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# African-American Women and Work-Life Balance

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# Walden University

College of Social and Behavioral Sciences

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Alisha Powell

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Walden University

2018

Abstract

African-American Women and Work-Life Balance

by

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MSW, University of Denver, 2012

BSW, Oakwood University, 2011

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Social Psychology

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## Abstract

African American women have high rates of depression and anxiety and are more likely to experience marital instability. Work-life balance (WLB) has been a topic of growing discussion and research as the number of women in the workplace has increased significantly. Researchers have demonstrated that women who work full time outside of the home have the unique challenge of fulfilling work obligations while taking care of household responsibilities. Work-life balance (WLB) has been a topic of discussion and research as the numbers of women in the workplace have increased significantly in the United States. The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to better understand the experiences of married African American women and how they manage the demands of both work and family. The theoretical framework was black feminist theory and work life border theory. Participants consisted of married African American women ( $n = 11$ ) who worked full time outside of their home. Data from interviews consisting of open-ended questions and a thematic analysis was conducted for common themes and meanings. Findings reinforce that of current empirical literature on the importance of having a flexible job and a supportive spouse in order to obtain a work-life balance. Using study findings, social psychologists, employers, and the general public may be more culturally competent in their knowledge of the specific challenges facing African American women, which may lead to potential positive social change. For instance, employers may be better able to meet the needs of their African American female employees, which may help to promote greater WLB, better emotional health, and increased life satisfaction for these women.

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## Dedication

I would like to dedicate this to all those who have gone before me to pave the way so that I could have this opportunity. The sacrifices that you made can never be repaid. I am forever indebted.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

### **Introduction**

The majority of adults in the United States divide their time between their workplaces and their homes (Horan & Chory, 2011). Thus, it is no surprise that the harmonious coexistence of work and home responsibilities also known as work-life balance, has been a topic that has come to the forefront of many discussions of policy makers, employers, and working adults (Horan & Chory, 2011). Women are an important part of the work-life balance discussion as they are often tasked with fulfilling work obligations and completing the majority of household duties at home (van Veldhoven & Beijer, 2012). Having a work-life balance means that it is easy for one to navigate between the spheres of work and home and they are not in conflict with each other. As a result of employers not having a work-life balance friendly policies, many women in the United States are negatively affected and many times are unable to take the time off that they need to take care of their families (The White House, 2015). Women in dual-earning households are also more likely to report higher levels of work-life conflict than men, and they often experience stress-related health problems (van Veldhoven & Beijer, 2012).

African American women face the same challenges of balancing work and home as their non-minority counterparts, but they are also affected by discrimination, racism, and classism (Hamm, 2014). In the United States, African American women earn 64 cents for every dollar made by men (Jarrett, 2015). While they are among the most educated groups in the United States, African American women are less likely to marry and more likely to experience depression and anxiety (Hamm, 2014). Historically,

African American women have been understudied in empirical research, and there is an existing gap in the literature regarding African American women and work-life balance (Few, Stephens, & Rouse, 2003).

To address this gap in knowledge, I explored the lived experience of married African American women who were seeking work-life balance. I used a qualitative phenomenological approach to explore the experience of African American women in their own words. I conducted interviews with participants, and meanings were drawn from the data collected. Common themes and patterns were extracted from participants' experiences told in their own words. Implications for further study are explored and discussed in Chapter 5. Results from the study provide a unique contribution to the existing body of knowledge on the experience of married African American women and provide an opportunity for those who work with African American women as colleagues and as professionals to better understand and become competent in how to be responsive and respectful to their cultural needs.

This chapter will begin with an introduction and background of the problem. I will continue the chapter with a problem statement, purpose of the study, research questions, theoretical framework and nature of the study. The chapter will conclude with a discussion of definitions, assumptions, limitations, delimitations, and summary.

### **Background of the Problem**

The experience of constantly juggling multiple demands can be exhausting and stressful for women who are married and work full-time. Work-life balance is an ongoing challenge for many employees. Lower productivity, increased stress, and work absences

can all be a result of conflicting priorities and poor work-life balance (Bell, Rajendran, & Theiler, 2012). Women can often feel conflicted as they navigate work responsibilities and meeting the expectations of their employers while being emotionally and physically present for their spouses and children. Employers have discovered that happy employees have higher levels of productivity (Pandey & Khare, 2013). Women can be more inclined to stay on the job when they are satisfied and when they feel that their employers genuinely care about their welfare. Researchers have found that women experience the stress of obtaining a work- life balance in a different way than men, as their work commitments are valued less (Walia, 2015). As a result, women are more likely than men to report a conflict between work and home responsibilities as they typically complete the majority of household duties (Walia, 2015).

Daily life for many working women in the United States consists of attempting to maintain a delicate balance between their jobs and their families. Women often find themselves in dual roles that include work responsibilities, household duties, childcare, and emotional support for a spouse (Walia, 2015). They are more likely to perceive a conflict between their work and personal lives than men due to competing responsibilities (Evans, Carney & Wilkinson, 2013). Men often work longer hours outside of the home when family responsibilities increase, leaving women to pick up the slack (Evans, Carney & Wilkinson, 2013; Sirajunisa & Panchanatham, 2010).

African American women are often faced with the challenge of balancing the responsibilities of work and home along with multiple stressors that include racism and discrimination in the workplace (Hamm, 2014). African American women have higher

divorce and lower marriage rates than their non-Hispanic Caucasian counterparts and are more likely to maintain full-time employment regardless of their marital status (Hoffnung & Williams, 2013). African American women are achieving more advanced degrees but continue to be underrepresented in management and upper leadership positions due to social, economic, and interpersonal barriers (Beckwith, Carter, & Peters, 2016). Many African American women experience discrimination in the workplace and face a glass ceiling when it comes to getting promoted into executive leadership positions (Beckwith et al., 2016). From the time of slavery, African American women have experienced sexism, racism, and discrimination and have been stigmatized and devalued in many U.S. workplaces and by U.S. society at large (Hoffman, 2015). They are the most educated group in the United States, and, yet, they make up less than 2% of the existing leadership positions (Osborne, 2016). African American women are less likely to marry, more likely to marry in later life, and more likely to experience marital instability than their counterparts (Raley, Sweeney, & Wondra, 2015).

There is an existing gap in the literature related African American women and work-life balance. African American women as a group are understudied in empirical research (Few, Stephens, & Rouse-Arnett, 2003). This study was necessary in order to gain a deeper understanding of the experience of African American women seeking a work-life balance. I also sought to make a meaningful contribution to the existing body of knowledge regarding work-life balance and to the field of social psychology.

### **Problem Statement**

The process of seeking an optimal work-life balance can be tedious and lead to increased levels of stress and physical discomfort. As researchers have found, individuals who fail to adequately manage their work and home responsibilities are more likely to experience burnout and leave their employer (Richards, 2016). Physical ailments such as neck or back pain, for instance, can also be the result of constant workplace stress that includes low levels of support and monotony (Fanavoll, Nilson, Holtermann, & Mork, 2016).

Despite an increasing presence in the workplace, women continue to complete the majority of household duties in addition to bearing and raising children (Doble & Supriya, 2010). Women are also more likely to report stress and depression related to feeling that they are neglecting their families at the expense of their jobs (Doble & Supriya, 2010). Additionally, the lack of a flexible schedule (or, having a schedule that changes weekly) can be a source of stress for women, as they have to make frequent adjustments to childcare and the completion of household duties (Henly & Lambert, 2014). As a result, women have been forced to make significant adjustments that have included leaving their jobs or becoming self-employed in order to ensure that they are able to meet both their work and home obligations (Annink & den Dulk, 2012). Thus, many women living in the United States have been compelled at times to make a choice between their work responsibilities and their families without the benefit of an understanding employer or flexible workplace policies.



In order to succeed in the field of their choice, many African American women feel that they have to prioritize work over their families and work twice as hard to be half as good as their counterparts (Kachchaf, Ko, Hodari, & Ong, 2015). African American women can experience tension between having financial security and being physically and emotionally present for their families (Kachchaf et al., 2015). Raising their children while still working full time and being emotionally present can be challenging. African American women are more likely to have a child outside of marriage and are often sole providers of households (Chambers & Kravitz, 2011). Additionally, more African American women are marrying later in life and dedicating time to their educational and professional goals (Barr & Simons, 2012). When they do marry, African American women are more likely to take on a co-provider role with their spouse for economic stability (Barr & Simons, 2012). Many do not have the choice of staying home with their children because they cannot afford the loss of an income to the household (Barr & Simons, 2012). Hence, African American women can experience varying levels of stress due to attempting to take care of their families while not neglecting their careers.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of the study was to explore the lived experiences of married African American women who work full-time and are seeking work-life balance. An unhealthy work-life balance can increase stress and contribute to the mental health symptoms of depression and anxiety (Selvanathan, Senthil, & Thyalnayaki, 2012). Additionally, emotional and physical exhaustion can occur, and one's job performance can be adversely affected as a result of an unhealthy work-life balance (Selvanathan, Senthil, &

Thyalnayaki, 2012). Work-life balance is important for both employees and their companies because employees who have a healthy work-life balance are more likely to be loyal to the company, be more efficient, and perform at a higher level while completing job duties (Sen & Bakht, 2013). Individuals who can work and simultaneously manage their personal obligations tend to have higher levels of emotional and psychological health (Murthy, 2014). Perceived stress related to one's work-life balance can be detrimental to one's quality of life and require intervention from a trained social psychologist on appropriate coping strategies (Murthy, 2014). Dual earning households are on the rise in the United States due to economic necessity, and women tend to handle the bulk of household duties in addition to working outside of the home (Anila & Krishnaveni, 2016).

African American women have higher rates of depression and anxiety than their Caucasian counterparts (Hamm, 2014). However, they often underuse available mental health resources (Watson & Hunter, 2015). Many African American women struggle with stress and depression related to their jobs or their families but feel uncomfortable accepting or seeking assistance (Watson & Hunter, 2015).

The term *work life balance* has been defined in various ways: it refers to a harmonious relationship between the domains of work and home (Koubova & Buchko, 2013). Women report a higher level of conflict between work and home than men due to the multiple roles and responsibilities that they have (Walia, 2015). As a result, many women are attempting to balance the responsibilities of work and home in a way that

does not leave both neglected and still gives them time to tend to their own emotional needs (Walia, 2015).

The expectation of many employers is that one's personal life should not interfere with job duties (Lehigh University, 2016). However, that is not always possible. Many employees frequently find themselves working after the workday ends (Lehigh University, 2016; Boswell & Olsen-Buchanan, 2007). Often, family responsibilities overlap into the work domain creating additional stress and making work-life balance a challenge for women (Wheatley, 2012). One's work life balance and general well-being are closely connected, according to researchers (Hoffmann-Burdzinska & Rutkowska, 2015). Life satisfaction, a positive perspective, and the management of stress are all factors that contribute to one's well-being and are significantly affected by work-life balance (Hoffmann-Burdzinska & Rutkowska, 2015).

It is time to consider the long-term benefits of implementing family-friendly policies that contribute to work-life balance (Gregoire, 2014). With women making up about 40% of the workplace in the United States, there is a need for more family-friendly policies that allow women to fulfill their work responsibilities with the flexibility needed to be available for their spouses and families (Gregoire, 2014). Family-friendly workplace policies have been slow in coming to fruition but are becoming increasingly important to employers in order to decreased employee turnover and improve morale and performance (Gregoire, 2014). While other countries have created policies designed to reduce the stress of employees and spend more time with their families, the United States has lagged far behind (Gregoire, 2014). The presence of work life friendly policies in the

workplace such as alternative working arrangements and flexible work schedules can substantially improve the work-life balance of employees and decrease turnover (Yuile, Chang, Gudmundsson, & Sawang, 2012). Women, in particular, will be able to benefit from understanding employers who realize that employees have personal lives and family obligations.

### **Research Questions**

RQ1. What is the experience of married African American women seeking a work life balance through a shared cultural lens?

RQ2. What is the perceived role of a spouse in navigating between the separate spheres of work and home?

### **Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical framework for this study was rooted in Black feminist theory (Crenshaw, 1991) and work family border theory (Clark, 2000). A tenet of Black feminist theory is that Black women in the United States share a common experience of oppression that is based on racism, sexism, and classism (Amoah, 2013). Black feminist theorists assert that the systems of oppression, gender identity, sexism, and racism are inextricable and intertwined (Amoah, 2013). Black feminist theory emerged as an extension of feminist theory in the late 20th century (Hoffman, 2015). During this time period, Black women started to question the feminist theory assertion that all women experience the same type of oppression related to their gender (Hoffman, 2015). Black feminists held that Black women faced daily oppression not only related to their gender, but also to their race and their class (Schiller, 2000). While feminist theory addressed

societal inequalities, black feminist theory included a cultural component that was specific to the experience of black women in the United States.

African American women often experience many internal tensions related to their race and gender as they attempt to succeed in their workplace. Additionally, they are often taught to be silent, self-sacrificing, and supportive of African American men no matter what (Austin, 1999). African American women are the recipients of numerous historical oppressions that have persisted into the 21st century (Rousseau, 2013). Because of cultural perceptions, African American women are often blamed for the social problems in their communities and are thought of as lazy, entitled, and lacking morals (Rousseau, 2013). African American women have faced scrutiny based on their body structure and their sexuality and have been objectified by media (Nash, 2012).

Black feminist theory was appropriate for this study because of its focus on the experience of black women and their unique realities, which shapes their perceptions (Hoffman, 2015). The focus of Black Feminist theorists on gauging the experience of Black women in their own words and through their eyes is also congruent with qualitative studies (Few, Stephens, & Rouse-Arnett, 2003). The theory was chosen for my study due to the fact that it is applicable to the cultural experience of Black women in the United States and their historical experience of slavery and oppression.

Work life border theory is the creation of Clark (2000), who asserts that work and family systems are separate but interconnected at the same time. People transition between the borders of work and family on a frequent basis (Clark, 2000). While individuals shape their work and home environments, those environments also shape

them. Traditionally in research conducted on work and home environments, both spheres were thought to be totally independent of each other (Clark, 2000). A man's place was thought to be at work making money for the family, and a woman's place was at home taking care of the children (Clark, 2000). Researchers theorized a spillover theory that asserted that despite the boundaries of work and home, behaviors and emotions from one sphere were likely to spillover into the other sphere (Cho, Tay, Allen, & Stark, 2013). Work life border theory also asserts that individuals navigate the separate rules and values of home and work by communicating and negotiating. Each sphere has a separate set of patterns, behavior, and requirements (Clark, 2000). The domains of work and home consist of different cultures with different sets of expectations and values. The values of responsibility and being capable may take precedence at work, while the values of being giving and loving may be more important at home (Clark, 2000). Individuals are tasked with navigating between these two spheres as seamlessly as possible while making the necessary adjustment for stressors that arise (Clark, 2000). However, while each sphere is separate, they both have high levels of influence on each other. The borders of the spheres of work and home are also permeable and stressors from one sphere affect the success of the other (Clark, 2000). Flexibility is also an important quality of the borders because the borders can expand and constrict based on the demands that may emerge (Clark, 2000). Women often find themselves frequently navigating between the spheres of work and home and being able to do it as seamlessly and flexibly as possible can help work-life balance.

A detailed explanation of both black feminist theory and work life border theory will be given in Chapter 2. Both theories are appropriate for the study approach and research questions. Black feminist theory addresses the historical experience of African American women and work family border theory asserts that the spheres of work and home are separate but also interconnected (Clark, 2000; Crenshaw, 1991).

### **Nature of the Study**

I used a qualitative research design with a phenomenological approach. The purpose of qualitative research is to explore the human experience and gather data that cannot be quantified as it can be in quantitative research (Lester, 1999). The approach of phenomenology was chosen because it explores the lived experience of an individual who has experienced a specific phenomenon (Giorgi, 1997). Additionally, phenomenological research can be used to inform practice and is especially useful in the social sciences because it is based on the interpretation of lived experiences through the eyes of individuals (Giorgi, 1997). The goal of phenomenological research is to have a deeper understanding of how individuals see the world around them based on their life experience (Murray & Holmes, 2014).

### **Definitions**

*African American/Black*: An American of black African descent (Merriam-Webster Dictionary, n.d.).

*Black feminist theory*: A theory that asserts that Black women are impacted by systems of oppression that are interrelated and include racism, classism, and sexism (Crenshaw, 1989).

*Work-life balance*: The harmonious interface between different life domains (Abendroth & den Dulk, 2011).

*Work life border theory*: A theory that asserts that the spheres of work and home are separate but are also interconnected and that individuals must learn how to successfully navigate through the demands and responsibilities of both spheres (Clark, 2000).

### **Assumptions**

Historically, African American women have experienced racism, sexism, and classism and continue to face a different set of challenges and life experiences than their White counterparts (Hunn & Craig, 2009). They have had to learn to cope with a unique set of stressors related to cultural and psychosocial factors that have caused them to constantly adjust and adapt to changes (Hunn & Craig, 2009). Women are more likely to experience depression than men and in African American women depression is often under-diagnosed and undetected (Hamm, 2014). As a result, many African American women turn to their faith as a source of strength and support (Martin, Boadi, Fernandes, Watts, & Robinson-Wood, 2013). African American women with children may have a different perspective on work life balance than married African American women without children.

### **Scope and Delimitations**

African American women have faced substantial challenges in the workforce and also in their personal lives. They have faced discrimination, classism, racism, and sexism and experience high rates of depression and anxiety. Additionally, African American



women are less likely to get married and more likely to be divorced. The study explored the lived experiences of married African American women seeking a work life balance and focused on the role of one's spouse in achieving a work life balance. The population included in the study was married African American women. Findings from the study may not be transferable to individuals from other ethnic backgrounds due to the unique historical experience of African American women.

### **Limitations**

One of the biggest limitations in this study was that it might not easily be replicated due to the phenomenological approach. Another limitation to the study was that random sampling was not used due to the constraint of time. Additional limitations for this study included the fact that participants may have altered their answers because they knew that they were being studied. Additionally, participants may have felt pressured to give answers that did not accurately reflect their experience because they did not want to be perceived unfairly (McCambridge, Witton, & Elbourne, 2014). Participants may have used ambiguous language in their responses, which may have impacted the way themes were extracted from the data. Additionally, the data from this study is not generalizable to the entire population due a lack of testing for statistical significance as the study approach was qualitative in nature (Atieno, 2009).

It is argued by some that qualitative research is subjective and dependent on the perspective of the researcher. However, inter-subjectivity occurs with recognition that the researcher has some influence on research findings while also acknowledging the importance of replicating findings in other studies (Rudnick, 2014). Because of the use of

purposive sampling in this study, participants had a similar socioeconomic status and there is a chance that the results may have been skewed due to similarities in participants (Emerson, 2015). However, each participant answered questions from their own experience, which was also unique because no two experiences are identical.

### **Significance**

My study focused on married African American women because African American women are less likely to marry and more likely to divorce than their white counterparts. They are also most likely to experience marital instability (Franklin & James, 2015). It is argued by some that the high rates of marital instability are the result of slavery and economic stressors that weakened the African American family structure (Bloome & Muller, 2015). In addition to economic stressors, psychosocial stress can also have a negative effect on one's psychological health. Depression rates among African American women are higher than their White counterparts and often goes misdiagnosed and undetected. It is estimated that only 7% of African American women will seek treatment for depression in their lifetime (Martin, Boadi, Fernandes, Watts, & Robinson-Wood, 2013). The variables of age and gender do not always determine work life balance and are more related to each person's individual life circumstances (Walia, 2015). Findings from the study informed the field of social psychology, employers, and the general public on the experience of work life balance in a population that historically has been understudied.

The study affected positive social change by exploring the experience of a population who historically have experienced discrimination and oppression and have

been neglected in empirical research. The results informed the general public, academia, and the field of Social Psychology of the unique challenges of the African American population and will hopefully facilitate continued meaningful dialogue and subsequent changes in policies and professional practice.

### **Summary**

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the lived experience of married African American women seeking a work life balance. While women who work outside of the home are faced with balancing the needs of their home and family along with the demands of their employer, African American women face the additional stressors of discrimination, lower wages, and racism in the workplace (Hamm, 2014; Wheatley, 2012). Obtaining a work life balance can reduce stress and improve one's quality of life, emotional health, and productivity in the workplace (Pandey & Khare, 2013). Chapter 1 discussed the significance and the background of the problem and discusses how this study contributed to solving the problem. The theoretical framework described two theories that guided the study. The methodology that was used for the study allowed the participants to be interviewed using the van Kaam Method developed from Moustakes (1994). Furthermore, there was a review of the professional literature on work life balance, the impact of work family conflict, and the historical and current experience of African American women within the context of work life balance. Chapter 2 begins with an in-depth literature review pertaining to Black feminist theory, Work Life border Theory and the results of previous studies. The chapter concludes with a

discussion of previous studies on African American women and their environmental stressors.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

### **Introduction**

Work-life balance is important for both employers and employees because employees who are happy in their jobs and feel fulfilled in their personal lives can be more likely to stay with their employer. There is an increased need for understanding of work-life balance as it is an ongoing struggle for many individuals who work outside of the home (Krishnakumar & Choudhury, 2014). Employees function best and have a better quality of life when they can express their need for flexible time off where they have the ability to leave work for family emergencies (Kim, 2014). Employees have a higher level of commitment to their employers and better organizational performance; as well as a greater chance of becoming emotionally attached to their companies (Kim, 2014). Having a flexible work schedule is important to many individuals who carry family responsibilities outside of the workplace and is often cited as one of the necessary components of achieving an appropriate work-life balance (Kozjek, Tomazevic & Stare, 2014). However, flexible scheduling can also blur the lines between work and family (Sav, Harris, & Sebar, 2013; Subramaniam, Overton, & Maniam, 2015). Having the ability to take off work when family responsibilities arise can be essential for women who are wives, mothers, daughters, and employees.

Both men and women are likely to struggle with balancing multiple roles in different settings with separate sets of expectations (Burnett, Gatrell, Cooper & Sparrow, 2010). The primary roles tend to evolve around either work or family (Versey, 2015). Living in a dual-earning household can be stressful, as both partners can feel torn

between their family and their career (Burnett, Gatrell, Cooper & Sparrow, 2010; Versey, 2015). Women from all walks of life can find balancing their careers and family responsibilities to be challenging, including in countries outside the United States that have higher rates of gender equality (Sierstad & Kirton, 2015).

A successful work-life balance is closely related to overall life satisfaction and the ability to manage conflict (Grawitch, Maloney, Mooshegian, & Barber, 2013). It is estimated that women make up over 40% of the workforce in the United States, and this percentage continues to rise (Toosi, 2002). With the increase of women in the workplace, new stressors on family and work life conflict have increased as well. Women who take the time off from their careers to raise their children are often criticized by their coworkers, employers, or families (Tajili, 2014). Many women feel that they have to make the difficult decision between having children and pursuing their career (Tajili, 2014). Women continue to make constant adjustments to ensure that they can spend sufficient time with their families while simultaneously managing a professional career (Chalawadi, 2014). Thus, obtaining balance in the areas of both work and family life can be a constant challenge and source of strength.

According to Few (2007), more understanding is needed of the experience of African American women and their children and the impact of black consciousness on work-life balance. African American women have often shouldered the emotional burden of their families and a full-time career without attending to their own mental health (Watson & Hunter, 2015). In this population, seeking professional help by going to a therapist is often frowned upon because it is perceived as a sign of weakness (Watson &

Hunter, 2015). Balancing a spouse and family as well as a full-time job outside of the home can cause African American women to neglect caring for themselves (Dow, 2015). Being pulled in multiple directions takes an emotional toll as African American women seek to fulfill their responsibilities both at work and at home (Dow, 2015).

The chapter begins with an introduction of the problem and continues with a discussion of the literature search strategy and theoretical frameworks. It continues with a literature review of the current research regarding work life balance and African American women. The chapter concludes with a brief summary of the literature topics and the contents of Chapter 3.

### **Literature Search Strategy**

The literature reviewed and referenced for the purpose of this study came from a variety of sources. I used the online databases ProQuest Central, PsychARTICLES, Academic Premier, and SocINDEX. I also used Google Scholar as an additional resource for locating articles and finding full-text versions of articles that were not available in the primary databases I searched. The search terms used included *work-life balance and women*, *work-life balance and marriage*, *work-life balance and stress*, *African-American women and stress*, and *African-American women and marriage*.

### **Theoretical Framework**

#### **Black Feminist Theory**

Black feminist theory emerged as the Black liberation movement became popular in the United States in the 1960s and 1970s. African American women sought to find a new lens to confront the racism, sexism, and classism that were common in their daily

lives (Guy-Sheftall, 2009). The theory was helpful in addressing the unique challenges of women of African descent and the source of their oppression while acknowledging that oppression can be experienced differently (Guy-Sheftall, 2009).

African American women have always had close ties to the U.S. labor force, first through forced labor (slavery) and then by wage-based employment. According to Booth and Myers (2011), these women have historically been exploited for financial gain and have often been seen as merely instruments of production instead of human beings. African American women experience a unique oppression that is rooted in their gender, race, and class (Booth & Myers, 2011). They are also more likely to be in a job role that involves serving others in some capacity (Booth & Myers, 2011). Historically, African American women have had to adopt a culture of remaining silent about injustices or abuse in order to protect themselves from scrutiny and personal attack and have remained an enigma that has been misunderstood by their White counterparts (Broussard, 2013). Despite being in the workplace for years, African American women can feel uncomfortable with speaking up and fear the repercussions of making a complaint about an experience they have had in the workplace.

Black feminist theory offers a multiperspective approach and is applicable to my study as daily life for African American women consists of multiple interconnected oppressions (Guy-Sheftall, 2009). Anna Cooper was a key influence on Black feminist theorists; her 1892 book, *A Voice from the South*, is considered to be one of the first articulations of Black feminist thought (Guy-Sheftall, 2009). Black feminist theorists assert that being Black and a woman is a phenomena that demonstrates intersectionality



as Black women are subject to multiples systems of oppression due to being both Black and female (Rousseau, 2013). The four aspects of Black feminist theory are acknowledgment of Black women's historical oppression and struggles; examination of the way black women and their families navigate class, gender, racism, and sexism; eradication of negative stereotypes of Black womanhood; and promotion of activism for the empowerment of Black women (Few, 2007). While there are African American women who do not self-identify as feminists, all have been affected by oppression in some way, according to Black feminist theorists, (Few, Stephens, & Rouse-Arnett, 2003). Black feminist theorists highlight the connection between oppression, coercion, and exploitation instead of compartmentalizing types of oppressions (Nash, 2012; Rousseau, 2013) These theorists also assert that oppressions exist in order to maintain a structured stratification system (Nash, 2012; Rousseau, 2013). Experiencing multiple systems of oppression in both their professional and personal lives can impact Black women's perspectives and the way that they experience the world around them.

The main purpose of Black feminist theory is to accurately depict and capture the experience of African American women in a way that is congruent with reality (Jones, Wilder, & Osborne-Lampkin, 2013). The use or misuse of power in the interconnected systems of oppression is also highlighted as it relates to the empowerment of African American women (Jones, Wilder, & Osborne-Lampkin, 2013). Additionally, Black feminist theory is also concerned with activism, resistance, and empowerment for African American women in the United States who are experiencing multiple systems of oppression (Alinia, 2015).

Feminist theorists have failed to recognize the impact of privilege on daily life (Rousseau, 2013). Black feminist theorists speak to the need for African American women to see themselves as valuable and to believe that liberation from oppression is a basic human right (Zabit-Foster, 2014). Black feminist theory is based on a concept of healthy self love, love of the community and a realization that the only people who care enough to work for liberation are the oppressed themselves—African American women (“*A black feminist statement*,” 2014).

African American women have been largely neglected as a population in existing empirical literature and studies on work-life balance. A tension exists between current academic studies on African American women’s experience and the way that African American women conceptualize their social worlds and experiences (Reynolds, 2002). There is a need for further study on work-life balance that includes a cultural component, has a sample size that is diverse, and focuses on married women (Ezzedeen & Ritchey, 2009; Reddy, Vranda, Ahmed Nirmala & Siddaramu, 2010; Wierda-Boer, Gerris, & Vermulst, 2008)

### **Work Life Border Theory**

Clark (2000), first introduced work family border theory to the world and asserted that the domains of work and family are separate domains with different rules and responsibilities (Clark, 2000). Individuals frequently cross the borders of these separate spheres and change their behaviors in order to adapt to the responsibilities of each sphere (Clark, 2000). In order to achieve balance, one must have a high degree of competence and influence to successfully navigate through the differing demands of both spheres

(Clark, 2000). From a work family border theory lens, individuals who identify strongly with both spheres are more likely to have a balance (Clark, 2000).

The spheres of work and family are physically separate from each other but also interconnected. Previous theorists on work-life balance asserted that there was a spillover effect and that an inverse balance existed between work and family (Clark, 2000). One of the main premises of the theory is that the spheres of work and home differ in terms of tasks and culture (Clark, 2000). Individuals varied their investments in their work and family lives in order to make up for what was missing in the other (Clark, 2000).

Spillover theories related to work-life balance were very limited and tended to focus on the emotional link between work and family while neglecting to explain the impact of social, physical, and behavioral links (Clark, 2000). However, the consensus with these theories and work family border theory is that the spheres of work and family have a high level of influence on each other and that ignoring one at the expense of the other will result in a negative outcome (Clark, 2000). The purpose of work family border theory is to provide a solution to rectify the gaps of previous theories related to work-life balance.

Clark (2000), likened their differences to that of two countries with separate languages and traditions. In order to manage effectively, individuals must build bridges and make daily transitions as well as tailoring their focus and goals to meet the demands of both spheres of work and home (Clark, 2000). The cultures of work and family are different with cheerfulness and friendliness reported as a goal for work; and responsibility and capability were reported as a goal for home (Clark, 2000). Traditions at home tend to be more information and relationships centered, while traditions in the

workplace are formal and tend to be performance based (Clark, 2000). The culture between the two is also different as well with professionalism taking precedence in the workplace over relationships. In contrast, interpersonal relationships make up a lot of the culture within the home (Clark, 2000).

The borders referred to in the theory consist of time and psychological borders of rules and behavior patterns that can be appropriate for one sphere but not the other (Clark, 2000). However, it's not uncommon for type of psychological permeability between borders. An example of this is when one becomes upset or stressed with an issue at work and in turn responds in anger when faced with conflict in the home due to the ongoing stress at work (Clark, 2000). In addition, flexibility is necessary between the two spheres as individuals may work from home or be called away from their workplace in order to address a family emergency.

Clark (2000), identified 8 propositions associated with work family border theory

1a: When domains are similar, weak borders will facilitate work/family balance

1b: When domains are different, strong borders will facilitate work/family balance

2. When the border is strong to protect one domain but is weak for the other domain, individuals will have: (a) greater work-family balance when they primarily identify with the strongly bordered domain; and (b) lesser work-family balance when they primarily identify with the weakly bordered domain.

3. Border-crossers who are central participants in a domain (i.e. who have identification and influence) will have more control over the borders of that domain than those who are peripheral participants.
4. Border-crossers who are central participants (i.e. who have identification and influence) in both domains will have greater work/family balance than border-crossers who are not central participants in both domains.
5. Border-crossers whose domain members have high other-domain awareness will have higher work/family balance than border-crossers whose domain members have low other-domain awareness.
6. Border-crossers whose domain members show high commitment to them will have higher work/family balance than border-crossers whose domain members have shown low commitment to them.
7. When work and family domains are very different, border-crossers will engage in less across-the-border communication than will border-crossers with similar domains.
8. Frequent supportive communication between border-keepers and border-crossers about other-domain activities will moderate the ill effects of situations that would otherwise lead to imbalance (p. 765).

Individuals cross the borders of work and family daily and must learn to seamlessly transition between the culture, language, responsibilities, and traditions of each sphere (Clark, 2000). Work family border theory is a way to achieve better balance between

work and family obligations and empower individuals to successfully navigate the two spheres of work and family (Clark, 2000).

### **Literature Review Related to Key Variables and/or Concepts**

Impactful discussions around work-life balance in the United States first occurred in the late 1930's when the Fair Labor Standards Act was signed into law (Sullivan, 2014). The law mandated that employees received overtime for working over 40 hours a week and set limits on the hours that minors could work (Sullivan, 2014). A conflictual relationship between work and family life was originally defined as work family conflict (Kahn, Wolfe, Quinn, & Rosenthal, 1964). The term, "work-life balance," was first used in the United States in the 1980s (Sen & Bakht, 2013). The term, "work family conflict" was originally defined by Kahn et al (1964) as, "a form of inter-role conflict in which the role pressures from work and family domains are mutually incompatible in some respect" (p. 470). Work-life balance is something that affects not only individuals but also employers, those who work in person-centered professions, and society in general (Madipelli, Sarma, Veluri, & Chinnappaiah, 2013). Achieving a work life balance is not only good for one's family; it also contributes to one's quality of life and overall life satisfaction.

The Family and Medical Leave Act that was passed in 1993 was a defining moment in helping employees to achieve an optimal work-life balance (Sullivan, 2014). The law mandated that employees could take a leave of absence from work due to factors such as adoption, parenthood, or to take care of a parent or spouse who was incapacitated (Sullivan, 2014). Vacation time given by employers in the United States still lags far

behind vacations days given by other countries to their employees (Sullivan, 2014). In 2014, a Summit on Working Families was held at the White House. The purpose of the summit was to bring attention and encourage more family friendly policies in the work place (Jarrett, 2015). Since the summit, federal employees can use up to 6 weeks of paid sick leave after the birth of a new child. Other employers such as Johnson & Johnson gave more leave time to their employees and Target, Wal-Mart, and McDonald's also increased wages for their employees (Jarrett, 2015).

Some employers have become more aware of the negative results of work life conflict and many have implemented Family-Friendly Policies (FFPs) as a way to support their employees and decrease turnover rates (Belwal & Belwal, 2014). FFPs have been increasingly popular in countries outside of the United States and are designed to assist women effectively manage work and domestic obligations (Belwal & Belwal, 2014). However, even with the gains being made, employers in the United States continue to lag behind neighboring countries in creating and implementing FFPs for their employees (Belwal & Belwal, 2014).

Karassvidou and Glaveli (2015), conducted a qualitative study on work family border theory and work-life balance. A total of 20 in-depth interviews were conducted with both male and female respondents in the study. All respondents reported that they perceived work as more important than family and those family responsibilities always came in second to work responsibilities (Karassvidou & Glaveli, 2015).

Respondents also reported that their direct supervisors were helpful in crossing the border between work and family spheres when respondents had to leave work due to

family emergencies (Karassvidou & Glaveli, 2015). Additionally, respondents reported that the leadership style of their supervisor directly impacted their performance and shaped the work environment. A theme that emerged was that respondents went out of their way to try to keep their work and home life as separate as possible (Karassvidou & Glaveli, 2015). Many did this by doing some type of decompression activity before going home, like going to the gym and exercising. Some respondents reported that despite their best efforts, they still thought about work related problems at home and stayed up at night worrying about their job (Karassvidou & Glaveli, 2015). Married respondents also noted the importance of having a supportive spouse. One theme that emerged from the data was that having a physical distance between work and home increases the border strength between the two spheres (Karassvidou & Glaveli, 2015). Ultimately, flexible policies, recreational activities, and a supportive spouse all contributed to work life balance.

In a study conducted by Lambert, Kass, Piotrowski, & Vodanovich (2006), participants reported that they were less satisfied with their life when there were high levels of work family conflict. Having a high level of autonomy on the job was associated with a more optimal work-life balance and increased life satisfaction (Lambert, Kass, Piotrowski & Vodanovich, 2006). Respondents who were able to fulfill their job duties without constant oversight from supervisors and had less conflict from family responsibilities were happier and had a better quality of life.

The process of successfully integrating one's work and family life depends on the individual, immediate family, work organization, and external assistance (Bennett, Patterson, Wiitala & Woo, 2006). When a work-life balance is present, the spheres of



work and family life exist harmoniously with minimal conflict (Anila & Krishnaveni, 2016). Women tend to respond differently than men to competing priorities and they report higher rates of work life balance when their family takes priority over their job (Keene & Quadagno, 2004). Women are also less likely to report conflict between their work and family obligations when they have high levels of social support (Sitkowski, 2005). Often times other family members or friends can provide assistance with household responsibilities or childcare, which decreases levels of stress.

In a study done by Schragger, Kolan, and Dottl (2007), women reported that the tools for a good work-life balance included mentoring, dependable childcare, prioritizing responsibilities, and focusing on balance. Women under the age of 40 are more likely to report that they have an appropriate work-life balance (Carr, 2004). However, some women over 40 have reported that the younger generations have multiple shortcomings in the area of work-life balance (Devi & Rani, 2012). The majority of women do not change their career plans after marriage if they have a supportive spouse and family (Jang, Zippay, & Park, 2012). The decision to continue to work outside the home after marrying and having children is a personal choice that often has strong economic ramifications for the family. Women often feel emotionally torn between the paid responsibilities of work and the unpaid demands of home (Jang, Zippay, & Park, 2012). Many women work out of necessity for the financial welfare of the family (Sujata & Singh, 2011). Thus, they are often tasked with finding adequate childcare providers along with ensuring that the family is able to remain financially stable.

Women often find meaning in their career outside of their roles of a wife or mother but are likely to report that family obligations takes precedence over their career (Bobat, Mshololo, & Reuben, 2012; Dubey & Tiwari, 2014; Ezzedeen & Ritchey, 2009).

The way that woman balance multiple roles and work-life balance continues to be a growing concern in both public and private sectors. The consequences of work life conflict for women can include depression, poor job performance, emotional and physical exhaustion, and stunted career growth (Maiya & Bagali, 2014). The emotional response to work life conflict can also include increased psychological stress (Selvanathan, Senthil, & Thyalnayski, 2012). Many women respond to stress differently and some cite a strong religious conviction or faith as the reason that they have achieved work life balance and learned to manage stress (Krymis, 2011). They value their personal and professional relationships and see themselves as giving back through their profession (Krymis, 2011).

Women with lower educational levels are more likely to report having irregular work schedules, which makes it difficult to manage home responsibilities (Negrea, 2012). Responsibilities such as breastfeeding an infant often become much more complicated to fulfill when a woman works full-time outside of the house (Negrea, 2012). As a result, some women find themselves reducing their workload to part-time in order to improve their work life balance and spend more time with their families (Lyonette, 2015). However, part-time jobs are not regarded as highly as full-time positions and can lead to decreased job mobility (Lyonette, 2015). Many women report anticipating conflict between work and home responsibilities as they complete their education and plan their

careers (Bulanda & Lippmann, 2012). As a result, many are waiting longer to have children in an effort to become more stable in their careers and reduce work life conflict (Bulanda & Lippmann, 2012).

When a woman makes the decision to stay home with her child, she is subject to the judgment of others. However, she is also likely to feel overwhelmed when she goes back to work and continues as a full time spouse and parent (Tajlili, 2014). Unmarried women report higher rates of work life balance while some married women make the difficult decision to work an alternative schedule such as night shifts in order to spend more time with their families (Chitra & Sheela, 2012). Juggling both home and work responsibilities without adequate assistance can increase stress and also cause emotional distress.

In a study conducted by Sigroha (2014), female employees reported that a flexible work schedule positively impacted their ability to maintain their health and contributed to their overall well-being. The demands of a high-level management position are often hard to combine with the responsibilities of a household and many women shy away from certain fields because of increased job demands and anticipated work family conflicts (Sigroha, 2014; Beddoes & Pawley, 2014). The struggle to obtain a work-life balance is also present when one is employed in a country that is work life friendly, such as Norway. Having a supportive spouse can be a means to help manage the stress that comes from working to achieve an optimal balance of career and home (Seierstad & Kirton, 2015). Women who work outside the home can find that the demands of a career often

conflict with family responsibilities. Even with a spouse, many women complete the bulk of domestic duties in the home (Seierstad & Kirton, 2015).

Slaughter (2012), asserted that a work-life balance is impossible for women who want to have it all. Slaughter also asserted that while having a supportive spouse is good, many women still do not feel comfortable leaving their families for long periods of time in order to fulfill the job responsibilities of a high profile position. However, quitting a job to spend more time with one's family is often a euphemism for being fired (Slaughter, 2012). Hence, women often find themselves in a difficult position as they attempt to take care of their family's needs while making progress in their careers and climbing the corporate ladder.

In a study conducted with Canadian women, researchers found that about 47% reported that they were successfully balancing responsibilities at work and home (Hersch, 2015). Women reported that they would have a better work-life balance if their families were more helpful around the house and understanding of their work responsibilities (Hersch, 2015). Women are more likely to report that they work non-traditional hours that consist of nights and weekends in order to fulfill their job responsibilities (Stevens, 2014).

Shaheen (2012) found that women who had a Type A personality (driven, aggressive, and very competitive), experienced higher levels of work life conflict than their Type B laid back counterparts. Women are expected to fulfill multiple roles simultaneously while traditionally men do not have the same societal expectations (Shaheen, 2012). For some women, having a work life balance means that they live a life

that fits their values as well as their personal and professional goals and this can mean recognizing that family is more important than work responsibilities (Brodin, 2011).

Additionally, women reported that having better benefits, sick time, and flexible time off were factors that impacted their work-life balance (Hersch, 2015). As women have increased in numbers in the workplace, many are finding it increasingly difficult to have work-life balance if their employers are not understanding of their family responsibilities (Hersch, 2015). As a result, women experience role stress where they experience difficulty fulfilling their job duties because they are worried about their families or family tasks that need to be completed (Jang, Zippay, & Park, 2012). A difficult boss, insufficient compensation, and an unfavorable work-life balance were among the reasons women touted for leaving an employer (Hersch, 2015).

### **Obtaining a Work-Life Balance**

In the United States, there are more couples with both partners working outside of the home than in previous decades (Charles & Harris, 2007). A recent study on newlywed couples conducted by Symoens & Bracke (2015), found that the conflict between work and family was a major stressor in marriages. Couples reported high rates of depression as they sought to navigate conflicting priorities and job responsibilities and provide emotional support for each other. The daily experience of balancing a professional career and family can be a source of constant marital conflict between couples as they often do not see eye to eye on the best way to manage conflicting responsibilities. (Minnotte K.L., Minnotte, M.C., Pederson, Mannon & Kiger, 2010; Symoens & Bracke, 2015; Wang & Repetti, 2014).

One's marital status is an important aspect of work-life balance. Women get married for a variety of reasons that include economic stability. Individualization has impacted the way that many couples view their relationship and there has been an emphasis on a de-genderization of roles (Charles & Harris, 2007). Ashima (2015), conducted a study on married women working in Indore City in India. The women were all working in the software industry. The respondents reported a high level of work-life balance without any respect to their age and income level (Ashima, 2015). Many married couples make the decision to pool their resources and income and this can often lead to an increase in socioeconomic level (Ashima, 2015).

Married women can also experience an increase in leisure time as compared to their single counterparts due to having a partner in providing financially for the household (Vernon, 2010). Higher levels of work family conflict are associated with lower levels of marital satisfaction in women. Stress levels can have a direct impact on work-life balance for women. Many report that managing the stress is more important than eliminating it. The ability to effectively manage multiple responsibilities of work and home can significantly decrease level of stress for women (Sitkowski, 2005; Sirajunisa & Panchanatham, 2010).

Women who endorse equal division of household responsibilities are more likely to report a negative relationship between being satisfied in their marriage and work-family conflict (Minnotte, K.L., et al., 2010). Juggling multiple responsibilities can cause one to neglect to nurture the emotional needs of a spouse. Additionally, the demands that

arise from financial difficulties such as longer work hours can also negatively impact marital satisfaction (Minnotte, Minnotte, & Bonstrom, 2015).

African American women have lower marriage rates, higher divorce rates, and are also more likely to experience marital instability (Barr & Simons, 2012). Regardless of educational attainments, African American women experience marital instability in high rates (Kim, 2012). In essence, a higher educational level does not translate to having a successful stable marital relationship (Kim, 2012). Having a poor work-life balance can be detrimental to a relationship because it can inhibit partners' ability to be emotionally connected with each other (Panda, Pradhan, & Mishra, 2013). The process of achieving a good work-life balance for married individuals often lies in the ability to collaborate with one's spouse in order to fulfill family responsibilities (Wierda-Boer, Berris, & Vermulst, 2008). African American women are often tasked with providing emotional support for their spouse while maintaining their own self-health.

Women are more likely to report expectations of equal gender roles in dividing household duties when both partners work outside the home. However, it is very unlikely that their spouses contribute equally to the responsibilities of the house (Fetterolf & Eagly, 2011). In a study conducted by Mills & Taht (2010), women who had varying work schedules reported increased levels of relationship dissatisfaction with their spouse. The respondents reported that relationship satisfaction was attributed to lack of companionship and unequal distribution of household duties due to both partners having conflicting schedules (Mills & Taht, 2010). Married women with children often ended up with the larger share of the household duties despite the fact that they also worked full

time outside of the home (Matheson & Rosen, 2012). Childcare responsibilities were one of the factors that women reported made them feel unbalanced and affected their emotional well being (Matheson & Rosen, 2012).

Panda, Pradhan, and Mishra (2013), asserted that the key to achieve a work-life balance is to first define success. In order to define success, one must clarify their self-values and purpose in order to measure what they accomplish (Panda, Pradhan, & Mishra, 2013). A successful work-life balance depends on focus and the resolution to live a life with purpose and one that matters. Individuals who report having an optimal work-life balance are organized and have learned to delegate and prioritize their responsibilities (Panda, Pradhan, & Mishra, 2013). While they may feel pulled in various directions at once, they have learned to manage their stress in a way that is congruent with their values (Panda, Pradhan, & Mishra, 2013).

Self-regulation plays a huge part in the ability to maintain a work-life balance as well as having the ability to managing the boundaries of work and home while still remaining flexible (Mellner, Aronsson, & Kecklund, 2014). Individuals who have the ability to change their work schedule in order to meet the demands of their family are more likely to report having a better work-life balance (Mellner, Aronsson, & Kecklund, 2014). Johnson (2014), asserted that the first step in achieving a work-life balance was taking responsibility over one's life and setting boundaries around work. This included not working late hours and putting work completely aside when it was time to spend time with one's family.



More employees are working from home and are experiencing a different set of challenges as they navigate the challenges of privacy and peace with fulfilling work responsibilities. Individuals make the choice to work from home in order to play a more active role in their families and to have increased flexibility (Krasulja, Blagojevic, & Radojevic, 2015). However, working from home can have its own set of challenges to achieving a work-life balance as employees can be under increased pressure to maintain their job performance (Krasulja, Blagojevic, & Radojevic, 2015). An optimal work-life balance also depends largely on the quality of one's interpersonal relationships (Murthy, 2014).

High levels of work conflict play a huge factor in one's quality of life and also work family conflict (Md-Sidin, Sambasivan, & Ismail, 2010). Having a successful professional relationship with colleagues and supervisors as well as with one's spouse and immediate family members can reduce stress (Harvard Health Publications, 2010). Successfully navigating interpersonal relationships at work and home can also positively influence the development of coping strategies that contribute to one's emotional health and well-being. In contrast, relational conflicts in the spheres of work and home can increase frustrations and cause one to emotionally detach from others (Murthy, 2014).

Martinson (2016), asserts that leaders can support the work-life balance of their employees by: focusing on output, reducing drama at the workplace, and encouraging workers to take frequent vacations to decrease burnout.

## **African American Women**

African American women have a history of oppression and racism that began with being forcibly taken from Africa and enslaved. Historically, African American women have been involved in the fight for equal rights as their gender and race has made them a double minority in America (Chepp, 2015). They experienced unspeakable atrocities at the hands of their captors while raising their families (Chepp, 2015). In the 19<sup>th</sup> and the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, the popular opinion towards African American women was that they were animalistic and hypersexual. Being thought of as less than desirable often meant that they fell outside of the parameters for justice and protection beside their white counterparts (Chepp, 2015). African American women are known for their resilience and adaptation as they have historically carried the financial burden of the family and been matriarchs for the family unit raising children and grandchildren (Chepp, 2015).

Historically, African American women have had to adapt in order to successfully navigate a world that has been against them (Mayes-Buckley, 2011). African American women are less likely to marry and also more likely to divorce than their White counterparts. However, they are also more likely to report that having a work-life balance is possible (Hoffnung, 2004; “*Higher Education; Education’s protective effect on marriage differs between white and African American women*”, 2013). In a study conducted by Barr and Simons (2012), unmarried African American couples reported that their expectation of marriage was related to their education and work-related experiences. The expectations for marriage were also tied to the economic prospects of one’s future

partner. External factors such as a spouse's income potential played a huge role in determining marital compatibility for African American women (Barr & Simons, 2012).

From the time of slavery, African American women have been expected to be a Strong Black Woman (SBW), which is a race and gender schema that requires self-control, self reliance, and self silence (Watson & Hunter, 2015). African American women have also experienced multiple psychosocial stressors that have contributed to their depression and anxiety. However, they rarely seek help for mental health challenges because it goes against the schema of SBW. It has been asserted by some that the schema of SBW came as a result of a combination of racism, sexism, financial hardship, and lack of resources (Watson & Hunter, 2015). When slavery ended, there was an effort made by the Freedmen's Bureau and many local churches to encourage former slaves to marry. Because slaves were rarely allowed to marry, many were in cohabitating and intimate relationships that continued once they received their freedom. The economic benefits of marriage were highlighted, as couples would make more money together than separately due to having two incomes (Watson & Hunter, 2015).

In recent years, due to an increase of women in the labor market, more African American women are independent and do not need the financial help of a husband are making the decision to marry later in life or not to marry at all (Hill, 2006). If current trends continue, out of the African American women who choose to marry, 70% of their marriages will end in divorce (Burdette, Haynes, & Ellison, 2012).

African American women have historically been neglected in the discussion on achieving an optimal work-life balance (Dow, 2015). In many cases, African American

women are the backbone of their communities and take on multiple roles including that of breadwinner. They have been expected to work full time regardless of their status of a mother in order to not be criticized for being lazy (Dow, 2015). Even after slavery ended, many African American women continued to work as maids in the homes of the rich where they were expected to prioritize the needs of their employer over that of their children. Participation in the labor force was necessary for the financial success of the family (Dow, 2015). A history of marital instability traces back to the times of slavery when slaves were not allowed to marry and many times were separated by their Masters (Bloome & Muller, 2015). After slavery, African American women often married for economic stability and for better chances of employment. Employers were often reluctant to hire single women and married women were thought of as being more stable (Bloome & Muller, 2015). In some situations, young African American women married older men and the relationship was similar to that of a superior and a servant (Bloome & Muller, 2015). The increased marriage rates post-slavery were also accompanied by increased divorce rates as the successor institutions after slavery caused marital instability (Bloome & Muller, 2015).

Even today, African Americans are at higher risk for experiencing financial hardship than their white counterparts. Most do not have the luxury of being stay at home parents as both partners have to work outside of the home in order to provide for the financial needs of the family (Chaney, Lawrence, & Skogrand, 2012). African American women who report discrimination on their job are more likely to experience

psychological distress, which negatively impacts the quality of the relationship with their spouse and their families (Murry, et al., 2008).

However, the responsibilities of work and home can cause African American women to suppress their own goals and interests for the needs and wants of others. African American women also frequently suppress their emotions in order to attend to the emotions of those around them (Black & Peacock, 2011). The traits of self-sacrifice, and self-reliance while very noble, can also cause increased levels of distress and negatively affect African American women's overall health (Black & Peacock, 2011).

It is estimated that over forty-two million individuals working in the private sector does not have access to any sick leave and this statistic disproportionately affects women of color (Jarrett, 2015). In addition, African American women earn 64 cents for every dollar made by men and many times cannot afford to take any sick time off (Jarrett, 2015). Many African American women have less access to flexible work schedules and feel conflicted between their careers and their families. They are also likely to report that they feel there are fewer opportunities for professional advancement in their current position (Golden, 2008; Kachchaf, Ko, Hodari, & Ong, 2015). Additionally, African American women often report feeling invisible at their place of employment and that they are looked over for promotions and leadership positions (Jeffries, 2015).

Decreased decision making ability on the job, lower workplace control, and lower rates of self-esteem are among the imbalances that adversely affect African American women (Watson & Hunter, 2015). African American women experience higher rates of anxiety and depression than their White counterparts but are also less likely to seek

professional help (Watson, Roberts, & Sanders, 2012). Emotional and physical exhaustion, poor job performance, and stunted career growth can also come as a result of having an inappropriate work-life balance (Selvanathan, Senthil, & Thyalnayaki, 2012; Benerjee, 2013).

A study conducted by Booth & Myers (2011), found that African American women reported higher rates of commitment to their career than their Caucasian counterparts and were more likely to have the motivation to pursue their careers. While they saw themselves raising families, their career aspirations were just as important (Booth & Myers, 2011). Married African American women reported high rates of work family conflict when they felt that there was racial bias in their workplace (Cole & Secret, 2012). Additionally, they reported planning for multiple roles and a commitment to both their career and future families (Booth & Myers, 2011). While the individual experiences of African American women vary, there is a commonality of racism and oppression that has impacted each generation differently. The ability to manage social interactions as well as power relationships can have a huge impact on African American women's quest to find and maintain an appropriate work-life balance (Forson, 2013). In a study done by Gibson-Jones (2005), African American women reported that their overall well-being and quality of life was based on factors that included spirituality, job satisfaction, and work-life balance (Gibson-Jones, 2005).

### **Conclusion**

Non-minority women have been the main focus of the majority of existing literature related to the experience of seeking a work-life balance. Researchers have

identified numerous ways that an appropriate work-life balance is attainable but have not included the perspectives and experiences of African American women. African American women face a unique set of stressors related to their gender, race, and class that have not been explored in the current literature. The theoretical framework of black feminist theory includes these stressors and provides an accurate depiction of the common experience of African American women. The study was relevant to all men and women, mental health clinicians and social psychologists as well as potential employers and informed the general public on the need for the formulation of culturally competent and family friendly policies in the workplace that will positively impact African American women. As the rates of women in the workplace increase, the need for more understanding of work life balance and implementation of family friendly policies increases as well. The study not only positively impacted African American women, but women as a whole as it addressed the importance of a work life balance and made recommendations for practices and policies that will improve women's quality of life.

### **Summary**

In this chapter, I presented an in-depth review of the literature as related to work life balance, obtaining a work life balance, and African American women. Black feminist theory and work life border theory were both discussed and defined as the theoretical foundation for the study and the lens used to explore the experience of African American women navigating the spheres of work and home. In Chapter 3, I will include an explanation of the research methodology.

## Chapter 3: Research Method

### **Introduction**

The study was qualitative in nature in order to more accurately understand the experiences of African American married women in their own words. Qualitative researchers explore the human experience and phenomena that cannot be quantified (Rudnick, 2014). Additionally, qualitative researchers seek to explore the motivations behind human behavior and one's decision-making process. The research design of phenomenology was the most appropriate one for this study as conducting a phenomenological includes exploring the lived experience of an individual who has experienced a particular phenomenon (Giorgi, 1997). Giorgi (1997) asserted that in order for a qualitative study to be phenomenological, a researcher needs to use description within the context of phenomenological reduction and seek to find invariant meanings within that context. Thus, qualitative researchers seek to narrow down information collected into various descriptions and look for deeper meanings and insights. Husserl first created the philosophy of phenomenology in the early 1900s and described it as a way for human consciousness to have access to truths that are logical (Giorgi, 2008). These truths are explored through the eyes of the individuals experiencing them and can provide qualitative researchers with better insights into human behavior and motivation.

Phenomenologists explore the experience of individuals and seek to interpret and find deeper meaning based on individuals' descriptions of their experiences (Matua & Van, 2015). In this study, I explored the experience of married African American women



who work full time outside of the home and are seeking a work life balance. I interpreted the findings in order to find a deeper meaning based the description of the participants' experiences.

In this chapter, I will restate the research questions and provide an overview of the research design. I will then discuss the role of the researcher, the population sample for the study, and the data collection procedures. After doing so, I will discuss data analysis procedures and ethical considerations. The chapter concludes with a brief summary of key points.

### **Research Design and Rationale**

The research questions for this study were, as follows:

1. What is the experience of married African American women seeking a work-life balance through a shared cultural lens?
2. What is the perceived role of a spouse in navigating between the separate spheres of work and home?

I chose a qualitative design in this study. Qualitative research has become the approach of choice for the social sciences as it involves the exploration of human experiences in individuals' own words (Osborne, 1994). Qualitative researchers seek to interpret and explore textual data in order to better understand and draw meanings from it (Smith, 2015). In qualitative research, the emphasis is on discovery, meaning, and description instead of prediction and control, which is indicative of quantitative research (Rudnick, 2014). Qualitative researchers tend to focus on the personal experiences and

worldviews of a small number of participants instead of testing a hypothesis with a large population sample (Osborne, 1994; Rudnick, 2014; Smith, 2015).

Phenomenology is one of several qualitative research traditions. In phenomenological studies, data are gathered through in-depth and semistructured interviews with participants (Murray & Holmes, 2014). The ultimate goal of phenomenological research is to better understand how people make sense of the world around them based on their life experiences (Murray & Holmes, 2014). Phenomenology can yield rich findings, and results can be used to inform psychology practice because they are based on the lived experience, perspectives, and subsequent interpretations of individuals who have experienced a common phenomenon (Murray & Holmes, 2014).

Husserl is known as the originating author of phenomenological scientific inquiry because of his thoughts on philosophy (Lopez & Willis, 2004). He concluded that there was a need to have a scientific approach for exploring the lived experiences that were specific to a group of people. His approach comprised descriptive phenomenology; a key assertion was that people influence their own culture and environment (Lopez & Willis, 2004). Husserl had a student named Heidegger who built on his work concerning phenomenology (Lopez & Willis, 2004). Heidegger's perspective comprised the interpretive approach to phenomenology (Lopez & Willis, 2004). He asserted that individuals are enmeshed in their worlds and that their experiences are connected to cultural and social contexts (Lopez & Willis, 2004). Interpretive phenomenology differed from the philosophy of descriptive phenomenologists, who asserted that individuals are free to influence and shape their environment (Lopez & Willis, 2004). Interpretive

phenomenologists used theory merely as a guide to focus the research in contrast to descriptive phenomenologists who used theory in a more formal way (Lopez & Willis, 2004).

An interpretive phenomenological approach was appropriate in this study because it can be used to explore features of experiences that can be applicable to direct practice. The purpose of interpretive phenomenology is to arrive at a clearer understanding of a phenomenon to emphasize the words that are used in a specific context (Lopez & Willis, 2004). A unique characteristic of an interpretive phenomenological approach is that the researcher is considered part of the assumption and the phenomena that is being explored (Matua & Van, 2015; Tuohy, Cooney, Dowling, Murphy, & Sixsmith, 2013). In essence, the role of the researcher is included in the research design and is considered part of the study.

The purpose of interpretive phenomenology is to have an understanding of the structures and meaning of a phenomenon through the words of participants who have experienced it first-hand (Matua & Van, 2015). In interpretive phenomenological research, the researcher analyzes how individuals talk about stressful experiences, the ways that individuals handle these stressors, and the meanings attached to them (Lopez & Willis, 2004; Matua & Van, 2015). Interpretive phenomenology was the most appropriate design for this study as I wanted to successfully understand and interpret deeper meanings based on the experience of the participants.

### **Role of the Researcher**

The role of the researcher in a qualitative study is that of an observer (Matua & Van, 2015). As the researcher in this study, I observed and listened to participants as they shared their experiences of seeking a work-life balance. I documented participant responses and asked clarifying questions as needed during data collection. I did not develop or maintain personal relationships with the participants and was also careful to avoid a potential conflict of interest as well as power dynamics by not including friends, family, or professional colleagues in the participant pool.

### **Methodology**

#### **Participant Selection Logic**

The population for this study consisted of married African American women who work outside of the home. The sample for the study consisted of 11 married African American women who were over 18 years of age. I interviewed participants over the phone and asked them a series of questions regarding their experience of being married and working full-time outside of the home. The number of participants in the study was based on a recommendation from Creswell (1998) that an adequate sample size for a qualitative study is between five and 25 participants.

The sampling method for this study was purposive in nature as I explored the perspectives of a particular group of people. Purposive sampling is often used in qualitative studies because it gives the researcher access to the richest data that is the most valuable to the study (Suen, Huang, & Lee, 2014). Saturation of the data is more likely when sampling is purposive (Suen, Huang, & Lee, 2014). Additionally, the level of

data saturation determines the sample size for the study (Suen, Huang, & Lee, 2014). I recruited participants through the Walden participant pool and a social media group and asked participants to refer others who were willing to participate in the study. In the recruitment post, it was clearly stated that participants were needed who identified as female, African-American, and were married while also working outside of the home.

### **Instrumentation**

The basis for the research instrument was taken from relevant literature on work life balance and African American women. The questions in the research instrument were formed based on existing literature and the research questions. All questions were open ended. I established content validity by ensuring that all questions in the research instrument were relevant and pertinent to the research questions. Additionally, I did my best to ensure that data was collected from participants who were truly representative of their segment and I sought to obtain a sample size that was large enough for data saturation to occur.

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

In this study, I conducted semistructured interviews with a representative group of women. All interviews were conducted by phone and I attempted to build rapport with the participants and answered questions about my education and myself. I also asked clarifying questions and listened as participants shared personal stories about their families (Smith, 2015). The identity of participants was confidential and they were not required to provide their first or last name or any other identifying demographic information. They were asked to disclose their age and their state of residence if they felt

comfortable doing so in order to demonstrate a diverse sample size. The only requirement for participants was that they self-identified as female, African-American, and were married. Prior to responding to the interview questions, participants received the informed consent that disclosed of the purpose of the study and were asked them to indicate that they understood that that there was a potential risk for emotional distress and that proceeding forward indicated their consent. The interviews lasted approximately 15 to 20 minutes and were recorded from start to finish. I used an interview instrument that I created based on the research questions. The interview instrument is included in Appendix B. Participants were asked to be as thorough in their answers as possible. Each question was asked in order as it appeared on the interview instrument and participants were asked to clarify if answers appear to be ambiguous. The participants were also informed that their participation in the study was voluntary and that they could decide to stop participation at any time.

Each participant was interviewed once and follow up interviews were not conducted. Interviews were recorded through a voice-recording application for iPhone. The process of data collection occurred within the span of 7 days. An adequate sample size was attained by the initial invitation posted on the social media page so there was no need to recruit additional participants. At the conclusion of the interviews participants were debriefed and any relevant concerns or questions were answered and participants were thanked for their participation in the study.

### **Data Analysis Plan**

As the data were collected, I took notes and began a preliminary analysis. Data that was not pertinent to the study was eliminated to only include that which was the most meaningful and usable. After the interviews were completed, the data was transcribed word for word. From the complete transcripts, the data was phenomenologically coded and phenomenological clusters were identified. Impactful statements were extracted from the transcripts of each individual interview in the form of direct quotes from the respondents. The process of horizontalization was used in the analysis of the data by highlighting commonalities in the written transcripts. Themes from each of the respondents were identified and clustered. After the themes from all the interviews were identified and clustered, I explored commonalities in the themes.

A description from each of the themes was written that summarized the response of the participants in their individual interviews (Priest, 2003). A master set of common themes was identified. In order to increase understanding surrounding the lived experiences of individuals, a researcher must be reflective while not influencing the research process (Chan, Fung, & Chien, 2013). From the table, descriptions based on the common themes were explained and summarized in a narrative account. After the summarized themes were identified, conclusions were drawn and implications for further study were explained (Smith, 2007).

### **Issues of Trustworthiness**

Credibility in this study was ensured through theory/perspective triangulation and member checks. The theoretical frameworks of Black Feminist Theory and Work-Life

Border Theory were used as a means to examine and interpret the data. Informal member checks were conducted during collection of the data as an additional means of ensuring credibility. Participants were asked to clarify vague answers and respond to my summary of their words in order to correct any errors of interpretation. Participants were also given the opportunity to provide additional information that they felt is relevant.

Transferability is a means to determine the degree the study can be transferred to other contexts. Transferability was ensured in the study by providing a thorough description of the research and relevant assumptions. A thick description of the phenomenon being studied was also provided (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Dependability is a means to ensure that the findings of the study are consistent and can be replicated. Confirmability is a means to question that the findings of the research are supported by the data and are believable (Trochim, 2006). Both dependability and confirmability were ensured in the study by creating an audit trail that provided a description of all research steps that were taken. A detailed rationale for the analysis of the themes and patterns in the data was also provided.

### **Ethical Procedures**

The study was conducted with consenting adults over the legal age of 18. No protected populations were studied. While there were not any anticipated ethical issues associated with this study, participants were advised that the subject matter might cause them to feel negative emotions. Participants were also notified that they had the option to leave at any time and that participation in the study was voluntary.



Participants were informed of the possibility for emotional distress due to the sensitive nature of the study. Participants were asked personal questions about their marriage and relating to their self-image. Participants may have shared information about themselves that put them in an emotionally vulnerable position based on the introspective nature of the questions asked.

The identities of participants were kept confidential and real names were not used in the study. Participants were asked to provide their age and state in order to identify and interpret themes that may be specific to a certain age group and to show diverse a geographical sample size. Participants were also informed that direct quotes would be used in the study but real names would not be used in order to protect their identity. Other than the age of participants and their state of residence, no other demographic information was reported in the study in order to keep their identities confidential. Digital files that consist of the recordings and transcripts of participants were stored in a password-protected file with regular and secured backup on an external hard drive.

Participants were informed that complete confidentiality could not be guaranteed due to actions that could have been taken by other participants (Helgesson, 2015), but that every reasonable effort would be made to maintain confidentiality throughout the course of the study and afterwards. Due to the use of purposive sampling in this study, it was possible that participants had prior interactions with each other. Prior to recruiting or interviewing participants, approval was obtained from the Walden University Institutional Review Board (IRB). The IRB approval number for the study was: 84-14-17-0366783 and the expiration date was August 13, 2018. The IRB served as an

additional review to ensure that ethical considerations were adequately addressed and that participants would not be adversely affected by the study. Data from the study will be stored for 3 years in a password protected file and then destroyed.

### **Conclusion**

A phenomenological design was the most appropriate for this study because of the focus on the lived experiences of married African American women who were seeking to obtain a work life balance. Participants in the study were asked to describe their experiences of being married, working outside the home, and seeking a work life balance. Phenomenology allowed me to explore their perspectives and interpret their responses in order to find deeper meanings related to what specifically is necessary to obtain a work life balance. Implications for further study were identified and conclusions were drawn based on the findings of the study. Recommendations for culturally competent policies and practice were made based on the data collected. Findings from the study contributed to the existing body of knowledge on the topic of work life balance and women and promoted positive social change by providing insight on the necessary tools to achieve work life balance and a better quality of life.

In this chapter, I provided a description of the research tradition of the phenomenological methodology and research design. The role of the researcher, population sample, interviews, and analysis of the data were also discussed. I concluded the chapter with a discussion of trustworthiness, ethical considerations and anticipated outcomes. Chapter 4 will include the findings of the study.

## Chapter 4: Results

### **Introduction**

The purpose of this study was to explore the lived experiences of married African American women seeking a work-life balance. The study was qualitative with a phenomenological approach as the goal was to better understand the challenges that African American married women face on a daily basis when it comes to navigating the spheres of work and home. The research questions for the study were, as follows:

RQ1. What is the experience of married African American women seeking a work life balance through a shared cultural lens?

RQ2. What is the perceived role of a spouse in navigating between the separate spheres of work and home?

The chapter will begin with the research questions for the study and will continue with demographic information on the participants and a summary of recruitment and data collection procedures. A narrative analysis of the data collected as well as themes and patterns that were consistent in participant responses will be explored and summarized. The chapter will conclude with results and conclusions that were drawn from the identified themes and patterns.

### **Demographics**

Eleven participants completed the interview. Participants consisted of married African American women who ranged in age from 27 to 43. Participants resided in various states across the U.S. (see Table 1).

Table 1

*State of Residence and Age of Study Participants*

Pseudonym	State	Age
L.	Maryland	43
M.	Pennsylvania	35
B.	Georgia	37
A.	Illinois	27
Le.	South Carolina	34
E.	Georgia	36
As.	North Carolina	34
O.	Indiana	33
K.	New Jersey	35
J.	Georgia	42
N.	Louisiana	36

**Data Collection**

The recruitment procedures for the study consisted of posting a short summary about the study on a closed social media group for African Americans and also uploading the short summary to the Walden Participant Pool website. The post on social media became very popular within a short period of time and was shared by several individuals. Less than a day after posting the initial invitation I had the necessary number of participants and had confirmed most of the interview times. As a result, I requested that the study be moved to “inactive” status on the Walden Participant Pool.

Potential participants replied directly to the e-mail posted in order to keep their involvement in the study confidential. They received the informed consent via e-mail and responded, “I consent” prior to having their interviews scheduled; I e-mailed participants

to confirm their availability for an interview. All participants self-reported that they were married African American adult women who also worked outside of the home.

All participant interviews occurred between September 3, 2017, and September 10, 2017. All interviews were completed via phone. All interviews took place in participants' homes or offices. Due to personal concerns and the lack of face-to-face interaction, it is possible the participants were not as honest as they would have been in a face-to-face interview. Other than the occasional interruption of background noise during some of the interviews, no unusual circumstances occurred during the course of data collection.

Participant interviews were recorded using an iPhone application called Call Recorder. In order to protect participants' identities, I did not use their actual names in the audio recording. Also, participants only provided their age and their state of residence. Participants were encouraged to be as candid as they felt comfortable being and to expound as much as they liked in answering the interview prompts. A copy of the interview instrument is available in Appendix B. Participant interviews lasted 15-20 minutes as some participants spoke longer than others in response to the interview prompts.

### **Data Analysis**

During the process of collecting data, I took notes in order to begin preliminary analysis. I transcribed the interviews and uploaded the transcript documents into NVivo qualitative analysis software. I de-identified the real names of the participants in order to protect

their identify and allow them to remain confidential. The data were studied in detail in order to achieve a deeper understanding of the study phenomenon.

Horizontalization involves giving equal meaning to elements within the data and can be useful in viewing the data from different perspectives (Bentz & Rehorick, 2008). I utilized horizontalization in this study by highlighting common themes in the written transcripts of the interview. Various quotations from the interview transcripts that indicated similar themes and patterns were highlighted using different colors. After the themes were identified, commonalities were explored for common themes using the NVivo qualitative analysis software program. Data collected in the transcripts that were not related to the research questions were disregarded and labeled as not usable. During the data collection process, I did not encounter any unusual circumstances.

Participants' direct responses were coded and grouped into basic categories of description (see Table 2). A total of nine descriptions were created based on the research and interview questions for the study. These descriptions were career goals, household duties, children, listening, providing support, racism and discrimination, stress, time off, and work-life balance. The descriptions were reviewed for meaningful patterns and themes, and data were then synthesized to identify relationships between the research questions, the literature review, and participant responses. Corresponding quotes and common themes were identified and used in the process of data synthesis in order to identify deeper meanings.

Table 2

*Descriptions from the Data*

Theme	Summary of participant responses
Career goals	Marriage and children did not change career goals
Household duties	Many spouses provided assistance with chores
Children	Children provided motivation to pursue dreams
Listening Providing support	Key characteristic of a supportive spouse Support is a two-way street; couple is a team
Racism and discrimination	Experienced in varying degrees based on job
Stress	An unavoidable daily challenge
Time off	Flexible work schedule is very important
Work life balance	Time management and calendar for organization

**Career Goals**

All participants reported that they did not drastically change their career goals after they married. While some mentioned the impact that having children had on their career, the majority of participants reported that nothing had changed since being married. Lisa, reported “I think that over the course of being married just more information has come about what I can do for my career goals and how I can make them possible.” Brenda also had a similar perspective saying, “I can’t say I changed anything. I did everything that I wanted to do.” Participants acknowledged that some of their career goals had taken a backseat to the family goals. Janice remarked, “I held off on some of my goals to get the marriage stabilized and to get us together. We bought a house and all those domesticated things.” Some of the participants acknowledged that they had made a

small adjustment due to the career goals of their spouse. Amy said, “I took a backseat to allow his career to go first. So, I pursued my dreams but they’ve just taken a backburner to his.” Overall, the general consensus of participants was that they have not changed their career goals but they have made small adjustments or delayed their career goals for the sake of their households and their spouses.

### **Household Duties**

Some participants reported that they split household duties equally with their husbands. Katherine remarked, “Equal distribution. A lot of the time we shop together late at Wal-Mart.” Lisa reported, “Everything is pretty much split down the middle.” Other participants shared similar sentiments about equal distribution of household duties. Allison said, “His thing is laundry. We do teamwork with that. He separates and washes and I fold and put away... Luckily we don’t get into it about house chores.” Some participants reported that they bore the brunt of household duties. Elaine remarked, “ I guess we have certain ones that we do. I feel like I do most of them.” Olivia echoed a similar sentiment saying, “He does help with laundry...but other than that everything else falls on me.” One participant noted that she didn’t see eye to eye with her spouse reporting, “We don’t manage that (household duties) well at all. I do most of it. He helps occasionally. That’s actually a sore spot.” Overall, almost all participants reported satisfaction with the way the household duties were divided whether the split it evenly with their spouse or completed most of it themselves.



## **Children**

Participants that had children discussed some of the challenges that they had balancing child-rearing with their careers. Some participants noted increased stress with having children because there were more things to balance and they wanted to ensure that their children had a consistent routine. Mary reported, “We live in a state where we don’t have any family. It’s just us so if there is a day that my son is off school that’s a stressor because we have to figure out where he is going to go.” Some participants acknowledged that they had changed their work schedules in order to spend more time with their children. Katherine remarked, “I try to spend time with my daughters. In the summer I put in so that I could leave early one or two days a week so that I could be at home with my family.” Amy echoed a similar sentiment when she remarked, “I work an abbreviated work day to ensure that I am able to drop off my children and pick them up.” Brenda spoke about the role of her spouse in daily childcare duties saying, “We swap childcare duties. If I bathe her, he puts her to bed. We take turns doing a lot of things.” The common consensus among participants who had children was that their children were their priority and they made adjustments with their job choice to ensure that they had the flexibility that was necessary to be emotionally present for their children.

## **Listening**

Listening was one of the themes that emerged from the data. Some participants spoke about listening to their spouse as a way that they demonstrated emotional support. They also spoke of feeling supported when their spouse listened to them. Mary remarked, “I am a listener. He gets his alone time to do what he wants to do and when he’s back and

ready to share more than I listen.” Katherine echoed a similar sentiment when she said, “I try to listen to him and be there for him.” Laney remarked, “I’m always interested in what he has to say and have a listening ear in what goes on in his day to day. He’s there to listen to me and give me quiet time to open up about what I need to vent about.” More than half the participants noted that listening was the way that they provided emotional support to their spouse when it was needed.

### **Providing Support**

In addition to listening, participants identified other ways in which they provided support to their spouse. Mary remarked, “I do a lot of physical stuff. Like if he is going through a hard time I am not going to leave things at home. I take on more responsibilities and hold things down at home.” Allison reported, “I definitely give him massages. We try to meditate as much as we can. So that’s pretty much what I do and I try to make sure he has home cooked meals.” Another participant referenced home cooked meals as one of the ways that she provided support to her spouse. Elaine said, “His love language is caregiving so I know if I make sure he has dinner, his clothes folded and put away that just makes life easier for him.” Amy and Katherine both noted the fact that they pray over their husbands and identified it as one of the ways that they provided emotional support to them. Olivia remarked, “I text him throughout the day to let him know that I love him and stuff like that. I just make sure he’s good.” The consensus from most participants was that they did something that was tangible whether it was massaging their spouse or cooking a home cooked meal in order to provide emotional support to their spouse.

## **Racism and Discrimination**

The responses of participants varied when asked about their experiences with discrimination on their job. Some spoke of racism subtleties that they noticed in their interactions with colleagues or clients. Brenda shared an experience of hers saying, “I’ve had a couple of interns who were Caucasian and they were older than me. When we would go for home visits I would notice that the parent would make more eye contact with them and not me and it would be irritating.” Janice remarked, “I have definitely experienced some racism. I’ve probably experienced some levels of sexism but it’s not the blatant things that are the highest extreme so it’s not really recognized.” Mary told of her experience saying, “In my current position there has been racism in that my ideas get stolen or that my ideas get presented as someone else’s ideas.” One participant said that she had experienced racism to the extent that she was seeking legal counsel. Three other participants denied that they had experienced racism, sexism or discrimination of any form on their jobs.

## **Stress**

Almost all participants with the exception of two reported that their stress levels were moderate to high on a regular basis. The participant who reported that she did not experience stress often attributed it to not having children and having a supportive spouse. Mary said, “That’s everyday almost. It’s frequently almost every day to the point three years ago that I hit burnout. It’s different now because I’ve been working more flexible hours and also doing my business.” Brenda reported a high level of stress saying, “I’m usually stressed about one thing or the other. I definitely feel like if I’m succeeding

at one I'm usually doing not so great with the other." While most of participants attributed their stress to managing their household and taking care of their spouse and children, Olivia had a different perspective. She remarked, "I'm always stressed out and I've been doing social work for ten years. I'm stressed because I'm dealing with crisis situations all the time. Several participants noted that while they were stressed regularly, their spouse was helpful in helping them manage the daily stresses of the household.

### **Time Off**

The ability to take time off and having a flexible work schedule was one of the keys to having a balance between the two spheres of work and home according to all of the participants. Allison remarked, "I have a very flexible job. My supervisor is very flexible so if something happens with my children I'm able to either work from home or to take sick time." Other participants had similar sentiments. Elaine said, "I have three personal days and I have my sick days. I've never had leave denied and they always accommodate it." Janice reported a similar experience saying, "When we do need to accommodate things we are allowed to do so. If we need to cancel appointments our job allows us to do that." Participants who did not have a flexible schedule reported that it was a source of stress. Katherine remarked, "There's not really a lot of room for flexibility. The expectation is that we come early and leave late. I'm stressed out 90% of the time." In contrast, one participant noted that her job had been very understanding when she needed time off. Brenda said, "When I had my child I was able to use my sick days but I was constantly told that if I needed additional time my supervisor would help me out with that." Participants reported that understanding supervisors and flexible work

schedules was what allowed them to maintain and make adjustments when emergencies happened that required their attention.

### **Work Life Balance**

Participants were very candid about the daily challenges that they faced and the continuing quest to have a work life balance. Mary shared her personal philosophy about work life balance saying, “Some people say ‘balancing act.’ I don’t like using the term ‘balancing act’ per se, because I don’t feel that you can have balance if you work outside of the home but it is more about creating harmony with the different roles that I carry.” Each individual shared some adjustments or things that they do to ensure that their family is not neglected. Lisa reported, “Typically on Fridays my husband and I both don’t work so we try to use that day to go to the supermarket and we try to call each other during the day or text just to communicate the things that are needed for the household.” Brenda had a similar perspective about her husband saying, “A lot of times he fills in the gaps that I have with working late, which happens often. He’ll get our child and he’ll start laundry and stuff like that. It would not work without teamwork.” Participants talked about dedicating a day during the weekend to their families and dividing household responsibilities with their spouse as a ways to reduce stress and obtain a work life balance. Olivia remarked, “I try to devote a day over the weekend to catch up on family stuff and I have things like cooking dinner that I try to get done in the morning before I go to work. That’s helped a lot.” Three participants noted that having a family calendar where they put all scheduled activities and important dates was one of the biggest ways

that they kept track of important dates and ensured that the family was organized. Elaine reported, “I keep a calendar to keep track of work obligations that expand beyond regular hours and the chores and responsibilities I have.” Katherine summed up her experience by saying, “I have a great husband who is very much a partner. He is not afraid of chores and housework so he’s better at cooking than I am so he does that. I try to keep a family calendar to stay organized and have a little grace and mercy on myself when I don’t get it right.”

### **Analysis**

Participants talked of finding a balance that worked for them that they could maintain. Responses to all the interview prompt questions were varied but had the underlying theme that spouse and family took precedence over work responsibilities. Participants made whatever adjustments were necessary to try to ensure that they were not neglecting their role as a parent or as a spouse. All participants’ responses were aligned with the theme of family first and there were not any discrepant cases that moved away from that common theme. One of the biggest factors identified by participants’ that helped them manage everything was a flexible job schedule. For some participants this meant taking a job that may have paid less money but allowed them the flexibility to leave work when necessary when a family emergency occurred. For other participants this meant being self-employed so that they could make their own work hours. Other participants reported that they worked less hours—some even working part time so that they had the necessary flexibility to be physically and emotionally present for their spouse or children.

Having a supportive spouse was one of the other ways that participants reported that they were able to manage both home and work responsibilities simultaneously. Spouses who were understanding and willing to assist with some household duties and childcare duties gave participants the additional support that they needed to manage the spheres of work and home effectively. In addition to support with household and childcare duties, spouses also provided emotional support to participants as they worked job that were stressful. While some participants noted that their spouse did not fully understand their job duties or responsibilities, having someone to vent to about job stressors assisted them in managing stress related to their job. Some participants noted that their spouse provided support by helping them make clear boundaries around their job and taking off the “career woman” hat while they were at home so that they were able to be emotionally present with the family. Spouses also helped participants to see when they were not managing the spheres of work and family well and were in need of a change. Some participants noted that their spouses struggled with being supportive when they worked in jobs that were not flexible or required copious amounts of overtime because it meant that they were not spending as much time with the family. However, all participants reported having supportive spouses.

### **Evidence of Trustworthiness**

In order to ensure credibility through the process of data collection, informal member checks were performed during participant interviews. Participants were asked to clarify when they gave vague answers in order to correct any errors of interpretation and to increase clarity. Participants were also asked to expound as much as they liked during

interview prompts and some participants did this by pausing during one question and then providing an additional experience related to a previous question. Interruption of participants was kept to a minimum in order to ensure that they did not feel rushed to answer questions and to ensure credibility throughout the process.

In order to ensure transferability, I provided a thorough description of the research. Also, clear description of the phenomena being studied has also been provided in order to determine the degree that the study can be transferred to other contexts. Additionally, relevant assumptions about the study have been identified as a part of the literature review.

Confirmability and dependability in this study were both accomplished by the creation of an audit trail that detailed all the research steps. Data from the study came directly from transcribed interviews with participants in their own words. The rationale for the analysis of themes and patterns is also included in the written summation and drawn conclusions based on the data.

## **Results**

The first research question for the study explored the lived experiences of married African American women through a shared cultural lens. The experience of African American women is informed by numerous and cultural societal factors. Obtaining a work life balance is challenging and it takes effort. It can also cause moderate to high levels of stress. Married African American women often find themselves making adjustments with their work schedules and with their families to ensure that the spheres of work and home are not neglected. One participant remarked, “If something happens



with my children I'm able to either work from home or to take sick time." Having a flexible work schedule is one of the biggest keys in having a work life balance. If one is able to take off work early or to come in late to drop of children for school or to daycare, it means that there is one less thing to worry or stress about while working.

Women are often willing to make sacrifices that include working part time or making less money so that their job can coexist peacefully with their family and related responsibilities. With a flexible job, there was less stress because the women knew that if something unexpectedly came up their employer would support them. Another participant said, "I've never had leave denied and my job always accommodates me." They were able to be present if their child became sick or they had to be with their child because their scheduled caregiver was unable to work.

There is a deliberate shift in priorities after marriage and having children. The job becomes more of a financial necessity and raising responsible kids contributes to personal purpose and fulfillment. The women in this study chose their children and families over their job and acted accordingly. They noted that this change in priorities was key to achieving work life balance because they knew what was really important to them. One participant remarked, "I don't bring notes home. I wait until the next day. It's just more important for me to be at home in the evenings." While they had no desire to leave work neglected, the participants also had accepted that there were times when that had to happen in order to be physically and emotionally present for their families.

While discrimination, racism, and sexism still exist in some workplace settings, the experiences of African American women vary. One participant said, "We definitely

aren't a post-racial American. You know when you've experienced it whether someone wants to acknowledge it for not." While some participants experienced discrimination and racism to the point that required legal action, others noticed it but decided to ignore it because it did not impact their work performance. One participant remarked, "...You always have a feeling that other people's pay is different than yours and I think that's an issue." African American women can experience racism, sexism or discrimination through blatant or covert situations. One participant said, "When I first got my masters degree I got a lot of comments like 'so you're a therapist?' I used to get that a lot." African American women may feel that they have to prove themselves at their place of employment and may find it difficult to advance into managerial positions (Purdie-Vaughns, 2015).

Keeping a schedule or a family calendar was helpful in organizing weekly activities so that family commitments, bills, and extracurricular activities were not forgotten. Remaining consistent with the calendar helped women to be more organized and to recognize what things or activities required their immediate attention. One participant said, "I keep a Google calendar to keep track of work obligations that expand beyond regular hours and the chores and responsibilities I have." Using a calendar helped women with time management skills, which was also identified as one of the keys to work life balance.

The second research question asked about the role of a spouse in navigating between the spheres of work and home. Along with a flexible job schedule, a supportive spouse was one of the deciding factors of work life balance. Spouses who were willing to

assist with childcare and/or household duties provided the additional support that women needed in order to balance work and home responsibilities. Even in situations where women completed the majority of the household duties, their spouses helped with childcare and were often willing to step in when they had to work late. Spouses also provided stress relief in the form of emotional support.

All the participants worked in some type of social services or customer service field and many times their spouses were available to help when they had to work non-traditional hours or work weekends. Listening was one of the other ways that spouses provided emotional support. One participant said, “He lets me vent to him when things get too tough. He’s supportive of my relationship with my family. He just wants me to be happy.” Women spoke about being able to vent and talk about their day to their spouse. Other women reported that their spouse helped them to compartmentalize their work stressors so that they did not bring their work anxieties home to the family and were able to be emotionally present for their children.

Sharing faith with their spouses was also one of the ways that women felt emotionally supported. Participants spoke of spouses who prayed over them and how important it was to feel that they were not in their life alone and that they had a partner. Several women described their spouses as teammates or partners because they were an integral part of maintaining work life balance. Spouses also provided emotional support by being available and being willing to be flexible when participants had to work later than usual.

Lastly, doing things together was one of the ways that participants and their spouses provided emotional support to each other. One couple made it a practice to do yoga together because they felt more connected to each other and it relaxed them. Another couple would have weekly date nights to the grocery store where they would spend time together but also buy all groceries and household products that they needed for the week. One couple traded off giving massages to each other because it helped when they were stressed. Participants spoke about the importance of setting time aside for their spouse outside of their children to make sure that they were still talking and communicating. Participants felt best supported by their spouse when they were able to vent about their stressors and when their spouse understood that sometimes they did not want to talk about work.

### **Summary**

African American married women balance home and work responsibilities on a daily basis. While levels of stress vary based on spouse involvement, job flexibility, and their children's needs, stress is still present and can be constant. The way that African American women manage stress also varies. Some turn to their faith, while others turn to their spouse or friends for emotional support in managing their stress levels. Keeping a calendar to stay organized and having a flexible job schedule was also a way to help manage stress when an unexpected emergency occurred.

Spouses also played an integral part in work life balance. Having a supportive spouse was also an important factor in managing stress related to work life balance. Spouses assisted in the division of duties around the home and were a partner in raising

children and ensuring that they were not neglected. Women were often able to continue to pursue their career goals with the support of a spouse although sometimes it was on a different timeline than they had originally planned. Spouses also provided emotional support and a listening ear, which reduced stress and improved overall quality of life.

Chapter 5 begins with an introduction and interpretation of the findings. It continues with the limitations of the study and concludes with recommendations and implications for practice.

## Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

### **Introduction**

The purpose of the study was to explore the lived experiences of married African American women seeking a work life balance. A qualitative design was used with an interpretive phenomenological approach in order to best understand the lived experience of married African American women in their own words. A phenomenological approach was the most effective way to obtain the richest data and to draw conclusions based on themes and patterns indicated in the data. The goal of phenomenology is to come to a deeper understanding of how individuals view themselves and the world that surrounds them based on their experiences (Murray & Holmes, 2014). By using a phenomenological approach, I was able to better understand commonalities in the experience of married African American women and their perspectives on work life balance.

Key findings from the study included the importance of a flexible job schedule and a supportive spouse in obtaining a work life balance. Participants said they were better able to manage both the spheres of work and home when they had a job that allowed them to take time off when they needed it or work a flexible schedule. Having this type of flexibility reduced stress and allowed participants to be emotionally and physically present for both their spouses and children. Additionally, having a supportive spouse was also very important to work-life balance. A spouse provided assistance with household and childcare duties and could fill in when women were called away for work-related responsibilities. Providing emotional support was also an important role for

spouses because women in the study often worked stressful jobs. A spouse's willingness to listen was often crucial to reducing stress and having a work-life balance.

Chapter 5 will begin with an introduction and interpretation of the findings of the study. The chapter will continue with limitations of the study and relevant recommendations. It will conclude with a consideration of the study's implications and potential impact for positive social change.

### **Interpretation of the Findings**

The findings of the study confirm those in the existing body of scholarly literature that a flexible work schedule is one of the necessary components of work-life balance. Women who have a flexible work schedule are more likely to stay at their place of employment, which then reduces turnover rates for their employers (Dizaho, Salleh & Abdullah, 2017). A flexible work schedule can lead to a better quality of life and reduced stress (Dizaho, Salleh & Abdullah, 2017; Kozjek, Tomazevic, & Stare, 2014). Thus, Women who know that they can talk to their employer about taking time off for family emergencies or even to pick up their child from school have a better chance of achieving work-life balance because it is easier to then navigate between the spheres of work and home.

Women continue to increase in number within the workforce in the United States. At the same time, they have responsibility for most household duties and responsibilities including child-rearing duties. Some women are criticized for taking time off from work to care for their children because their employers feel that it takes them away from their work responsibilities (Burnett, Gatrell, Cooper, & Sparrow, 2010; Tajili, 2014). The

findings of the study were congruent with the literature that asserts that social support is essential to obtaining work-life balance and that women often complete the majority of household duties even when they have a supportive spouse (Akanbi, 2016; Anila & Krishnaveni, 2016; Fetterolf & Eagly, 2011; Sitkowski, 2005). According to participants, sometimes, spouses were willing to be flexible or to split up the household chores, but the majority of the time, it was the woman's responsibility to do these things. As a result, women in the study made adjustments with their work schedules or worked for less money in order to order to have a job that allowed them the flexibility that they needed. Sometimes, this meant postponing career choices until their children were older that would have enabled them to make more money, they noted. Historically, African American women have shouldered the emotional weight of their families and been expected to balance multiple roles and responsibilities (Chepp, 2015; Watson & Hunter, 2015).

In addition to these work and home stressors, African American women can often face additional stress stemming from discrimination, sexism, and racism on their job. The findings of the study confirm existing literature that African American women can experience racism, sexism, and discrimination in the workplace (Beckwith, Carter, & Peters, 2016). Sometimes, women who face these forms of discrimination seek legal intervention; in other cases, they ignore or tolerate the discrimination. For African American women, experiencing racism, sexism, or discrimination within the workplace can be an additional source of stress and negatively impact their quality of life (Cole & Secret, 2012).



African American women experience high levels of depression and anxiety and often are reluctant to seek treatment (Cole & Secret, 2010). Many of the African American women who participated in this study, for instance, reported moderate to high levels of stress on a frequent basis. One recounted a workplace experience where her ideas were stolen by a Caucasian colleague and then presented to their supervisor. Another woman shared the experience of taking time off after her child was born and discovering that all her Caucasian counterparts were allowed significantly more time off from work when they had their children. Significant wage gaps, inequality, and oppression continue to exist, and African American women are still disproportionately affected (Redden & Kasperkevic, 2016).

One of the theoretical frameworks of this study was Black feminist theory. A tenet of Black feminist theory is that black women are subject to multiples systems of oppression (Guy-Sheftall, 2009). Black feminist theorists focus on empowerment (Guy-Sheftall, 2009). All Black women have been impacted in some way by oppression, and their experiences of oppression shape the way that they see the world (Guy-Sheftall, 2009). I drew on Black feminist theory because it provides a culturally competent lens with which to view and better understand the experience of African American women in the United States (Guy-Sheftall, 2009).

Another theoretical framework that I used was work life border theory. Clark (2000) asserts that the systems of work and family are separate but also interconnected. Within the spheres of work and home exist different cultures and sets of responsibilities that individuals must navigate/ Individuals transition between both spheres on a daily

basis, and, sometimes, behaviors and emotions from one sphere “spillover” into the other (Clark, 2000). The women in this study spoke about times where they have had to bring work home or complete appointments after business hours. Having a defining line between work and home was one of the ways that women in the study managed work life balance. Leaving work on time and not completing work tasks while home was a way that participants were able to be emotionally and physically present for their spouses and families.

Having a supportive spouse was an important aspect in successfully navigating between the spheres of work and family. Spouses were there as partners to provide assistance when participants had to work late or had a last-minute work demand. Women reported that their spouses supported their careers by helping with some household duties and being emotionally present when they were stressed because of their jobs. A supportive spouse was also helpful when there was “spillover” between the spheres of work and home such as a sick child or an emergency session after hours with a client.

A flexible work schedule and time management skills also helped participants to navigate easily between both spheres. They were able to move their job responsibilities around as necessary in order to accommodate unexpected events with their children or family emergencies. Women talked about the things they did to leave work responsibilities at work so that it would not interfere with their family life. In order to meet demands, some women would go into work early in order to complete the documentation that they had not finished the day before. The process of going between both spheres on a daily basis requires constant adjustments, and women reported that it

was something that they have gotten used to. To ensure that their households run as smoothly as possible, women reported that they have had to also depend on their spouse when something unexpectedly arises that requires their attention. Thus, having teamwork and being able to work together with their spouse to meet the needs of the household was essential in order for participants to report having a work-life balance.

### **Limitations of the Study**

The biggest limitation in the study is that it may not easily be replicated due to the phenomenological approach. Each participant spoke from their own personal experience, which was unique to them. A similar study that explores the lived experience of married African American women may have entirely different results because it would consist of different individuals. Another limitation for this study was time constraints. I wanted to complete the interviews within a time period of two weeks so my sampling method was purposive instead of random. There is a chance that while participants were encouraged to be honest, they changed their answers because they knew they were being studied (McCambridge, Witton, & Elbourne, 2014). All participants in the study with the exception of one worked in the social services sector and had attended college. Several participants also mentioned having graduate degrees. Results of the study may have varied if participants were working in a different field or only had a high school education. Participants in the study were all working professionals and their spouses had professional jobs as well so they appeared to all have a similar socioeconomic status. Responses to the interview questions may have varied if there had been participants with spouses that stayed home to raise their children instead of working outside of the home.

There is also the limitation that the researcher in some way influenced participant responses and that this influenced research findings.

### **Recommendations**

Recommendations for further study include exploring the lived experience of single African American women seeking a work life balance. In this study, the role of a spouse and the accompanying emotional and physical support was one of the key aspects of work life balance. African American women are less likely to marry and more likely to get divorced (Raley, Sweeney, & Wondra, 2015). A study that explores how work life balance is obtained without a spouse would be meaningful and would provide a unique contribution to the existing body of literature.

Future research should also explore the lived experience of African American men seeking a work life balance. African Americans as a whole have been understudied and underrepresented in empirical literature. Participants in this study were clear about how a spouse contributed to their quality of life and it would be research appropriate to discover if African American men had a similar sentiment. Additional research in this area would increase cultural competence with social psychology and mental health professionals in other disciplines around the unique challenges of African American men.

### **Implications**

African American women face multiple stressors on a daily basis. Achieving a work life balance can be possible but it requires planning and a willingness to be flexible and adapt to change. Traditionally African American women have a mistrust of healthcare professionals and they often underutilize community mental health resources.

The constant demands of work and home and weigh heavy on some and impact their emotional and physical well being. Having a work life balance can improve one's emotional and physical health as well as improve one's quality of life.

This study impacts positive social change by informing both men and women of the ongoing challenge of balancing multiple responsibilities successfully. The rates of women within the workplace continue to grow and the study shows that there is a continued need for employers to provide more family friendly policies. Employers need to be aware that their employees have other responsibilities that extend past their work duties. There is a need for flexible work schedules that allow employees to take time off for work in order to address family emergencies that come up unexpectedly. Women need a work schedule that allows them to be emotionally and physically present for their spouses and children.

This study also impacts positive social change as it validates the experience of millions of women who may often feel overwhelmed as they are expected to keep up the house, work full-time and raise children simultaneously while still remaining attractive and attentive to their spouse. The study also informs social psychologists, mental health professionals, and employers, and the general public on the unique challenges that women face while attempting to meet the emotional needs of their families and fulfill work responsibilities. Mental health professionals can become more culturally competent and better equipped to assist African American women when they seek treatment. By better understanding some of the challenges that African American women face, they may be better able to normalize and address depression and anxiety that African

American women talk about experiencing. Mental health professionals need to be willing to address the stigma surrounding mental health with African Americans and to support them as they navigate through the spheres of work and home. A harmonious work life balance is a crucial part of emotional wellness.

### **Conclusion**

Achieving a work life balance is not an easy process for many. Married African American experience the challenging of attempting to balance their home and work life in a way that does not leave either neglected. Struggling between work and home responsibilities can increase levels of anxiety and depression as well as stress. A supportive spouse and flexible work schedule can assist married African American women in obtaining a work life balance. Women who prioritize their families find jobs that are willing to respect their priorities and then build their lives around what is best for their spouses or children. Taking a job that pays less or sacrificing sleep to make sure that food is prepared for the next is one of the many ways that women make adjustments for the good of their family. A work life balance promotes emotional wellness and having a healthy mind and body. Successfully obtaining a work life balance is key to a harmonious relationship between the spheres of work and home and quality of life.

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## Appendix A: Interview Instrument

### African American Married Women and Work Life Balance

1. How do you manage family responsibilities while working outside of the home?
2. How has your job accommodated requests for time off for family emergencies or personal time?
3. How often do you feel stressed out because of work and family?
4. What has your experience been with discrimination, racism, or sexism on your job?
5. What adjustments (if any) have you made with your work schedule or job choice to ensure that you still have time for your family?
6. How does your spouse support your career?
7. What career goals (if any) did you change or adjust after getting married?
8. How do you and your spouse manage household responsibilities such as grocery shopping, laundry, and cooking?
9. How does your spouse help you to manage stress related to your job?
10. What are some things that you do to provide emotional support to your spouse?