.	Description of sample	What are the important characteristics of the sample? e.g. <i>demographic data, date</i>
Data collection		
17.	Interview guide	Were questions, prompts, guides provided by the authors? Was it pilot tested?
18.	Repeat interviews	Were repeat interviews carried out? If yes, how many?
19.	Audio/visual recording	Did the research use audio or visual recording to collect the data?
20.	Field notes	Were field notes made during and/or after the interview or focus group?
21.	Duration	What was the duration of the interviews or focus group?
22.	Data saturation	Was data saturation discussed?
23.	Transcripts returned	Were transcripts returned to participants for comment and/or correction?

No	Item	Guide questions/description
<b>Domain 3: analysis and findings</b>		
Data analysis		
24.	Number of data coders	How many data coders coded the data?
25.	Description of the coding tree	Did authors provide a description of the coding tree?
26.	Derivation of themes	Were themes identified in advance or derived from the data?
27.	Software	What software, if applicable, was used to manage the data?
28.	Participant checking	Did participants provide feedback on the findings?
Reporting		
29.	Quotations presented	Were participant quotations presented to illustrate the themes / findings? Was each quotation identified? e.g. <i>participant number</i>
30.	Data and findings consistent	Was there consistency between the data presented and the findings?
31.	Clarity of major themes	Were major themes clearly presented in the findings?

<b>No</b>	<b>Item</b>	<b>Guide questions/description</b>
32.	Clarity of minor themes	Is there a description of diverse cases or discussion of minor themes?

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## Appendix C: Email Invitation

**Subject line:**

Interviewing Black women leaders at nonprofit national associations of regulatory boards (\$25 thank you gift)

**Email message:**

There is a new study about Black women leaders at nonprofit national associations of regulatory boards that could help public administrators better understand the effect of workplace diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) policies on the career trajectory of Black women. For this study, you are invited to describe your experiences with career advancement and workplace DEI programming.

**About the study:**

- One 60-75 minute phone interview that will be audio-recorded (no videorecording)
- You would receive a \$25 Visa gift card as a thank you
- To protect your privacy, the published study will not share any names or details that identify you

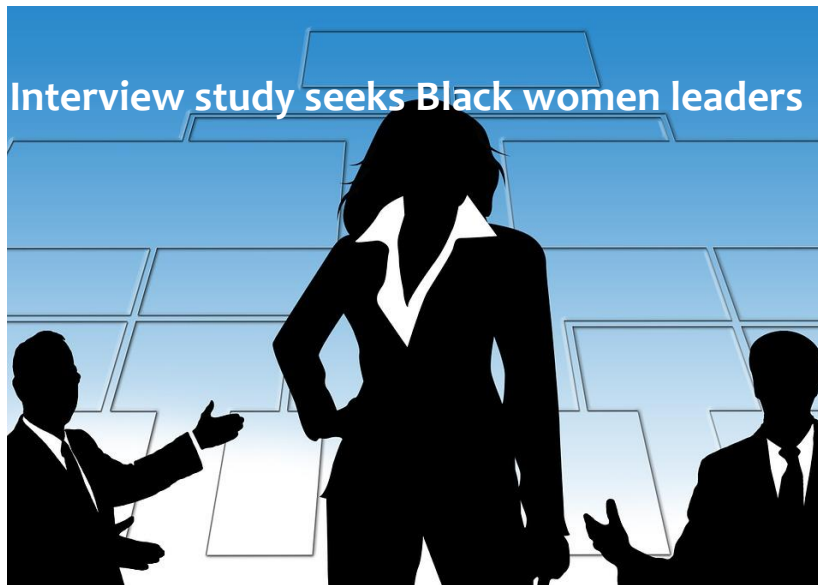
**Volunteers must meet these requirements:**

- 18 years old or older
- Self-identify as a Black (or African American or BIPOC) woman
- Completed at least a bachelor's degree program
- Hold a leadership position within four levels removed from the top executive
- Had experience with workplace diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) programming

This interview is part of the doctoral study for Staci Mason, a doctoral student at Walden University. Interviews will take place during February/March 2024.

Please reach out to [Staci.Mason@WaldenU.edu](mailto:Staci.Mason@WaldenU.edu) to let the researcher know of your interest. You are welcome to forward it to others who might be interested.

## Appendix D: Social Media Invitation



Caption: There is a new study about Black women leaders at nonprofit national associations of regulatory boards that could help public administrators better understand the effect of workplace DEI policies on the career trajectory of Black women. For this study, you are invited to describe your experiences with career advancement and workplace DEI.

**About the study:**

- One 60-75 minute phone interview that will be audio-recorded (no videorecording)
- You would receive a \$25 Visa gift card as a thank you
- To protect your privacy, the published study will not share any names or details that identify you

**Volunteers must meet these requirements:**

- 18 years old or older
- Self-identify as a Black (or African American or BIPOC) woman
- Completed at least a bachelor's degree program
- Hold a leadership position within four levels removed from the top executive
- Had experience with workplace diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI)

This interview is part of the doctoral study for Staci Mason, a doctoral student at Walden University. Interviews will take place during February/March 2024.

Please reach out to [Staci.Mason@WaldenU.edu](mailto:Staci.Mason@WaldenU.edu) to let the researcher know of your interest. You are welcome to forward it to others who might be interested.

## Appendix E: Flyer Invitation

### **Interview study seeks Black women leaders**

There is a new study about Black women leaders at nonprofit national associations of regulatory boards that could help public administrators better understand the effect of workplace DEI policies on the career trajectory of Black women. For this study, you are invited to describe your experiences with career advancement and workplace DEI.

#### **About the study:**

- One 60-75 minute phone interview that will be audio-recorded (no videorecording)
- You would receive a \$25 Visa gift card as a thank you
- To protect your privacy, the published study will not share any names or details that identify you

#### **Volunteers must meet these requirements:**

- 18 years old or older
- Self-identifies as a Black (or African American or BIPOC) woman
- Completed at least a bachelor's degree program
- Holds a leadership position within four levels removed from the top executive
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