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African American Women Leaders, Intersectionality, and Organizations

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Walden University
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Abstract

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by

Kena Renee Mayberry

MS, University of Phoenix, 2009

BS, George Mason University, 2003

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

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Industrial/Organizational Psychology

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Abstract

Research suggested that African American women (AAW) leaders are overlooked as candidates for senior level positions in organizations. The problem that prompted this study was the lack of empirical research surrounding the intersectionality of race and gender and how this dual identity informed their leadership development and excluded AAW from the leadership promotion group identified by organizations. The research questions addressed how AAW described their career trajectory, strategies that were used to transform institutional barriers into leadership opportunities, how AAW leaders perceived their dual identity as contributing to their unique organizational experiences, and how AAW leaders perceived their role as mentors. This study was grounded in the critical race theory (CRT) as it pertains to the concept of the intersectionality of race and gender. Semistructured interviews with a purposive sample of 12 participants were used to obtain data along with thematic coding to analyze the data. Key findings included the women expressing both subtle and blatant racial and gender discrimination in the workplace. The participants identified self-advocacy as crucial to their success along with having strong mentors. One of the main conclusions was that the corporate world is a long-standing, white, male network and continues to be an obstacle for women in today's workplace. Recommendations for future research include studying bi-racial women and women who are in lower managerial roles to identify whether they experience similar obstacles as women in senior leadership roles. Social change implications include organizational modifications across multiple industry types that would create more positive perceptions, descriptions, and trust in the leadership abilities of AAW.

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Dedication

So much hard work, dedication, and diligence went into this milestone of a project. I would like to dedicate this body of work to my grandmother, the late Grace H. Mayberry and to my father, Franklin D. Mayberry. The two of you have been my pillars of strength and your everlasting love, encouragement, and motivation have kept my torch burning strong and bright. So much of who I am, what I have become, and what I will accomplish in the future are because of the two of you and your belief in me. There are no words to express my deepest gratitude and love for the two of you. Thank you for lifting me up in prayer and keeping me grounded. For this, I am forever grateful. All of my love to the two of you.

In addition, this is dedicated to all of the African American women leaders who have persevered, strategized, and ultimately made their way to the top! Thank you for paving the way for me and all the African American women who aspire for greatness and strive to be senior leaders within their organizations. Thank you for your mentorship, encouragement, for being change-agents, and for your undying "can do" attitude. You are my inspiration and I am grateful for your journey and the path you have laid before me. Thank you.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Introduction

Although African American women (AAW) have begun to climb the corporate ladder and are given some opportunities to achieve career success, AAW continue to fight against discrimination as it relates to the intersectionality of race and gender due to businesses conceptualizing AAW as organizational outsiders (Davis, 2016). Festekjian, Tram, Murray, Sy, and Huynh (2014) along with Key, Popkin, Munchus, Wech, Hill and, Tanner (2012) are sources that spoke to the experiences of AAW and how intersectionality informs their leadership development in the workplace. Rosette and Livingston (2012) and Sanchez-Hucles and Davis (2010) spoke to the issue of how AAW are not being researched as a sole entity and without the inclusion of other women of color identities, which results in the experiences of SSW being under documented. Additionally, Davis (2016) agreed with the aforementioned scholarship by arguing that AAW have been studied from a sociological perspective but few studies have focused on how gender and race play a role in the leadership development and the rise to leadership positions for AAW. According to Sanchez-Hucles and Davis (2010) intersectionality is the manner in which various aspects of identity, which include race and sex, combine in different ways to construct a social reality. As asserted by Choo and Ferree (2010) and Arifeen and Gatrell (2013), in most cases, intersectionality focuses on marginalized people and the interactions that they face while working within an environment that collectively creates an unequal atmosphere.

The intersectionality of race and gender is a critical aspect of the role that AAW play within organizations and their potential for being noticed, respected, and promoted as leaders. For example, Cortina, Kabat-Farr, Leskinen, Huerta, and Magley (2011) asserted that "modern" discrimination against women of color includes contempt, the endorsement and acceptance of offensive stereotypes, and the support of blatant discrimination, which reduces the likelihood of AAW being promoted to leadership positions. AAW have two disadvantages: being Black and being female. Davis (2016) posits that women of color face a twofold target of discrimination because they are female and belong to a racial minority group, both of which subject them to discrimination and oppression. Being both African American and female means that both racism and sexism are experienced by AAW, which can also be perceived as a compounded form of discrimination (Biernat & Sesko, 2013; Remedios, Snyder, & Lizza, 2015). The race and gender characteristics of AAW can cause them to go unnoticed, which fosters an environment for marginalization (Hughes, 2011; Miville & Ferguson, 2014). Rocco, Bernier, and Bowman, 2014 and Sanchez-Hucles and Davis (2010) stated that racism and sexism still exist and that because racism and sexism exist, women of color face challenges as they attempt to acquire leadership roles within the workplace. Livingston, Rosette, and Washington (2012) further highlighted this thought by affirming that AAW continue to be considered nontypical and are marginalized and rendered invisible because they are African American and female. For the purposes of this study, African Americans is defined as Americans who have African, particularly black African, ancestors or are of African descent (African-American, 2016). In addition,

the AAW who choose to participate in this study will identify as being African American and have what is considered "black" skin color. For the purposes of this study, black skin color will be defined as dark pigmentation of the skin. Essentially, the terms "African American" and "Black" (African-American, 2016; Black, 2016) will be used interchangeably throughout this research study to describe AAW who are darkly pigmented in skin color and consider themselves to be Black and are so considered black by society due to their skin color and ethnicity.

Critical race theory (CRT) is the conceptual paradigm framing the constructs of the intersectionality of race and gender (Rocco et. al, 2014). CRT promotes the inclusion of women and minorities into the intricate systems within organizations (Bell, 1995). Rocco et al. (2014) support CRT by asserting that CRT advocates for radical change in systems and organizations and such organizational change may eventually diminish stereotypes regarding gender roles, competency, intelligence, and the qualifications of women and minorities.

Despite efforts to increase equal access and opportunities for socially devalued groups in employment, workplace discrimination still exists (Shih & Young, 2013). Rosette and Livingston (2012) found that AAW were evaluated less favorably when compared to leaders who met what was considered "typical" leadership characteristics. Moreover, they were and are considered less than typical for leadership because of their race and gender. Not looking like the "typical" leadership candidate creates situations in which the AAW is marginalized and rendered invisible to organizational heads who have the authority to promote qualified candidates (Livingston et al., 2012). The devaluation of

the AAW as a leader and organizational contributor is not prevalent in the research

(Johnson & Thomas, 2012). In the field of organizational development and change, a lack

of empirical data and qualitative-based research on how intersectionality informs the

leadership development in women of color within organizations exists, even within the

discourse of managing diversity (Festekjian et al., 2014; Rosette & Livingston, 2012). In

this chapter I review the background of the research topic, the purpose of this research

study, and the statement of the research problem. In addition, I cover the research

questions that are guiding the study, the overall nature of the research, the definitions of

key terms, assumptions, the scope and delimitations, and the limitations to the study.

Finally, the chapter will end with the significance of the research study, the implications

for social change, and a summary of the chapter's main points and findings.

Background of the Study

African American women continue to lag behind in regard to holding top

leadership roles within organizations (Ely, Insead, & Kolb, 2011). White women have

shattered the glass ceiling, but this is not the case for AAW. Therefore, the lens through

which AAW view the glass ceiling is different from their White female counterparts.

The intersection of race and gender has singled out the AAW, and a closer look into how

intersectional identity informs the experiences that are encountered by AAW needs

further investigation (Key et al., 2012; Rosette & Livingston, 2012; Sanchez-Hucles &

Davis, 2010). With a lack of empirical research and documentation, this marginalized

group of women have experienced a muted voice, which results in their stories not being

told and their experiences not being understood (Byrd, 2009; Parker, 2005; Nkomo,

1992; King, 1988). The central ideas that are necessary to fully illustrate the intersection of race and gender in the organizational experiences of AAW leaders include: barriers and challenges experienced by AAW (Cook & Glass, 2013; Emerson & Murphy, 2015; Lloyd-Jones, 2014; Johnson & Thomas, 2012), diversity and representation of AAW (Ely et al., 2011; Ferdman & Sagiv, 2012; Festekjian et al., 2014; Turner, Gonzalez, & Lau, 2011;), the intersectionality of race and gender (Livingston et al., 2012; Rocco et al., 2014), and the devaluation of AAW within organizations (Johnson & Thomas, 2012; Livingston et al., 2012; Rosette & Livingston, 2012). It is important to understand how the aforementioned main ideas shape the experiences that AAW encounter in the workplace and how those ideas contribute to the occupational fate of AAW.

AAW experience many challenges that make it less likely for them to acquire top leadership positions. Due to women leaders identifying as being female and Black, they are oftentimes perceived as being incapable of leading organizations (Cook & Glass, 2013). In addition, Cook and Glass (2013) asserted that individuals who are deemed as decision makers tend to view minority women as less capable of leading organizations when compared to their White counterparts. Emerson and Murphy (2014) stated that AAW also face challenges that demonstrate marginalization and discrimination in the workplace in the form of not being considered "qualified" for a leadership position because their race and gender are perceived as inferior to their White counterparts. White individuals are defined as having light or pale skin color and have ancestral origins from Europe (White, 2016). Rosette & Livingston (2012) suggested that AAW tend to suffer within their careers due to discrimination and a lack of career advancement opportunities.

According to Lloyd-Jones (2014), the social and scholarly marginalization of AAW acts a career barrier for promotion and tenure of AAW in higher education institutions. Scholarly marginalization is an active trend that is associated with the regulation of certain scholarship to a secondary and minor position within the academy and tends to focus on race-based research (Lloyd-Jones, 2014). Scholarly marginalization presents a barrier for AAW to advance in their careers. Cook and Glass (2013) referred to the high visibility challenge as the organization "keeping an eye on" the AAW. The challenge of isolation occurs when the AAW is not given the opportunity to succeed and become a leader within the organization because she is not exposed to tasks that would lead to possible promotion. As suggested by Cook and Glass, the high visibility ensures that the AAW is in the position that the organization sees fit for her and is not exposing the AAW to tasks that create the possibility for a leadership promotional opportunity. Johnson and Thomas (2012) highlighted that *selective incivility* creates challenges and barriers for the promotion of AAW because organizations perceive AAW to be members of a socially undervalued group, thus making it almost impossible for AAW to be promoted to leadership positions.

Ferdman and Sagiv (2012) suggested that diversity within organizations emphasizes the reduction or elimination of discrimination. Furthermore, Ferdman and Sagiv promoted the benefits of differences, which maximize the inclusion and contributions of individuals, increases social justice and equality, and provides greater organizational success. Festekjian et al. (2014) stated that although organizations have

called for diversity to be implemented, there is still a lack of general minority (i.e.,

women, people of color, etc.) representation.

Looking specifically at AAW, Turner et al. (2011) addressed the experiences that

AAW encounter when working within predominantly White universities, which included

the underrepresentation of AAW and the decrease in the women of color within

professional ranks. This is important and connects to this research study because women

within organizations may experience the same underrepresentation that AAW within

university settings experience. Research has shown that African American, Latino, Asian,

and Native American women represent 12 percent of the managerial and professional

workforce, only 3% of directors who work for Fortune 500 companies are women of

color, and there are only three women of color at the chief executive officer (CEO) level

for those Fortune 500 organizations (Ely et al., 2011). Essentially, the call for

diversification and equal representation within organizations has not been successful with

regard to AAW. Organizations continue to mask opportunities for the advancement of

AAW by allowing the organizational culture to remain negatively stereotypical of AAW

and deem AAW as not being capable to lead and intellectually and morally inferior

because of their race and gender not aligning with the prototypical leader (Emerson &

Murphy, 2014; Emerson & Murphy, 2015).

Problem Statement

African American women scholars (Byrd, 2009; King, 1988; Nkomo, 1992;

Parker, 2005) concluded that the examination of AAW who have risen to leadership

positions is largely absent from the mainstream leadership literature and their voices are muted, obscured, or not mentioned.

African American women leaders, a marginalized group in the American workplace, experience both racial and gender discrimination. Racial and gender discrimination play an integral role in their leadership development and opportunities within organizations due to frequent exclusions they experience within their work environment (Johnson & Thomas, 2012). The 2013 Catalyst Census on women in corporate leadership positions indicated that AAW held only 3.2% or 172 out of 5,306 directorships in 471 Fortune 500 companies in corporate America (Catalyst, 2013; p. 2). According to Catalyst (2013), 318 companies reported no women of color as corporate officers, 134 reported one, 19 reported two, and none of the 471 companies surveyed had three or more women of color occupying corporate leadership positions (p. 2). In 2013, White women experienced an increase in inflation-adjusted income of 29%, whereas the wage growth for black women was statistically lower at 19% (Catalyst, 2013, p. 1).

Charleston, Adserias, Lang, and Jackson (2014) reported that while AAW represent 6.4% of the total population, they hold only 2.4% of science and engineering jobs, and within mathematical and computer science occupations, AAW account for 65,000 or 2% of the mathematics and computer science jobs. Cardenas (2014) reviewed the political offices held by women of color and found that women of color made up only 4.5% of the 113th Congress and were even less represented at the state level representing only 5% of the total state legislators. They represented only 20.8% of female state legislators and 3.5% of governors. The lack of representation of women of color in

politics raises questions regarding democractic legitimacy and issues of overall political representation. Statistcally speaking, in 2002, there were 106 AAW holding corporate offices out of a total of 10,092, resulting in miniscule representation percentage of 1.1% (Catalyst, 2004). Catalyst (2004) reported that one-third of AAWsurveyed reported exclusion from formal networks as a major barrier for career advancement.

Economic security is always in question when looking at the wage gaps between AAW and other women across various ethnicities. These data are further confirmed by the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2014), which reported that earnings growth has been the greatest for White women, outpacing their AAW counterparts. Historical data were a predictor of potential earnings in this study, suggesting that AAW will likely continue to lag behind their White counterparts regardless of their skills, qualifications, or inherent potential (Catalyst, 2013). As studied by Ahmad and Iverson (2013), in 2010, AAW made 64 cents to the dollar, whereas White women made 78.1 cents to that same dollar.

Dating back to slavery, AAW's unique history in the United States has influenced their workplace relationships as well as the wages they bring home from their organizational affiliations (Catalyst, 2004). Catalyst (2004) also argued that even today, women of a lighter complexion are more satisfied with their wages and advancement opportunities than women of a darker complexion. This can indicate a continued preference for lighter complexioned women and their ability to advance within organizations at faster rates than darker complexioned women, which is a separation and preference that occurred during slavery. The Bureau of Labor Statistics (2014) reviewed the income levels of AAW women compared to their White counterparts and found that

while White women earned approximately \$710 weekly, AAW earned \$599 on a weekly

basis, therefore representing an 84% difference in the weekly wages of White and Black

women. Thus, the disparity in wages between White women and AAW is fully

illustrated, yet the disparities in AAW obtaining top leadership roles and the experiences

that this population encounter continue to be absent from mainstream research, which

continues to ignore the voices of AAW.

According to Warner (2014), AAW represent 36.3% of the nation's female

population and approximately 18% of the entire U.S. population; yet, AAW represent

only 5.3% of managerial and professional positions. AAW scholars (Byrd, 2009; King,

1988; Nkomo, 1992; Parker, 2005) concluded that the examination of AAW who have

risen to leadership positions is largely absent from the mainstream empirical leadership

literature and their voices are muted, obscured, or not mentioned. Lloyd-Jones (2014)

examined the perspectives of AAW in positions of leadership in higher education and

found that despite achieving advanced levels of education and high-ranking positions of

leadership, AAW still encountered discrimination and inequity that arose from social

exclusion and scholarly marginalization. These findings led the authors to conclude that

the intersectionality between sexism and racism needed further investigation outside of

academia (Lloyd-Jones, 2014). Few scholars in the United States advocate the inclusion

of race in mainstream organizational theory, which remains critical to understanding the

position and quality of AAW leaders' participation in the workplace. Fewer scholars

address the significant intersections of race and gender in the leadership literature

(Nkomo & Cox, 1990; Proudford & Smith, 2003; Turner & Shuter, 2004), and the

research gap regarding the role of intersectionality in leadership remains, even within the existing literature on managing diversity (Debebe & Reinart, 2014; Holvino, 2010). AAW are leaders across various industries, including education and corporate organizations both within the private and public sectors, as reflected by the Bureau of Labor Statistics (2015). However, the current literature presents a paucity of research indicating how intersectionality influences organizational leadership development in AAW (Reed, 2012) and the impact that organizational development will have on the next generation of aspiring leaders (Festekjian et al., 2014; Key et al., 2012; Rosette & Livingston 2012; Sanchez-Hucles & Davis, 2010).

Scholars indicate that there is a need for researchers to use both CRT and the construct of intersectional identity to give voice to the experiences of women of color, including AAW (Rocco et al., 2014). According to Holvino (2010) and Jean-Marie, Williams, and Sherman (2010), placing AAW at the center of scholarly analysis provides a vantage point from which to examine how race and gender intersect with organizational leadership theory development even within the discourse of managing diversity. Holvino (2010) asserted that these processes need to be studied in a double move that breaks them apart and specifies them at the same time that it connects and articulates their relatedness. Finally, when conducting research on the role of an intersectional identity in women, Warner (2008) and Arifeen and Gatrell (2013) recommend a methodological approach that sees identity as a process and considers qualitative methods, which is useful because a qualitative approach pays particular attention to subjective experience and how this experience is dependent on a person's social location.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative, multiple case study was to address a gap in the literature that exists for studies documenting how the intersectional identity of AAW leaders shapes their unique experiences of leadership development within an organizational context. The study included AAW who currently hold executive level leadership positions in a United States-based organization, specifically in the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area. The study focused on the intersectionality of race and gender and how the dual identity of AAW plays an integral role in their journey to acquire executive leadership roles. In addition, the study addressed the barriers, opportunities, and the effects of mentoring AAW. The research study adds another facet to the sparse qualitative research literature that currently exists regarding the intersectionality of race and gender for AAW in organizations.

The desired outcome of the research study was to identify key themes that are specifically related to and focused on the lived experiences of AAW in the workplace. The research study provided the participants a voice and an opportunity to tell their stories about how they became executive leaders, the obstacles they faced, the coping strategies that they implemented, and how mentorship aided in their success. The women had an opportunity to express their thoughts about why AAW encounter such struggles and why there are so few African American women leaders in the workplace. The research study adds to a growing body of research and contributes to the overall understanding of the experiences of African American women who have successfully obtained executive level leadership positions.

Research Questions

Four research questions guided this research study:

RQ1: How do AAW describe their career trajectory into a leadership position within an organizational context?

RQ2: What do AAW perceive as professional strategies that have allowed them to transform institutional barriers into opportunities for advancement into leadership positions within an organizational context?

RQ3: How do AAW leaders perceive their intersectional identity as contributing to their unique leadership experiences within the organizational context?

RQ4: How do AAW leaders perceive their role as mentors for the next generation of aspiring AAW leaders?

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework that was appropriate for this research study was that of Bell's (1995) CRT paradigm as it pertains, specifically, to the concept of the intersectionality of race and gender. The major theoretical propositions of CRT include how race and gender contribute to the oppression of a marginalized group is people. AAW leaders are considered a marginalized group that continues to be discriminated against in the workplace, which results in a lack of AAW leading organizations.

Nature of the Study

CRT and intersectionality are associated with the critical theory paradigm. The critical theory paradigm relies on dialogic methods that combine observation and interviewing with qualitative research approaches that bring forth conversation and

reflection (Byrd, 2009). Reflective dialogic methodology allows the researcher and the participants to question the "natural" state and challenge the mechanisms for order maintenance. Researchers and their theory development from this paradigm typically seek to explore the scientific study of domination, oppression, alienation, and struggle within institutions, organizations, and social groups for the purpose of transformation and social change (Mabey, 2012).

I designed this study as a qualitative, multiple-case study in order to understand complex social phenomena among separate cases. A multiple-case study of organizational climate can involve individual employees as a unit of study (Yin, 2013). When the data focus is only on individual employees in a multiple-case study design, the study becomes employee-based at multiple organizational sites, as in the present research in which the original phenomenon of interest, leadership in organizations, was the context and not the target of study (Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007; Yin, 2013). The unit of analysis was the AAW leader. I chose the qualitative research method for this study because of the depth of understanding this approach can provide for the researcher. Qualitative research seeks to understand the world or a particular setting from the perspectives of the people living in it. This design enables the researcher to explore differences within and between cases (Yin, 2013).

Definition of Key Terms

African American: An American who has African and especially Black African ancestors or descent (African-American, 2016).

Black: Of relating to a race or group of people having dark pigmentation of the skin (Black, 2016).

Critical race theory (CRT): A practice that asserts the use of storytelling and narratives as a methodology for explaining persistent social inequality and its impact on people of color (Cook & Dixson, 2013).

Hardship: Something that causes pain, suffering, or loss (Hardship, 2016).

Intersectionality: The manner in which various aspects of identity combine in different ways to construct a social reality, which include race and sex (Sanchez-Hucles & Davis, 2010).

Selective incivility: When an organization identifies a group of people as being members of a socially undervalued group. It is also considered to be a modern manifestation of sexism and racism in the workplace (Johnson & Thomas, 2012).

White: Of relating to a race of people who have light-colored skin and who came originally from Europe (White, 2016).

Assumptions

This multiple case study is founded on three assumptions. One assumption of this research study was that the recruited participants will provide honest and detailed accounts of their experiences as AAW leaders and the impact that the intersectionality of race and gender has had on their leadership potential within an organization. Another assumption was the participant's willingness to volunteer to participate in this research study. A third assumption was the AAW leader's level of comfort when discussing the impact that the intersectionality of race and gender has had on her potential to hold a

leadership role within an organization, especially if she is currently employed by the employer that caused the promotional hardship. A hardship is defined as something that causes pain, suffering, or loss (Hardship, 2016). Therefore, a promotional hardship will entail an individual feeling a sense of loss or suffering with regard to being promoted within their organization.

Scope and Delimitations

A major delimitation to this research study is that the sample is limited to AAW leaders who are located within the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area, which includes Northern Virginia and Maryland. No participants will be recruited from other areas within the United States. This can pose a problem in regards to generalizability due to the sample coming from organizations within one small geographical area. Another delimitation is the narrowness of the scope of the study. This delimitation refers to the fact that this study focuses only on AAW leaders who are in top leadership roles, such as director and above, which further decreases the generalizability across different leadership levels of AAW below the director level, such as manager and supervisor.

Limitations

Limitations of a study usually refer to the aspects that identify conditions that weaken the study (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008). A limitation of this research study is the use of participants within top leadership roles, which eliminates research for AAW who are at the managerial and supervisory level of leadership. African American women who hold leadership roles on a smaller scale are being excluded from this research study. Another limitation is the use of the Washington, D.C metropolitan area as the

geographical location for the population that is to be studied. Although the focal geographical location is large, there is the possibility of finding too many or too few AAW leaders who hold top leadership positions.

Significance of the Study

This research study is unique in that it addresses an empirical literature gap in understanding the perceptions of AAW within organizational settings. A possible result of this study is an in-depth look at AAW who hold leadership roles and the organizational and social barriers that AAW encounter due to their race and gender. In addition, the study may provide insight into understanding the perceptions of AAW across different industry types and within predominantly White organizations, which has not been widely studied and thus will be explored in this research study (Turner et al., 2011). Such research may lessen the effects of stereotypes, organizational and social barriers regarding female leaders by offering recommendations to organizations. Furthermore, AAW need a comprehensive tool that will aid them in embracing their leadership identities (King & Ferguson, 2011).

This research is important in that it will address how race and gender intersect within organizational settings and how intersectionality may influence the perceptions of AAW leaders. Stanley (2009) suggested that organizations lack the tools to address issues of the growing workforce of women and minorities. Scholars agree that a lack of the theoretical understanding of the intersectionality of minorities, especially AWW, exists in the organizational leadership literature (Cook & Glass, 2013; Eagly & Chin, 2010). Perhaps this research study will help mitigate the lack of theoretical understanding

and provide useful information to the organizational leadership literature. In order to begin that undertaking, a clear understanding of leadership, the interconnected effects of race and gender, and the success factors of female leaders must be evaluated through research founded on the CRT paradigm, as was done in the present study. First, there is a dearth of any literature regarding the organizational challenges, along with the themes and meanings, derived from the experiences of current and former AAW leaders (Lloyd-Jones, 2014). Finally, this study is important in that it may encourage and streamline fair promotion practices in organizations to improve the perceptions that AWW leaders have. If organizations plan to increase the percentage of minority women who lead and manage their businesses, it is imperative that they understand how intersectionality contributes to these women's leadership characteristics (Kay & Gorman, 2012; Sanchez-Hucles & Davis, 2012), and how it can be an added value to managing business processes within an ethnically diverse workforce (Hyun, 2012; Tadmor, Satterstrom, Jang & Polzer, 2012).

Implications for Social Change

Gender and race issues within organizations have long been a strong force for social change (Cortina et al., 2011). This research study could possibly contribute to social change by providing real-life and real-world perceptions of AAW leaders and may give voice to a group of people who have, in the past and currently in the present, been muted and gone unnoticed (Eagly & Chin, 2010). The research may be a catalyst for social change within organizations with regard to AAW leaders and has the potential to bring about organizational change that will create more positive perceptions and descriptions for AAW. This study's conceptual significance is in its potential to make an

original research contribution to Bell's (1995) CRT as it pertains to AAW and leadership and the concept of intersectionality (Parker, 2005) as it relates to AAW and leadership. When space is made to hear the unique voices of people of color, hope for dialog and improved racial relations is created" (Rocco et al., 2014; p. 5).

Summary

The problem addressed in this study is that despite the fact that women AAW continue to rise above the many challenges that they face in organizational leadership, their experiences regarding how intersectionality informs their leadership development within an organizational context remains undocumented due to a paucity of research on this marginalized group of women leaders (Festekjian et al., 2014; Key et al., 2012; Rosette & Livingston, 2012; Sanchez-Hucles & Davis, 2010). Key et al. (2012) calls for such research due to research examining the influence of gender in the workplace but leaving out the influences of race. Additionally, Sanchez-Hucles and Davis (2010) revealed that historically research focused solely on one dimension (race or gender) of the lives of women leaders, which simplified a truly complex phenomenon and failed to capture the nuances of women's experiences due to the simplistic approach. According to Anthias (2013), intersectionality posits that social divisions interrelate in terms of social relations and in terms of people's lives. Although AAW have begun to break down barriers and have begun to climb the proverbial "corporate ladder", they still continue to experience challenges and discrimination due to being African American and female. Being a marginalized population, AAW experience workplace inequality that is a

collective effort of the organization itself (Choo & Ferree, 2010; Arifeen & Gatrell, 2013).

The purpose of this qualitative, multiple case study will be to address a gap in the literature that exists for studies documenting how the intersectional identity of AAW leaders shapes their unique experiences of leadership development within an organizational context (Arifeen & Gatrell, 2013; Festekjian et al., 2014; Holvino, 2010; Rosette & Livingston, 2012; Sanchez-Hucles, & Davis, 2010). This multiple case study will collect data from AAW who hold top leadership positions within organizations located within the Washington, D.C. area of the United States. For this research study, AAW are the best sample as they will be able to speak on how their race and gender created organizational barriers for them and the strategies they used to overcome those barriers. The participant pool will consist of 12 AAW who will undergo an individual and in-depth semi-structured interview process. For this case study, 12 participants will suffice as it will allow for a generous amount of data to be collected in order to identify key and critical themes. In addition, having 12 participants will ensure that an ample number of participants are secured should one to two participants choose to drop out of the study. The unit of analysis will be the AAW leader.

Previous research regarding the intersectionality of race and gender for AAW within organizations has presented the need for further research. The need for more research is based on the necessity for society to understand the experiences of AAW in regards to being promoted into top leadership position. This research study is significant because it addresses the gap in understanding the perceptions of AAW leadership

experiences within organizational settings. Furthermore, the results of this research study may provide a thorough analysis and give a voice to AAW who have acquired leadership roles within organizations but have experienced organizational and social barriers due to their race and gender. The next chapter will review current literature surrounding the intersectionality of race and gender within organizations.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

Over the years, a rise in AAW in leadership positions has occurred; however, according to Gamble and Turner (2015), there are very few research studies that focus on the career paths that might be of great value and significance to AAW who seek executive leadership positions. In addition, Gamble and Turner asserted that gender and leadership styles have always been stereotyped as men being the influential leader who guarantees organizational success, whereas women have been classified as compassionate and relationship-oriented. Newkirk and Cooper (2013) argued that women who assert themselves and attempt to obtain leadership positions often face challenges and struggles that their male counterparts do not experience. Finding or being paired with a suitable and willing mentor is also a challenge that many AAW face. In addition, Newkirk and Cooper argued that there are few people who are leaders and willing to mentor, which makes leaders who mentor future leaders rare.

AAW struggle to obtain leadership roles across all industries. Adesaogun, Flottemesch, and Ibrahim-DeVries (2015) highlighted that current literature does speak to the racial and ethnic disparities in nonprofit leadership across organizations, but there is a paucity of research that focuses specifically on how AAW strategically navigate within leadership and corporate power structures. Gardner, Barrett, and Pearson (2014) noted that predominantly White institutions have an inadequate representation of people of color in general, but the underrepresentation of women of color at senior level positions continues to illustrate racial and gender inequities. "Understanding the career experiences

of Black women, in particular, may lead to some insights about precisely what kinds of obstacles hinder them from realizing success in their careers" (Adesaogun et al., 2015, p. 46). To further substantiate the assertions of Adesaogun et al. (2015), Holder, Jackson, and Ponterotto (2015) asserted that the underrepresentation of Black women in executive leadership roles is evident as the numbers stand at only 1% representation. Also, Holder et al. argued that Black women continue to face serious challenges that limit their access to executive leadership levels as they ascend up the corporate ladder, which impacts their overall career advancement.

The current research study explored how the intersectional identity of AAW leaders informs and directs their unique leadership experiences and leadership development within an organizational context. Due to a paucity of research on how the intersectionality of race and gender shapes the unique experiences of AAW and their leadership development, this research increased the understanding of how these variables advise the career trajectory of AAW. Previous scholars have focused on "women of color," but have not focused solely on the leadership development experiences of AAW. Therefore, the current research study separated and considered only the experiences of AAW.

Library Search Strategy

The literature review was conducted by searching several databases, which included ProQuest, EBSCOhost, SAGE Journals, Emerald Insight, and Walden University dissertations. In addition to using the listed scholarly databases, articles were pulled from Google Scholar and then cross-referenced with the listed databases to ensure

that the journal articles were peer-reviewed. These databases and university dissertations provided a plethora of scholarly peer-reviewed resources that aided in completing a thorough review of the literature that is currently available. A list of keywords was compiled and searched within the various databases. The keywords that were used included *intersectionality, African American women, sex discrimination, race, gender, leadership, gender leadership, racial leadership, executives, organizations, workplace, marginalization and barriers, glass ceiling, sticky escalator, organizational diversity, critical race theory (CRT), mentorship, perceptions,* and *experiences*.

Conceptual Framework

This qualitative multiple case study was supported by the conceptual framework of Bell's (1995) CRT as it pertains to AAW and leadership as well as the concept of intersectionality (Parker, 2005) as it relates to AAW and leadership. The CRT framework provides a full perspective on racism, discrimination, and marginalization of AAW (Jean-Marie et al., 2009). CRT has its foundation in legal studies. CRT is based on the idea that the socially constructed categories of race and racism are endemic, permanent, and intersect with other forms of oppression such as gender and class discrimination and ethnic and sexual minority oppression (Delgado, 1995; Bell, 1990). CRT considers the social construction of race and racism as enduring features of American society due to the negative racial awareness that is so enmeshed in the fabric of the United States' social order. As such, racism and racist acts appear both normal and natural to many people, which cause them to be unrecognized and certainly unchecked (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Rocco et al., 2014).

CRT has been used in research studies involving academic tenure and the challenges that are experienced by African American faculty members based on their race. For example, Garrison-Wade, Diggs, Estrada, and Galindo (2012) asserted that retaining academic faculty of color is a challenge mainly due to higher education institutions failing to value faculty of color and because White America does not see the benefits of incorporating a diverse model within the higher education institutions. Garrison-Wade et al. (2012) used CRT as a conceptual foundation because it emphasized and illustrated the limitations of social justice for minorities with regard to employment opportunities in higher education institutions. Furthermore, CRT was the conceptual foundation because it was used as an analytical tool to study intersectionality and social inequality. My research study coincides with Garrison-Wade et al. (2012) and the way in which the authors used CRT because it focused on the social injustice that AAW encounter in the workplace. Cook and Glass (2014) highlighted that organizations experience a lack of diversity in leadership due to AAW being less likely to exercise authoritative roles and experiencing longer paths to leadership positions, paths that their White counterparts more easily cross.

CRT related to the outlined research questions for my research study because it coincides with the intersectionality of race and gender and the experiences that AAW encounter in organizations. CRT may also help to explain the reason for the current lack of AAW in leadership and aligns with understanding the institutional barriers that limit the advancement of AAW. Rocco et al. (2014) asserted that CRT is a tool that can be used to help people understand the social structures that dominate and oppress a group of

people. CRT promotes a critical look at how a lack of diversity can hinder an

organization's workforce due to the leadership not being representative of the entire

workforce, which limits appropriate mentorship opportunities for minorities. In regard to

my research study, CRT provided a foundation for further investigation into the

experiences that AAW have with organizational oppression and the barriers that exist due

to race and gender.

One of the six tenets of CRT is intersectionality, with regard to race and gender,

and illustrates the various ways in which AAW have experienced oppression due to their

race and gender (Rocco et al., 2014). The central premise of the intersectionality concept

with leadership was to explore how race and gender affect the dimensions of the

everyday lived experiences of AAW. Parker's (2005) description included

intersectionality as a tool for interpreting and analyzing the experiences that AAW

encounter while holding leadership positions in predominantly White organizations.

Although described in 2005, Parker's description of intersectionality still holds relevance

in 2016 because in 2015, McBride, Hebson, and Holgate continued to argue that the

intersectionality of race and gender continue to contribute to the oppression,

discrimination and marginalization of Black women within an organizational context.

Furthermore, McBride et al. asserted that the study of intersectionality of race and

gender, with a particular focus on Black women, continues be limited, and the subject is

in need of a greater engagement and understanding through research. The concept of

intersectionality is appropriate for exploring leadership in the workplace because it

provides an understanding of the connection between multiple identities and social

factors and how those factors and identities shape leadership identity, behavior, and effectiveness (Sanchez-Hucles & Davis, 2010). Intersectionality provides an analytical approach to the meaning and consequences of multiple categories of social group membership (Miville & Ferguson, 2014).

The concept of the intersectionality of race and gender was critical to the foundation of this research study. Sanchez-Hucles and Davis (2010) asserted that cross-cultural psychologists have applied the intersectionality of race and gender to study the socialization in various cultures to understand social interaction and identity formation. Intersectionality of race and gender has also been applied to understand the lack of minority women in high-level political positions. Hughes (2011) proposed that intersectionality conceptualizes sexism, racism, and other forms of bigotry that create multiple barriers that inhibit a minority woman's rise to a high-level, high-powered political position. The intersectionality of race and gender has been applied across various studies and various industry types. It is a concept that is used to approach the inequality of a group of people and attempts to promote an understanding of why a specific group of people is marginalized, encounters barriers, and is not given the opportunity to attain a higher level of success.

The research questions relate to the intersectionality of the race and gender concept because the concept focuses the attention on a group of people who have experienced gender and race segregation and have been denied a higher level of success within an organization partly due to their race and gender (Mills, Culbertson, Huffman, & Connell, 2012). According to Powell (2012), the proportions of women who hold

leadership positions in executive suites and corporate boardrooms have plateaued in recent years with AAW's representation being extremely sparse. Intersectionality bridges the gap between the barriers that AAW encounter and the strategies that they have used to overcome those barriers and find success. Furthermore, studying the intersectionality of race and gender helps to answer questions regarding the perceptions of AAW and how their identity contributes to their leadership experiences (Eagly & Chin, 2010). As noted by Wilton, Moss-Racusin, Good, and Sanchez (2014), in the workplace there is field and experimental evidence documenting the ever-present existence of both race and gender prejudice and discrimination, which negatively affects the promotional potential of AAW. In addition, intersectionality plays an integral role in describing the career path and trajectory of AAW within organizations due to its focus on race and gender and how race and gender dictate the professional climb up the corporate ladder within organizations (Eagly & Chin, 2010).

Organizational Research on African American Leadership: Issues of Race and Context

Race, Context, and Organizational Leadership

The topics of race and gender in organizational leadership literature has been under documented. Thus, there is very little context regarding how the intersectionality of race and gender informs organizational leadership decisions. "Despite overwhelming agreement about the importance of context this remains an under-researched area particularly in organizational leadership" (Ospina & Foldy, 2009, p. __). Galinsky, Hall and Cuddy (2013) highlighted that although the effects of race and gender have been

documented, only a handful of studies have addressed the possibility of race and gender stereotypes interacting and increasing marginalization. Inserting context into the leadership paradigm explores and explains the "how" aspect of leadership. When focusing on the "how," race becomes a critical aspect of leadership. Alston (2012) explained that the experiences of AAW leaders must be examined and positioned at the center of discourse in order to discredit or discount organizational leadership misconceptions and beliefs that are based on race and gender. Ospina and Foldy (2009) asserted that the movement toward growing a diverse workforce requires unity in highly fragmented environments. In growing a diverse workforce, an organization can benefit from a diverse clientele, which can prove to be beneficial for organizational growth and the overall managing of diversity within the organization (Debebe & Reinhart, 2014; Holvino, 2010). Emerson and Murphy (2014) declared that the presence of AAW in leadership and authority roles reduces identity threat concerns and increases perceptions of company fairness, which can foster positive connections without sacrificing or hindering differences in the workplace.

Researching leadership can provide insight into how those whose voices have been muted due to their race, overcome inequities and rise above the challenges, thus giving themselves a voice that is powerful (Emerson & Murphy, 2015). Oftentimes, the experiences of people of color have been categorized and treated as special cases within a social context. Race has a significant impact on social context and various social experiences (Mullings, 2014). According to Emerson and Murphy, research has suggested that AAW are widely stereotyped as being less competent than men in

organizational settings and less competent than their White female counterparts overall. The intersectionality of race and gender plays an important role in the lack of leadership development and opportunities afforded the AAW (Johnson & Thomas, 2012). It is impossible to understand the full scope of leadership if an entire group of people is excluded from the research, hence, a clear indication of a significant gap (Arifeen & Gatrell, 2013). Furthermore, it highlights the devaluing factor that goes along with being a person of color and a woman. It is necessary to examine the lived organizational experiences of Black women and their lives as it provides a more complete picture of the effects that race and gender have on current leadership practices (Alston, 2012).

African American women have had an integral impact on history, although they are rarely recognized as leaders. African American women went unrecognized for their contributions as minority leaders during the civil rights movement even though much can be learned from the AAW leaders of the civil rights movement and their ability to transform society (Ospina & Foldy, 2009). According to Abrams, Maxwell, Pope, & Belgrave (2014), the origins of the strong Black woman began during the days of chattel slavery, which marked the beginning of the leadership of AAW both in their households and in fields. Historically, AAW leaders' creativity, risk-taking, boundary spanning, and divergent thinking, grew out of their leadership strategies, which were formed in part by the context of the women's leadership and in part by their socialized traits and behaviors (Ospina & Foldy, 2009). As described by Abrams et al. (2014), the existence of AAW leaders is a reflection of historical and economic hardship as well as the ability to endure

physical and mental oppression, which can be experienced within an organizational setting.

Race-ethnicity has a significant impact on leadership, specifically in communities where people of color are prevalent (Ospina & Foldy, 2009). Recently, scholars have taken a closer look at African American leadership and noticed that leaders of African descent tend to use social resources due to having more access to social resources than economic resources. Black women succeed by using different tactics from their White counterparts. These tactics are different due to AAW having to overcome challenges, barriers, discrimination and other ostracizing factors (Mullings, 2014). Furthermore, Ospina and Foldy (2009) highlighted that African American leaders are more concerned with the collective interest of people of African descent than individual interests. This brings forth the understanding that African American leaders tend to focus on the uplifting of other African Americans into leadership positions.

Resistance to oppression is a key component of being successful at acquiring a leadership position (Pitt, Mya Vaughn, & Harris, 2015). African American women continue to experience and fight oppression within organizations, as per Cook and Glass (2014). African American women leaders are judged as being incapable of leading within organizations based on their social identity, which is described as being Black and female (Livingston et al., 2012). The lack of value that is placed on the potential and abilities of AAW is one of the main reasons as to why AAW are not positioned by organizations to hold leadership roles. Selective incivility is a concept that states that organizations identify AAW as being members of a socially undervalued group, which reduces the

likelihood of the organization promoting the AAW (Johnson & Thomas, 2012). Furthermore, organizations have a particular prototype that they align their leaders with. Unfortunately, AAW do not meet the characteristics of the acceptable prototype and therefore are invisible, mute, and are not given the same leadership opportunities as their White counterparts (Rosette & Livingston, 2012).

The experiences of African American women tend to be characterized by barriers that are doubled due to them being Black and female, which lead to organizational disadvantages because the women demonstrate multiple marginalized identities (Davis & Maldonado, 2015). Abrams et al. (2014) also asserted that the intersection of AAW identities is particularly fascinating because each sit in the crux of two of the most extreme forms of oppression in the United States. Being Black and female adds another texture and thought process. African American women leaders can contribute greatly to an organization because they are aware of the widespread needs within the minority community working within the organization, which allows them to ensure that the minorities within the organization are being given the right opportunities and are not overlooked or invisible (Ospina & Foldy, 2009). Furthermore, when organizations promote AAW to leadership positions, the organization positions itself for better success because the minority community within the organization has a leader that they can relate to, which is critical to ensuring the happiness and loyalty of employees (Santamaria, 2014). Davis (2016) explained that AAW leaders emphasize the importance of mentoring other AAW so as to add value, guidance, and to aid in the success of future AAW leaders by playing the vital role of mentor.

Intersectionality of Race and Gender for African American Women Leaders

Intersectionality within Organizations

Grounded in Black and multiracial feminist thought, theories of intersectionality conceptualize sexism, racism, and other forms of bigotry as an interrelated system that creates 'multiple barriers' to power (Hughes, 2011). According to Sanchez-Hucles and Davis (2010), intersectionality is the manner in which various aspects of identity combine in different ways to construct a social reality, which include race and sex. Multiple aspects of identity mutually construct one another–being female influences one's experience as an African American and being African American influences one's experience as a female, thus emphasizing the importance of understanding the intersection of multiple identities (Sanchez-Hucles & Davis, 2010). The concept of intersectionality provides numerous categorizations that for better differentiation between women, which makes it possible to reference a woman's intertwined social locations and identities (Calas, Ou, & Smircich, 2013). In most cases, intersectionality includes specific focuses on marginalized people, interaction, and on multiple institutions that work together in their collective creation of inequality (Choo & Ferree, 2010; Arifeen & Gatrell, 2013).

To build upon current research, Tatli and Özbilgin (2012) suggested that focusing solely on inequality oversimplifies the concerns of inequality and, at worse, obscures the complexities of inequality and domination, which silences the experiences of the least privileged and the most subordinated. Moorosi (2014) added that simultaneity of multiple identities often causes Black women to suffer from the 'double jeopardy' of racism and

sexism and the inequity of sexism and racism has been captured arithmetically and not qualitatively. Furthermore, Cortina et al. (2011) found that intersectional perspectives, such as race and gender, recognize that people concurrently occupy numerous social locations and identities, which vary in the degree of privilege and power that those social identities and locations afford. In addition, Cortina et al. (2011) suggested that researching intersectional perspectives has shed light on the unique experiences that women of color encounter and that these experiences are very different from men of color and White women. Validating the experiences of AAW was also mentioned in a study by Linder and Rodriguez (2012) in which participants recommended providing safe places for the experiences of AAW to be explored, considering women of color experience marginalization through invalidation and the minimization of their experiences. A limitation to the research study conducted by Cortina et al. (2011) was the use of self-report methods, causing the likelihood of distortions.

In the field of organizational development and change, a lack of research exists on how intersectionality influences the leadership development for women of color within organizations, even within the discourse of managing diversity (Festekjian et al., 2014; Holvino, 2010; Rosette & Livingston, 2012). Rosette and Livingston (2012) argued that when Black women are compared to White women and Black men, black women are not characteristically identified as the leadership prototype that organizations target and recognize, thus heightening the discrimination that Black women face and further solidifying the effects of double jeopardy. Rosette & Livingston (2012) built upon previous research and contributed to the body of knowledge regarding Black women and

their organizational experiences with discrimination. However, Rosette & Livingston did not effectively evaluate AAW due to the AAW being evaluated comparably to White women and Black men, thus creating an unclear alignment regarding leadership prototype discrimination. Catalyst (2004) argued that the lack of fit perceived by AAW is rooted in the "double outsider" status AAW have of being dissimilar from White men based on both race and gender. Although more women have been granted high-profile leadership positions, AAW, specifically, are still underrepresented at senior levels of management hierarchy and in other management positions, which was further illustrated in Stoker, Van der Velde, and Lammers' (2012) research that found the number of organizations with only men on the board of directors increased.

Festekjian et al. (2014) investigated leadership perceptions of race and found that racial minorities continue to be perceived as being less suitable and ideal for managerial positions within the United States. Although insightful, Festekjian et al. showed limitations to the mechanisms underlying intrapersonal leadership perceptions as not being explicitly examined, which make interpretation of the model open to speculation. Debebe (2011) argued that leadership development programs are not afforded to women, specifically AAW, due to organizations failing to relinquish the old way of thinking about women in leadership roles and choose to hold women to traditional gender-role expectations. Stead (2014) further validated Debebe by highlighting that the experiences of Black women are inadequately discussed within leadership development frameworks, specifically when reviewing critical leadership development programs. As Baby Boomers continue to leave the leadership roles within organizations, succession planning will be

critical to organizations and the implementation of women leaders will be imperative. Beeson and Valerio (2012) suggested that as the Baby Boomers retire and leave the workforce, organizations need to assess and consider all possible candidates within the talent pools, including AAW, and consider all avenues when completing succession planning, which will, in turn, require organizations to consider and develop AAW, currently an untapped leadership resource.

Key et al. (2012) argued that Black women perceive race and gender as a double jeopardy that results in making climbing the corporate ladder difficult, which increases feelings of literal isolation due to AAW finding themselves diametrically opposed to the dominant elite group on race and gender. The main noted limitation to their study is that individual and environmental factors relating to leadership disadvantages were not taken into consideration at the time of the study. In the same vein, Linder and Rodriguez (2012) highlighted that the characteristics of being women and minorities automatically renders women of color invisible. To further illustrate the invisibility of AAW, Catalyst (2004) reiterated that African American women face challenges to advancement in the corporate world, which is demonstrated by their low representation in influential leadership roles. African American women face challenges when pursuing specific career paths that are typically pursued by White and Asian males. According to Charleston et al. (2014), AAW who are interested in science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) careers face unique problems when pursuing STEM career paths due to their racial and gender identity as well as the fact that they do not qualify with the typical characteristics (White or Asian male) that are the norm for the field.

The Intersectional Identity of African American Women Leaders

Acker (2006) had this to say about intersectional identity:

[R]ace, even when paired with ethnicity, encapsulates multiple social realities always inflected through gender and class differences. 'Class' is also complicated by multiple gendered and racialized differences. The conclusion to this line of thinking – theory and research on inequality, dominance, and oppression must pay attention to the intersections of, at least, race/ethnicity, gender, and class (Acker, 2006, p.442).

According to Arifeen and Gatrell (2013), the new perspective on the lived experiences of oppression that AAW encounter and the role that race and gender played in those encounters was not identified until the 1980s, which fostered a new discussion around a new view of the experience of social identity. Although a major paradigm in women's studies, the emergence of intersectionality and how to study it has not been widely discussed, meaning the methodology in which to adequately study intersectionality has not been identified or practiced. This has brought about concerns regarding how the concept of intersectionality has been taken up and studied (McCall, 2005; Holvino, 2010). Although women have entered the workforce in great numbers, there is still a marked absence of research that focuses on the experiences that African American women encounter when they attempt to ascend to leadership roles and what their experiences are once they successfully become leaders within an organization (Davis & Maldonado, 2015). Furthermore, Wyatt and Silvester (2015) argued that very little attention has been paid to what influences the leadership journey of African

American women and whether current assumptions about their journey truly reflect their lived experiences.

Most Black women's epistemology is grounded in the richness of their African roots that inform what they believe to be true about themselves and their experiences (Jean-Marie et al., 2009). Essentially, Black women draw from common experiences that occurred historically, such as oppression that began during slavery, and those experiences shape their current views of how they fit within organizations today. Although Jean-Marie et al. (2009) shed light on the barriers that AAW face in predominantly White higher education institutions, the research falls short in that the majority of the participants in the study grew up in the southern United States during the Civil Rights movement; a time of political and social injustice and mayhem. The research does not account for AAW who grew up in the northern parts of the United States and did not experience the impact of the Civil Rights movement as directly as the AAW who were in the midst of the movement. Therefore, the differences in the experiences were not identified and taken into account. Furthermore, the research does not review women who grew up after the implementations of supposed "social justice" that occurred after the Civil Rights movement, which could show if real change has occurred in the unique experiences of AAW. Holvino (2010) asserted that these processes need to be studied in a double move that breaks them apart and specifies them at the same time that it connects and articulates their relatedness.

Remedios and Snyder (2015) studied the stigmatization of women of color and agreed that one of the barriers to studying women of color is the lack of empirical

research to capture the unique experiences of multiple stigmatized targets and to effectively operationalize what researchers mean by the term intersectionality. The biggest limitation to the review completed by Remedios and Snyder (2015) is their lack of definition when using the terminology "women of color". According to Arifeen and Gatrell (2013), the term "women of color" can incorporate women who are Asian, Caribbean, Black, Pakistani, etc. Therefore, it is unclear as to which category of women of color Remedios and Snyder (2015) are referring to, which indicates that all women of color are being studied as one category and not being separated to demonstrate true unique experiences.

The experiences of AAW are unique to other cultures due to the oppression that they experience. As asserted by Allen and Butler (2014), Black feminist thought examines the experiences of AAW as they relate to their multiple intersections of oppression along the lines of race, class, and gender. The intersections of race and gender are an accepted reality in the fields of women studies (Holvino, 2010). However, just as Remedios and Snyder (2015), Holvino (2010) did not differentiate the term "women of color" as solely relating to AAW. Instead, Holvino (2010), referred to "women of color" as being Native American, Latin, Asian, and Black/African American women who share a status and experience as racial-ethnic minorities in the USA. This is seen as one of the major flaws in the most recent literature regarding the intersectionality of race and gender for AAW. The unique experiences of AAW is not separated and studied as a single unit but is studied in the grand scheme of women of color. As highlighted by Jean-Marie et al.

(2009), Black women's experiences have been omitted, devalued, and misinterpreted, thus rendering them invisible (Arifeen & Gatrell, 2013).

The Inclusion of Race and Gender in the Leadership Literature

Implementing better diversity strategies and incorporating a strategic diversity selection process within organizations has been long talked about and supposedly "implemented" into recruitment and promotion strategies. In fact, more than 25 years have passed since the focused study of gender and diversity in organizations began in management and related fields (Berry & Bell, 2012). However, as mentioned by Gündemir, Homan, de Dreu, and Vugt (2014), although organizations have since begun considering the significance of ethnic team and organizational performance, society's need for recruiting and selecting the most qualified individuals for leadership positions, and preventing unnecessary loss of ethnic minority talent, it is very surprising that the number of research studies on this subject is limited. Though Gündemir et al. (2014) conducted research to address the lack of literature regarding ethnic minority leaders; a major limitation to the research was the use of males only. Therefore, the results cannot be generalized to female targets. Essentially, this presents an even smaller range of research regarding AAW leaders within organizations and their experiences with obtaining leadership positions. As asserted by Holvino (2010), in the field of organizational studies and organizational change there is little evidence of the importance that race and gender intersections is acknowledged, which is exacerbated due to the understanding of intersectionality being underdeveloped.

Few scholars in the United States advocate the inclusion of race in mainstream organization theorizing, which remains critical to understanding the position and quality of AAW leaders' participation in the workplace. Fewer scholars address the significant intersections of race and gender in the leadership literature (Nkomo & Cox, 1996; Proudford & Smith, 2003; Turner & Shuter, 2004); and the research gap regarding the role of intersectionality in leadership remains, even within the extant literature on managing diversity (Debebe & Reinart, 2014; Holvino, 2010). Nishii (2013) further supported the limited research by stating that despite the growing awareness of the potential benefits associated with cultivating inclusive environments, empirical testament of the power of inclusion is scarce. Reed (2012) noted that there is a considerable body of work on gender and women in management and leadership, but it tends to stand alone and remains absent from the mainstream; information that was further justified by stating that there are a small number of scholars producing research in the area of the intersectionality of race and gender. It is critical to note that the study of Black female leaders is usually cloaked in the term "women and minorities", which denies the specific experiences of Black female leaders and reduces the visibility and voices of the AAW leaders (Tillman, 2004). According to Reed (2012), although AAW are leaders across many diverse industries, the scarcity of research and literature surrounding the intersectionality of AAW and leadership presents an issue for aspiring AAW of the future. As asserted by Festekjian et al. (2014); Key et al. (2012); Rosette & Livingston (2012); Sanchez-Hucles and Davis, (2010), there is not enough literature to provide insight to inform the next generation of AAW leaders.

A critical aspect of the inclusion of race and gender in leadership is organizational assessment. According to Trenerry and Paradies (2012), organizational assessment is the practice of auditing diversity practices to identify and find resolutions to an organization's diversity weaknesses and building on the organization's diversity strengths, which also includes convincing the organization that the diversity problems exist. The greatest limitation to the research conducted by Trenerry and Paradies is that the researchers could not find an organizational assessment tool that explicitly focused on racism and discrimination in the workplace. Additionally, the term "racism" was not operationally defined as meaning a particular ethnic background or culture and the study did not consider separating the sexes (male or female) to understand if there were gender-based variables that affected the organizational assessment.

Barriers, Opportunities, Coping Strategies, and Mentorship

  Barriers and opportunities. In recent years, the amount of literature on women's leadership has increased; however, few studies explore leadership development of African American women (Davis & Maldonado, 2015). Much of the literature has been limited to the traditionally defined views of leadership; that is, most of the research concentrated on leadership and managerial aspects adopted by White males in the corporate world. However, there have been an increasing number of studies conducted on female managers and leaders that attempt to identify key success factors or pitfalls. Most of the research has been done with women at lower levels or in small organizations (Angel, Killacky, & Johnson, 2013; Davis & Maldonado, 2015). Waring (2003) indicates that much of the research on the leadership development of women has often been

confined within studies of women's history or feminist literature and states that "a review of the existing body of knowledge on women in management might lead to the observation that much of the scholarship addresses the experiences of only one group of women managers and does not address the effects of race and gender on African American women" (p. 1).

Historically, women and minorities were legally excluded from several professional occupations (Muzio & Tomlinson, 2012). Today, AAW continue to experience many forms of discrimination within the workplace due to their gender and race. Worsley and Stone (2011) highlighted that ethnic minorities face a variety of barriers to upward mobility in organizations, such as being marginalized in employment promotions, salary raises, and having limited access to mentors and role models. Three years following Worsley and Stone, O'Brien, Franco, and Dunn (2014), demonstrated that AAW are still encountering the same barriers by stating that AAW have reported various organizational barriers, including lack of support, devaluation of their work, and few, if any, role models or mentors. Additionally, Ortiz and Roscigno (2009) revealed that 33,202 discrimination case files that demonstrated Black women being more likely to experience discrimination in promotion than White women and Black women reported encountering discrimination pertaining to being fired and race-related harassment. Although O'Brien et al. provided pertinent information regarding the barriers and experiences Black women face in the workplace, a noticeable flaw in their research was the lack of analyses of subgroups of women of color. As seen in other research,

O'Brienet al. did not differentiate the term "women of color" and therefore, their research does not single out AAW as the only unit of measurement.

Barriers to leadership opportunities are a global phenomenon where women, when compared to men, are disproportionately concentrated in lower-level and lower-authoritative leadership positions (Northouse, 2010). These barriers are generally perceived as being against women, but to a larger extent are against African-American women executives. According to Parker (2005), the silencing of some groups of women and men while privileging others in the study of organizational leadership has resulted from the theoretical perspectives that frame an understanding of gender, discourse and organization. Black feminists theorize that the understanding of race, class and gender require researches to view the identities as characteristics that are embedded within one another and need to be studied simultaneously instead of separately (Acker, 2012; Vannoy, 2001). Black feminist theories emphasize that in many contexts, race and gender cannot be separated (Hooks, 1984; Collins, 1990). African American women report that racism, rather than sexism, is the greatest barrier to opportunities in dominant culture organizations (Edwards, 2013). Furthermore, only a few studies have examined how race impacts leadership in dominant culture organizations (Parker & Ogilvie, 1996; Hooks, 1984, Parker, 2005). Scholars suggest that attitudes towards women continue to be profoundly affected by past and current racial oppression (Davis & Maldonada, 2015; Feagin & Elias, 2013; Moore, 2013).

There are limited opportunities for AAW to become leaders due to their gender and race as well as stereotypes and perceptions of a prototype leader that affect Black

women but do not affect White women (Thomas, Dovidio, & West, 2014). As suggested by Edmondson (2012), when a Black woman is direct, it is perceived as a negative attribute and communication style, whereas, if a White woman is direct it is perceived as a positive attribute. Therefore, AAW tend to be overlooked due to an organization being unable to adapt to AAW's communication style, even if it is a style that is used by her White counterparts. Furthermore, invisibility plays a big role in AAW being given the opportunity to climb the corporate ladder. According to Sessler-Bernstein and Bilimoria (2013), women of color report feeling invisible due to a lack of respect and feeling as though they are not valued by the organization. Furthermore, according to Lewis and Neville (2015), another challenge that AAW face is marginalization in the workplace. The marginalization is accomplished through feelings of invisibility in the form of silence and being made to feel less significant and organizationally suitable on the basis of gender and race (Lewis & Neville, 2015).

Coping strategies. Effectively identifying and utilizing coping strategies has helped AAW become leaders. Case and Hunter (2012) define coping as a strategy that individuals use to respond to a stressor in ways that reduce the adverse effects of the stressor. The most commonly used coping mechanism for AAW when dealing with stress is spirituality. According to O'Brien et al. (2014), Black women found that they used their spirituality to cope in various ways: to find peace and guidance, gain strength, and reframe negative situations, which is accomplished through inspirational readings, meditation, and prayer. For example, when experiencing racism and sexism in the workplace, an AAW may consult her church pastor in order to cope with the conflict she

is experiencing at work. This thought process was further supported by Grayman-Simpson and Mattis (2012) in which it was suggested that religion is consistently shown to be a powerful means for coping with stress for African Americans. The biggest limitation to the research conducted by Grayson-Simpson and Mattis (2012) is the lack of differentiation between African American men and women and how the religion mechanism assists the different sexes in coping. Understanding how men and women differ in their reliance upon religion for coping may have possibly added value and strengthened the study.

Linnabery, Stuhlmacher, and Towler (2014) asserted that AAW cope with the stress that comes along with racial and gender biases by resting on faith, which involves being spiritually grounded and using prayer to deal with stress. Hayward and Krause (2015) further strengthened Linnabery et al. (2014) assertion by finding that African Americans tend to be more involved with religion and are more likely to use religion as a coping strategy. The research that will be undertaken in this study will directly address the issue of gender and racial biases, whereas the religion coping mechanisms address the stress of gender and racial biases in a more personal and indirect way. Schaeffer and Mattis (2012) further supported the thought of religion being the main coping mechanism for AAW in the workplace by stating that among Black women, prayer mitigated the impact of work stress, which demonstrates that religion and spirituality are central to some individuals' efforts to cope with work-related stress.

Mentoring African American women leaders. Various scholars define mentoring using different words and phrases but the essence of each definition is the

same, which emphasizes how an individual works with a protégé to assist that person on the career path and provide professional development and experience as needed (Clayton, Sanzo, & Myran, 2013). As highlighted by Brondyk and Searby (2013), research has found that mentoring provides great benefits in the area of career development. Career development, through mentoring, benefits the fields of education, business, and medicine in which positive outcomes in learning, personal growth, and development in professional abilities is prevalent (Brondyk & Searby, 2013). Leck and Orser (2013) defined mentoring as a relationship between a younger, less experienced individual, such as a protégé, and an older, more experienced individual, who is considered the mentor. Hu, Wang, Yang, and Wu (2014) further supported Leck and Orser (2013) by stating that mentoring is an interpersonal relationship that is developed and cultivated between a senior and more experienced employee and a junior or less experienced employee with the goal to enhance the junior employee's career development. Rutti, Helms, and Rose (2012) provided an expanded definition of mentoring by defining it as a nurturing process in which a more skilled or experienced person serves as a role model and teaches, sponsors, encourages, counsels, and befriends a less skilled and experienced individual. Allen and Butler (2014) chose to define mentoring as a process by which an individual of superior rank, high performance, and prestige counsels, coaches, and facilitates the intellectual and career development of a junior employee within the same organization. There are over 40 definitions of what a mentor is, but those definitions share the view that mentors are individuals who provided various kinds of personal and professional support to junior or protégé employees (Ghosh & Reio, 2013).

Mentorship is a critical and historical technique that prepares other AAW for leadership positions. Choosing to prepare and coach other aspiring AAW leaders for organizational leadership success helps to ensure that aspiring AAW leaders will be ready for the senior leadership workforce. In terms of influencing aspiring AAW leaders of the future, AAW leaders have historically used mentorship as a way to prepare, influence and encourage other AAW who have leadership potential (Mullings, 2014). A critical element of mentorship that is prevalent in the African American community is the concept of "othermothering". As implied by Ospina and Foldy (2009), "othermothering" is a survival technique that began during slavery in which mothers take responsibility for the children of other mothers. This can be used within an organizational context as well. AAW leaders (mother) tend to mentor other AAW (child) within organizations when the leadership potential is either expressed by the mentee or the mentor recognizes leadership capabilities within the mentee and chooses to take the AAW under her wing and coach her in preparation for a future leadership role (Museus, 2014). Another key factor to "othermothering" is advocating for the overall well-being of the mentee, which includes fighting oppression and remaining resilient and finding appropriate and effective coping mechanisms (Pitt et al., 2015).

According to Dominquez and Hager (2013), mentoring programs have been shown to increase personnel retention, which reduced organizational attrition, increases career satisfaction, accelerates the development of leadership, and reduce the learning curve in today's organizational markets. Rutti et al. (2012) suggested that when mentoring is included in the overall professional development of employees, both parties,

the mentor and the mentee, seek something positive from the mentoring relationship and both mutually benefit from the exchange. Furthermore, Craig, Allen, Reid, Riemenschneider, and Armstrong (2012) reiterated the impact of mentoring by stating that the strong link between career mentoring and positive employee outcomes include extrinsic success, such as increased compensation, promotion eligibility, and overall career mobility.

Aside from promotion eligibility, increased compensation, and career mobility, Dziczkowski (2013) asserted that benefits derived from mentoring include reduction in stress, improved self-esteem, increased professional skills, increased insight, and greater awareness of different approaches. Clayton et al. (2013) corroborated Dziczkowski by stating that mentoring benefits both the mentor and the mentee due to both parties sharing in the opportunity to exchange information, reflect, and participate in mutual professional development. In addition, mentor/mentee relationships provide the opportunity for mentees to share their experiences, provide feedback and increase their levels of confidence in their own leadership abilities (Clayton et al.). In addition, support behaviors, such as mentoring, are associated with positive work attitudes and outcomes, greater career success and increased likelihood of upward mobility (Eby, Allen, Hoffman, Baranik, Sauer, Baldwin, & Evans, 2013).

As reported by Leck and Orser (2013), mentoring enables women to overcome career obstacles, gain information and insight, seize power, understand organizational politics, obtain feedback and gain access to resources. Dworkin, Mauer, and Schipani (2012) further supported the positive effects of women's mentorship by stating that when

an organization has a strong mentoring program for women, it increases the likelihood of women rising to senior management level career roles. Although Leck and Orser (2013) and Dworkin et al. (2012) reported positive outcomes when women are involved in mentoring relationships, Germain, Herzog, and Hamilton (2012) asserted that in some professional male-dominated workplaces women experience a lack of female mentors, role models, and networks, which can result in a sense of isolation and low self-efficacy and create professional barriers. However, Skaggs, Stainback, and Duncan (2012) concluded that if more women were represented in executive and board level roles within organizations, the female managerial representation, in turn, would increase mentorship, access to better social networks, and reduce, if not eliminate, negative gender stereotypes.

The mentoring of women, in general, has been shown to increase a woman's marketability and increases the likelihood of women acquiring senior level leadership positions (Dworkin et al, 2012). Looking at the education realm, according to Hirshfield and Joseph, women who are part of the double jeopardy rule, female and Black, face issues that White women do not experience, such as pressure to be symbolic role models for female and minority students. Pittman (2012) corroborated Hirshfield and Joseph by noting that research states that African American women in predominantly White organizations demonstrate negative mental and physical consequences of interpersonal racial oppression, which is experienced due to a lack of networking and mentorship opportunities within the workplace.

Mentoring AAW women has its positive effects. For example, Jones, Wilder, and Osborne-Lampkin (2013) stated that mentoring Black women, especially in

predominantly White organizations, mitigates the challenges that Black female professionals experience. However, it is important to note that Jones et al. also asserted that the literature suggests that Black women experience invisibility, social exclusion, and poor mentoring, which results in too few Black role models being present within organizations that can effectively provide support and mentoring networks that aid in organizational leadership success. As asserted by Grant (2012), several researchers offer mentoring as an effective strategy to organizational leadership success; however, there is no underlying conceptual framework to determine effective mentoring outcomes, especially for African American women who work in predominantly White institutions. Essentially, it is difficult to determine which mentoring strategies effectively contribute to the success of African American women in the workplace where mentoring programs are available (Grant, 2012). According to Cook (2012), women of color seek out mentors and sponsors, build networks and consciously build their knowledge, which, in turn, makes it possible for them to reach out to other women of color and help them reach organizational leadership success.

Summary and Conclusions

As the literature review was being conducted, major themes from the literature were identified. For example, the under representation of Black women in executive level positions is prevalent in most organizations. Although organizational diversification is needed, many organizations continue the tradition of promoting the prototype: male, Black or White, and White women. The literature also provided insight into the limited focus of AAW, specifically, and instead put all women of color into one category, thus

clouding the specific experiences of AAW. Essentially, the major theme was the lack of research surrounding the organizational leadership experiences related specifically to AAW. Most of the research highlighted the lack of literature and focus on Black women and how their race and sex hinder their rise to corporate leadership.

In the discipline related to Black women and the intersectionality of race and gender within organizations, it is known that Black women are devalued in the workplace, which is demonstrated through a lack of leadership career advancement. It is also known that the term "women of color" if often used when referring to Asian women, Black women, Latina women, and Native American women, which reduces the focus on one particular group of women of color. It is known that Black women are deemed as not being the typical prototype when individuals are being considered for leadership positions. The typical characteristics of a leader, set forth by society, are a man or a White woman. In addition, the research highlighted that finding a suitable mentor is a difficult task for Black women. Furthermore, it is known that Black women continue to suffer from "double jeopardy" and are not given leadership opportunities because they are Black and female. The "double jeopardy" plagues their organizational existence and creates barriers that lead to lack of promotion into executive positions within organizations.

It is necessary to take stock of what the literature states versus what the literature does not state so as to identify the gaps in research with the goal of filling the gaps. What is unknown is how AAW describe their career trajectory into leadership positions within an organizational context. There is a lack of identification regarding what AAW perceive

as professional strategies that have allowed them to transform institutional barriers into opportunities for advancement to leadership positions. It is unknown how AAW leaders perceive their intersectional identity and how it has contributed to their unique leadership experiences within an organizational context. Additionally, it is unknown how AAW perceive their role as mentors for the next generation of aspiring AAW leaders.

This research study may add to the current literature and could possibly further the research attempts to address the gaps of what is currently unknown due to researchers not focusing specifically on AAW and their corporate organizational experiences. The current research strives to answer how AAW describe their career trajectory into leadership positions by exploring their unique experiences ad understanding the obstacles they faced as they climbed the corporate ladder. The current research will also address the literature gap regarding professional strategies that have aided in AAW successfully obtaining leadership positions by overcoming barriers and transforming how an organization perceives them as potentially successful leaders. The research will provide insight into the various specific strategies that AAW use to overcome objections to them being leaders. The gap in research surrounding AAW and how they perceive their intersectional identity will be addressed due to the current study's focus on intersectional identity and the exploration of the leader's experiences within an organizational context. Finally, the current research will address that gap of AAW mentoring by investigating how AAW leaders perceive their role as mentors and contributing to the success of future AAW leaders. The next chapter will discuss the research design for the study, which will

include an in depth look at the research methodology, the participant demographics, the

data collection process, and the ethical procedures that will be undertaken.

Chapter 3: Research Method

Introduction

In this chapter I discuss the qualitative research methodology for the study. Qualitative research seeks to explore an issue and to empower individuals to share their stories and experiences, which allows their voices to be heard (Creswell, 2013). Essentially, qualitative research focuses on the experiences and perceptions that have shaped the complexity of a human situation. The methodology is thematic and draws conclusions based on identified themes that arise from data collection and analysis. Qualitative research begins with the identification of a pattern or problem and is an exploratory approach that brings about conclusions. In this chapter, I review the research methodology that was used to assess the unique experiences of AAW who hold executive leadership positions within organizations. I also discuss issues surrounding trustworthiness, as well as the ethical procedures that will be implemented. The methodology section provides an in-depth explanation of how the participants were selected, the procedures that were used to identify, contact, and recruit participants, as well as the instrumentation, data collection procedures and how data was analyzed.

The purpose of this qualitative, multiple case study was to address the gap in current literature surrounding how the intersectional identity of AAW influences their leadership development experiences within organizations. AAW continue to be marginalized in the workplace due to their dual identity of being Black and female. AAW are not afforded the same leadership positions as their White counterparts and continue to fall behind the promotion curve to executive leadership at an alarming rate.

According to Byrd (2009), power and influence make it possible for AAW to attain positions of authority, but unfortunately, power and influence have been used as a means to restrict leadership opportunities for AAW.

Research Design and Rationale

There were four research questions that are guiding this study. The research questions were as follows:

RQ1: How do AAW describe their career trajectory into a leadership position within an organizational context?

RQ2: What do AAW perceive as professional strategies that have allowed them to transform institutional barriers into opportunities for advancement into leadership positions within an organizational context?

RQ3: How do AAW leaders perceive their intersectional identity as contributing to their unique leadership experiences within the organizational context?

RQ4: How do AAW leaders perceive their role as mentors for the next generation of aspiring AAW leaders?

In this research study I used qualitative interviews. Specifically, I used face-to-face interviews to gather data. As the face-to-face interviewer, I asked specific questions that were related to the four research questions that guided this study of the participants. The questions that I asked were open-ended and resulted in the participants sharing their perspectives, experiences, and opinions. Essentially, the participants shared their personal stories that were related to their rise to leadership.

The chosen research methodology, specifically, was a qualitative multiple case study. A multiple case study was the chosen research methodology because it afforded the opportunity to draw data from different cases that have similar characteristics. Studying multiple cases made it possible to illustrate the different perspectives of an issue. The rationale behind choosing the multiple case study research methodology was due to its relationship to the conceptual framework of the CRT as it pertains to the concept of the intersectionality of race and gender. CRT has been previously used as a conceptual foundation due to its implications and illustrations of the social injustice that minorities face. CRT's major premise is that society is fundamentally racially stratified and unequal, where power processes systematically disenfranchised racially oppressed people (Hylton, 2012). Considering my research study sought to explore and understand the various experiences of AAW leaders within organizations and the foundational conceptual framework, the CRT, seeks to identify and bring to light the perceived oppression that AAW leaders continue to experience in the workplace, a qualitative multiple case study was the best fit for answering the research questions.

Role of the Researcher

My role in the research study was to identify and interview 12 AAW who held an executive level position within U.S. organizations that spanned various industries. My goal was to explore and document their experiences and perceptions of being an AAW leader in their current and previous organizations. I also aspired to understand the barriers they encountered, the role that mentorship played in their success, the strategies that they used to overcome drawbacks and obstacles and the advice they had for aspiring AAW

leaders. The interviews that were conducted with AAW leaders sought to gain answers to the aforementioned research questions and add critical information and data to the current body of research literature. The discoveries I made may make an impact on how organizations view AAW and may bring about a better awareness of the experiences that current and former AAW leaders have encountered during their rise to power. I hoped that this research study would bring about positive social change as well as organizational change. The change will be reflected in the rising number of AAW leaders to senior level positions in U.S. organizations and across various industries.

As a qualitative researcher, it was my responsibility to collect and analyze the data acquired from the face-to-face interviews that I conducted. Essentially, I was the key data collection instrument as I conducted the interviews, took notes while the interviews were in session, and audio recorded them. In addition, I was responsible for the transcription of the interviews, as well as ensuring the member-checking component was fulfilled for accuracy and agreement. Lastly, as the researcher, I was responsible for coding and analyzing the results of the interviews and then identified critical themes based upon data that had been organized and the dissemination of the research study results to the participants and the community.

As the researcher, I was fully aware of my direct experience and ability to completely relate to the experiences and encounters that my participants shared with me. I am an AAW leader in an organization. I hold an executive level position within my organization, and I have had to overcome challenges and develop strategies for myself to ensure my success. I act as a mentor to young Black professional women who aspire to

be senior leaders in their current organizations, and I provide them with strategies that are geared towards overcoming obstacles and putting themselves in positions to be recognized as a leader.

I managed potential biases throughout the research study process. In order to remain unbiased, I strictly adhered to the interview questions, thus asking each participant the same core questions and in the same order while doing my best to manage follow up questions without willingly inserting my personal thoughts, opinions, or beliefs. Upon the conclusion of each interview, I took time to reflect on my actions during the interview as a personal check. This helped to ensure that any biased behaviors that I demonstrated in the previous interview would not be demonstrated in future interviews. I managed relationships by ensuring that I was professional at all times. Furthermore, I was punctual to scheduled interviews. I delivered and reviewed the completed transcripts with the participant within the promised allotted timeframe of 14 calendar days. I was mindful of the timeframes for the interviews, which lasted between 60 and 90 minutes. By taking these steps, I ensured the protection of my relationship with the participants and the professional relationships that they represented within their respective organizations.

Methodology

Participant Selection

The target population for this research study was AAW leaders in U.S. organizations. The sampling units were AAW who hold executive level positions in an organization located within the Washington, D.C. metropolitan region. The definition of

executive level leadership for this research study began at the director level and escalated up to senior director, vice president, senior vice president, president, chief financial officer, chief operations officer, and CEO.

A nonprobability sampling approach was best for this research study. Specifically, purposive sampling was the most effective sampling strategy for this research study. Frankfort-Nachmias and Nachmias (2008) suggested that when researchers use purposive sampling, it is used as an attempt to select sampling units that represent specific charateristics of the population in question. Purposive sampling allowed for selecting a particular subset of people to study, which was essential for this research study. This sampling strategy ensured that the chosen participants met very specific criteria and met the needs for answering the research questions. Therefore, this sampling strategy made it possible to exclude potential participants who did not meet all of the required criteria, which could have resulted in erroneous data being collected. The research questions led me to use a purposive sampling approach in the study because the strategy focused on a specific group of people who met specific criteria relevant to answering the research questions. The group was considered homogeneous, as all participants shared similar characteristics. Using a homogeneous group increased the likelihood of the participants choosing to be active in the research study due to the participants being able to identify with the objectives and goals of the research. Baxter and Jack (2008) asserted that the desired outcome is to replicate findings across the cases so that the researcher is able to predict similar results across the cases.

Participants were selected based on specific criteria. The criteria that was required in order to participate included the women identifying as being African American, identifying as being female, and currently holding an executive level position in a U.S. organization in the Washington, D.C. metropolitan region. Each participant was affiliated with a different organization so as to ascertain relevant information from different institutional experiences and to increase external validity. I used 12 participants for the study. For this case study, 12 participants sufficed, as it allowed for a generous amount of data to be collected in order to identify critical themes. In addition, having 12 participants ensured that if a participant chose to remove herself from the study, then there would still be an ample number of participants available from whom to draw a sufficient amount of data.

Participants were identified through purposive sampling, specifically of a homogeneous nature. To recruit participants who met the required criteria for participation, I first began with snowball sampling, which began with recommendations from one personal relationship with a previous direct supervisor under whom I worked. It is important to note that my previous direct supervisor was not a participant in this research study but aided in providing potential contacts for particiaption. In addition, particiants were recruited through recommendations from my network of professional Black women who knew of AAW leaders who would potentially be interested in participating. To help obtain a sufficient number of participants, snowball sampling was used to identify participants who met the required criteria, which was obatined through my LinkedIn network of professionals as well as the direct supervisor contact who was

able to supply the names of potential participants. Snowball sampling opened my sample size due to one or more participants providing me with referrals to other possible particiapnts. The snowball sampling helped to ensure that I interviewed a sufficient number of women so as to truly capture trends and themes. Through personal and professional recommendations, I acquired contact information. Initial contact was made through the use of organizational e-mails that could be found on the organization's website. Upon receiving confirmation of the e-mail being received and permission to contact privately, I then contacted the participant via telephone. During the telephone conversation, the participant was informed of the nature of the study.

Instrumentation

Data was collected from the 12 participants who chose to be active in the research study. The data collection process consisted of face-to-face personal interviews. The interview protocol consisted of recording the answers of the participants using an audio recording device. Specifically, a Livescribe 3 Smart Pen was used to not only record the audio aspect of the interview, but it was also used to take handwritten notes, which were recorded on an Apple iPad. Livescribe (Livescribe, 2014) is an electronic note-taking device that records audio and transcribes notes taken during interviews. Creswell (2014) suggested that researchers record interview information with the use of handwritten notes, audio recording, or video recording. In addition, Dragon Naturally Speaking 13 software was used to dictate and accurately record the interviews in their entirety. The use of this software made it possible for the entire interview to be transcribed for review by the participants for accuracy and agreement of questions and responses.

The data collection instrument that was used was a set of semi-structured interview questions that answered the four research questions. To ensure that all issues and topics that needed to be explored were accounted for, an interview guide was used as a checklist. Patton (2002) asserted that an interview guide ensures that each participant is presented with the same basic method of inquiry throughout the interviews. The semi-structured interview instrument was modeled after (Cain, 2015). Cain (2015) created interview questions that were used to collect data from AAW in organizational settings for research purposes. The semi-structured interview questions contained additions to further relate to the research questions and contained modifications. Content validity was established by conducting peer reviews of the interview questions.

Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection

Kena Renee Mayberry, who was the researcher of this study, collected the data. The data collection events were two-fold. The first data collection event was the initial interview. At that time, the participants were asked a series of semi-structured questions with the goal of answering the research questions and obtaining data related to their unique executive leadership experiences as AAW. The second data collection event was the post-interview. At that time, the participants reviewed the transcript of their interview with the researcher. The goal of the second data collection event was to ensure the accuracy of the interview transcripts based on the interview questions and the responses of the interviewee. The initial data collection event, the interview, had duration of approximately 60-90 minutes. The second data collection event occurred between one

and two weeks following the initial data collection event. Within that one to two-week timeframe, the participant and I reviewed the transcribed data for accuracy together.

In the event that recruitment resulted in too few participants, then the participant pool was increased by soliciting recommendations from the participants who provided data for the research study so as to increase the likelihood of a stronger participant pool. The participants knew of other women who met the specified criteria and were willing to participate. Participants exited the study with a debriefing. The debriefing began with thanking the participant and consisted of a reminder as to why the study was being conducted. Next steps, regarding transcription and the submission of the interview transcript to the participant, were discussed. Furthermore, a timeframe as to when the participant and I would review the accuracy of the transcript was discussed. In addition, a written debrief of what was discussed in the verbal debriefing was provided to the participant for their records.

Data Analysis Plan

The semi-structured interview questions were as follows:

1. How would you describe your career trajectory?

 1a. What specific personal characteristics would you say contributed most to your career development?

2. Overall, why do you think being a woman and African American affects the unique experiences of AAW who hold senior level positions?

3. Specifically, how has your race and gender affected your career development and trajectory?

3a. What specific examples do you have of how your race and gender, combined, has created barriers for your career advancement?

3b. How has being both African American and female contributed to your unique leadership experiences over the years?

4. How did you prepare yourself for a senior level position?

4a. What professional strategies did you implement to ensure that barriers presented to you did not result in not advancing into a leadership position?

5. How did developing a relationship with a mentor influence your ascension to a senior level position?

5a. What role do you play in mentoring AAW who aspire to attain a senior level leadership position within an organization?

5b. Why do you think it is difficult for aspiring AAW to find mentors within an organization who takes a keen interest in their career development and trajectory?

6. What obstacles have you had to overcome in order to excel into a senior leadership?

6a. How have those obstacles shaped you as a leader?

7. Are you aware that only 3 percent of Fortune 500 organizations have African American Women in senior level positions?

7a. Why do you think the percentage of African American women in senior level position stands at only 3 percent within Fortune 500 organizations?

8. What advice would you give another AAW aspiring to a senior level position?

9. Identify three factors in leadership that African American women can use to assist her in ascending to the next level of her career.

    9a. Why do you choose these specific three factors?

10. How did the lack of successful African American women effect the advancement of your career?

The interview questions that related directly to research question number one included, interview questions 1, 1a, 3, 7, 7a, 9, and 9a. Interview questions 4, 4a, 6, 6a, 9, 9a, and 10 related to research question number two. Research question number three was answered through interview numbers 2, 3a, and 3a. Research question number four was answered through interview questions 5, 5a, 5b, and 8.

    Coding required that all data be organized into chunks so as to identify themes and capture the essence of the interview transcripts. Organizing the coded data into concise chunks during analysis aided in theme identification. As the coding began, categories were created, which housed the various themes that were identified. Upon the completion of the data being collected and analyzed, themes were identified, within the categories, based on the reported outcomes of the coding process. Data was coded using Microsoft Excel. The Microsoft Excel software assisted the researcher in analyzing the data that was collected from the 12 participants. Microsoft Excel was used by sectioning off each research question in a spreadsheet. In each research question section, the semi-structured interview questions that coincided with each research question were categorized. Upon adding the interview questions that related to the research questions,

the researcher then added the comments made by each AAW participant for the specified semi-structured interview question. After all of the comments were added to each of the interview questions under the research question category, the researcher then analyzed the comments that were made by the interviewees. The researcher looked for commonalities as well as discrepancies. A thorough analysis of the comments aided in the identification of critical themes. Each theme was then categorized under each research question, which will be further explained in Chapter 5.

Issues of Trustworthiness

A study must be seen as trustworthy in order to categorize it as being valid and credible. Credibility was established due to the strength of the internal validity of the research study. A group of three AAW who currently hold a senior leadership level position within an organization was used to provide a peer review. The group was derived from my network of professional women who are employed within the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area. Upon the conclusion of the group review, a short survey was provided, which allowed for peer review feedback.

External validity was strengthened due to the participant pool being representative of the population that was being studied within this research study. The participants were African American, female, and held a senior level position within a U.S. organization, all of which coincided with the population that was being studied. In addition, triangulation strengthened the external validity of this research study. Triangulation was accomplished through member-checking of the transcripts and the 12 different data sources (participants) that were used in the study.

Reflexivity had to be maintained due to me, the researcher, being able to relate directly to the research study participants and the experiences that they have encountered as was mentioned previously. I had to be aware, at all times, that my close relationship with the nuances of the research study had the ability to shape the direction in which the research study could go. This required me to reflect on how I could possibly influence the research study prior to my interviews as well as complete a post-interview reflection to assess how my role in the research study and how my experiences and relatedness to the interviewees could have impacted the interpretations, analysis, and themes of the research study. Creswell (2014) reminded us that in qualitative research, reflexivity involves how the researcher's personal background, culture, and experiences can possibly guide the direction of the study, in terms of interpretation and discovered themes.

Ethical Procedures

To ensure that all human participants were handled in an ethical manner, the American Psychological Association (APA) Code of Ethic's principles were upheld so as to reduce the likelihood of doing harm. As noted by Fisher (2013), all humans participating in a research study will be treated humanely with the goal of improving or enhancing the lives of the individuals. In addition to treating all participants humanely, I acted in a professional manner at all times and promoted dependability and reliability of the sensitive information of the participants. Essentially, all human participants were treated with respect and I upheld the highest professional standards. Upon completion of the study, all participants, upon request, received a summary of the results of the research study, which were also made available to the public.

The data that was collected for this research study remains confidential. So as to protect the privacy and the rights of each participant, all information for each of the participants will remain confidential and has been stored in a password protected and locked computer file. All information regarding the participants will be held for one year and then destroyed. In addition, I have ensured confidentiality agreements have been adhered to and I have maintained all pertinent data in a password protected and locked computer file. Participants had the right to withdraw from the research study at any time during the research study process and each participant was informed of the voluntary nature of the study. In the event that participants chose to drop out of the study, replacement participants were identified and added to the data of the research study.

Summary

In this qualitative research study, I sought to explore and understand the experiences that AAW leaders have encountered during their rise to senior level positions within their previous and current organizations. In addition to wanting to understand experiences, I wanted to explore the strategies they developed in order to overcome challenges and various obstacles that were present due to them being Black and female. Furthermore, I wanted to grasp the role that mentoring played in their success as well as how they used mentoring as a way to empower aspiring AAW who want to become senior level leaders.

A purposive sampling strategy, specifically homogeneous, was used so as to ensure that the sample was a full representation of the characteristics demonstrated by the population in questions. Participants who met the sampling needs were identified and

interviewed so as to secure the data needed to answer the four research questions. Data collection methods consisted of face-to-face interviews in which the participants shared their experiences, perceptions, and strategies to becoming an AAW leader. In addition, the use of an iPad and a Livescribe 3 Smartpen, was used for taking notes as well as for recording the interview in an audio format. Collected data was transcribed using Dragon Naturally Speaking 13 software and analyzed using Microsoft Excel software, which aided in identifying the main themes of the research study and illustrated how being Black and female informs the experiences of AAW leaders within organizations. Lastly, the findings of this research study and the relationship they had to the research questions may be shared with the participants and the community. The next chapter will discuss the details of the findings of the collected data and the overall outcomes of the research.

Chapter 4: Results

Chapter 4 provides the demographics and the recruitment process of participants. It then continues with participant profiles and general observations as well as data collection and storage, followed by the data analysis process and data verification. In Chapter 4 I speak to the themes that were identified from the four research questions.

Demographics and Recruitment

This research study required a specific demographic. The target population consisted of AAW leaders who currently held a senior level leadership position in a U.S. organization. More specifically, the sampling unit was AAW who held senior leadership positions in an organization located in the Washington, D.C. metropolitan region. The Washington, D.C. metropolitan region includes Northern Virginia, Maryland, and the District of Columbia. The women must have identified as being African American. The study consisted of 12 participants.

Participants were identified through purposive sampling. The recruitment process began with the use of contacts from a previous supervisor, which resulted in a snowball sampling approach. It is necessary to note that the previous supervisor who provided contacts was not used as a participant in this research study. The snowball sampling approach allowed for more women to become interested in participating through word of mouth from those who had already been interviewed. I also identified participants from my LinkedIn network; I provided them with an overview of the study as well as a consent form to complete upon deciding to participate in the research study.

Participant Profiles

Each participant identified herself as being African American, female, and currently holding a senior level position in an organization that was located in the Washington, D.C, metropolitan area. Details of each of the 12 participants are as follows:

- Participant 1: The participant held a Ph.D. and an M.D. She was originally from the Northeast but currently resided and worked in the Washington, D.C, metropolitan area. She was the head of a major research and development organization and was instrumental in conducting various drug-related research and the release of drugs into the pharmaceutical community. The participant expressed that the organization that she worked for was predominantly White.

- Participant 2: The participant was the CEO of an executive coaching organization. She held a graduate degree. The participant was originally from the Northeast but currently resided and worked in the Washington, D.C, metropolitan area. She provided executive coaching to individuals as well as to corporations and created specifically designed signature programs for individuals and corporations. The participant expressed that the organization that she worked for was predominantly White.

- Participant 3: The participant held a B.S. and an M.S. and was currently working on her Ph.D. The participant was originally from the Northeast but currently resided and worked in the Washington, D.C, metropolitan area. She was the senior director for a well-known information and technology

company. The participant expressed that the organization that she worked for was predominantly White.

- Participant 4: The participant was a Washington, D.C, native. She had a B.S. and an M.S. She currently held a vice president of human resources position in a prominent health research organization. She had held senior level positions in the human resources field for over 20 years. The participant expressed that the organization that she worked for was predominantly White.

- Participant 5: The participant held a B.S. and was currently the vice president of operations for a security company. She was originally from the Southeast but currently resided and worked in the Washington, D.C, metropolitan area. She had held senior level positions in the security company for the last 8 years. The participant expressed that the organization that she worked for was predominantly White.

- Participant 6: The participant held a B.S. and a M.S. She was originally from the South but currently resided and worked in the Washington, D.C, metropolitan area. She had worked for the same company since graduating from college approximately 20 years ago. She had worked her way up from an entry-level position to a senior vice president position within the organization. The participant expressed that the organization that she worked for was predominantly White.

- Participant 7: The participant held a B.S. and was the chief operating officer (COO) of a training and executive coaching organization located in the

Washington, D.C, metropolitan area. She had held a vice president position in the Federal Government and was an international award-winning speaker. She was originally from the West coast, but currently resided and worked in the Washington, D.C, region. The participant expressed that the organization that she worked for was predominantly White.

- Participant 8: The participant held a B.S. and was originally from the Northeast, currently resided and worked in the Washington, D.C, metropolitan area. She was currently a senior director of operations for an organization in Maryland and was expected to become the vice president of operations in January, 2018. The participant expressed that the organization that she worked for was predominantly White.

- Participant 9: The participant held a B.S. and an M.S. She graduated cum laude for both degrees. She was a Washington, D.C, native and currently resided and worked in the Washington, D.C, metropolitan area. She was a senior director for a major healthcare organization, an organization that was ranked as one of the top healthcare organizations in the United States. The participant expressed that the organization that she worked for was predominantly White.

- Participant 10: The participant was a Washington, D.C, native who had earned her B.S. and her M.S. She was the COO of a for-profit organization located in Bethesda, MD. She had worked her way up the corporate ladder and had held positions ranging from an operations manager to the vice president of

operations for well-known, big name organizations until finally becoming a COO in her current organization. The participant expressed that the organization that she worked for was predominantly White.

- Participant 11: The participant was originally from the Northeast and held a B.S. She had worked in the nonprofit sector all of her career. She began as a special events manager but eventually rose to the level of a senior manager in a nonprofit corporation. She currently held the title of senior director of special events and oversaw all levels of managers and associates within the Special Events department in her organization. The participant expressed that the organization that she worked for was predominantly White.

- Participant 12: The participant held a B.S. and an M.S. She was from the Washington, D.C, area and currently worked for a nonprofit healthcare organization in the District of Columbia. She currently held an executive director position with her current organization. She was also on the Board of Directors for another organization and spent time educating low-income families about the importance of healthcare and how to gain access to services. The participant expressed that the organization that she worked for was predominantly White.

Data Collection and Storage

Participants were interviewed in person, over the telephone, and through the use of Skype. There were two data collection events as described in Chapter 3. The first data collection event was the initial interview. The initial interview required participants to

answer a series of semi-structured questions, which provided data related to their unique

executive leadership experiences. The second data event was the post-interview. The

post-interview allowed the participant and the researcher to review the completed

transcripts. This event occurred so as to ensure the accuracy of the transcript and to allow

the interviewee to ask questions or provide clarification for unclear statements. Ten of the

12 interviews took between 60 and 90 minutes to complete. There were two interviews

that lasted 2 hours or more. The second data collection event occurred 2 weeks after the

initial interview. All elements of the collected data were stored in password-protected

files in a password-protected computer. Each interview was recorded using a LiveScribe

3 Smart Pen and were transcribed by me. To ensure that participants could not be

identified, all identifying information was removed from the transcripts prior to the

second data collection event.

Data Analysis

Each transcript was reviewed thoroughly and the data that was collected was

organized into categories. I created an Excel spreadsheet. The spreadsheet was broken up

into the four research questions and the semi-structured interview questions that

coincided with the research questions. After the transcripts were thoroughly reviewed, I

entered specific comments made by the participants into the spreadsheet under the related

research question and interview question. Using this approach, I organized the data so

that themes could then be identified based on the specific comments from the

participants.

General Observations from the Researcher

The participants were eager to be a part of the research study. Learning about the study and the impact that the research may have on organizations, many of the women asked their friends to also be involved, which allowed me to have access to other potential participants, if necessary. The women were very open during the interview and provided detailed information about their experiences in the workplace. I found that although the women were different in their own right, there was also a strong kinship that was shared among them based on their race, gender, and the way in which they were perceived in the workplace. Each of the women felt strongly about the need for organizations to get away from the good ol' boy network and to diversify the senior level positions. Each of the women expressed that AAW are severely underrepresented in organizations at the senior level. They all agreed that, yes, you can find AAW on the management or junior associate level and below, but not in the decision-making roles, such as vice president, president, COO, or CEO.

A level of emotion was also observed during the interviews. The emotion came from thinking back to the hardships that the women endured in order to get to where they were. The negative comments that were made and the treatment that was so regular and blatantly discriminating caused a raw and still fresh negative emotion that was visible in their facial expressions during face-to-face interviews and Skype, as well as their speech with the words they chose. The emotion was also evident when talking about the future of African American professional women and how the road is so hard to pave for the rising and aspiring African American female leaders. The women spoke with emotion when

thinking about mentoring and preparing their mentees for the real world of working and the experiences that they may have in the workplace simply because they are African American and female. The emotions ran deep and even if the example that was given occurred over 10 years ago, the women spoke with such emotion that it seemed as though the event had occurred recently.

In addition, I observed anger, disbelief, and hope. The anger came from the thought that in 2017, AAW are still trying to break through the glass ceiling to achieve their goals of senior level leadership. Not much has changed over the decades and the fact that the conversation was happening caused the feeling of disbelief. The disbelief came in the form of asking why AAW were still struggling in 2017. Disbelief also arose during the conversation with realization that the percentage of AAW in leadership positions in Fortune 500 organizations stood at only 3%. The hope factor was prevalent during the conversation of mentoring. This was where the women became hopeful that their mentoring would help other young African American girls and women to realize that they were worthy, ready, and qualified for senior level positions. Hope came in the form of taking ownership over the African American girls and women whom they are mentoring and preparing them for what was to come by sharing their experiences, strategies, and solutions. However, unfortunately, the anger and disbelief often times outweighed the feeling of hope.

Identified Themes

The intent of this qualitative, multiple case study was to identify key themes that speak to the lived experiences of AAW in the workplace. The study sought to give AAW

executives a voice and opportunity to tell their stories about their rise to leadership, which included obstacles, implemented strategies, and the impact of mentoring. The findings below are sectioned by research question and the themes that were identified under that research question. Specific comments made by the participants will be presented to further strengthen the identified theme.

Research Question 1

RQ1: How do AAW describe their trajectory into a leadership position within an organizational context?

Started from the bottom. The participants described their career trajectory as starting from entry level and then having to work their way up the corporate ladder. A participant expressed how she started her career by stating, "I began as an administrative assistant. So, I literally began as the person who did all of the answering of the phones...everything. So, entry-level administrative position. I've only had one job (organization) out of college."

Work ethic coupled with assertiveness. When expressing the personal characteristics that contributed to the participant's career trajectory, the resounding theme was work ethic. One participant expressed, "Definitely a strong work ethic. I am results oriented and I strive to get results quickly." Another participant stated,

So, the characteristic that I have is that I am very assertive. As a Black woman in the workplace, you know there's always a certain expectation for Black women to be a little more assertive and a little more vocal than a White counterpart just because of the history of Black women in America.

Lack of support. Participants were asked how their race and gender, specifically, affected their career development. Participants shared how their race and gender has impacted their career trajectory and lack of support was the main theme.

I do find that there have been times when I have not been offered training that others have been offered and at times I have felt that I wasn't offered the training because I'm a Black woman. It was difficult to find people who would actually give me a chance. I do believe that prejudice and racial divide is still prevalent in the business world. Unfortunately, I have been a part of some of those types of experiences by not being offered training or being treated differently than others.

Another participant stated, "Being in science, once again, it's a field where there aren't a lot of women. The support just is not there. I've felt that even as a professional, the support is just not there."

Lack of representation. The women were asked if they knew that only three percent of Fortune 500 organizations have AAW in senior level positions. The participants were stunned to find out that the percentage was so low. "I knew the number was low but I didn't necessarily know that it was that low. I don't think that number will change." Another participant stated, "I can't say that I am aware of that. However, that number is strikingly low and disproportionate to the amount of capable African-American women available for those positions."

Good ol' boy network. Upon learning of the low representation of AAW in Fortune 500 organizations, the women were then asked why they felt as though the percentage was so low. The participants expressed,

I think the good ol' boy mentality has not gone away. I think that the IBM

standard is the White male with the gray suit and the briefcase and it doesn't look

like me. The model of executive leadership...I don't fit that.

A second participant stated,

Because this is America, honestly. I wouldn't say it would be the same in some

other country because I'm not exactly sure but I know that here in America the

White men get everything. And that's just the way it is. They talk about

affirmative action but that just really helps White women.

Participants also shared that,

We live in a country where White people still reign. Yes, we've received a few

privileges over the years but White privilege is strong and has remained strong for

centuries. A Black man is more likely to be put in a senior level leadership

position than a Black woman. Like I said, the glass ceiling is thicker for Black

women.

Be consistent. Be assertive. Qualify yourself. Each participant was asked to

identity three factors in leadership that AAW can use to help her move up the corporate

ladder into a senior level leadership role. "Qualifying yourself is probably the number one

factor. Make sure that you're always acquiring knowledge and skills to go to the next

level. I think that consistency is so important. Be assertive in your aspirations."

These factors worked well for me. As a follow-up to the aforementioned three

factors, the women were asked to reflect on why they chose those three factors. The

identified theme was that the three factors worked well for the women. "I've found those

to be most helpful for me and the most helpful for others. They worked for me and were given to me by my mentors."

Research Question 2

RQ2: What do AAW perceive as professional strategies that have allowed them to transform institutional barriers into opportunities for advancement into leadership positions within an organizational context?

Mentors and examples. The participants shared how they prepared themselves for leadership positions. The women stated,

I had great mentors. In fact, there are two great mentors that I have had over the years and they're still around if I need them. I had a mentor. I actually had two different mentors and these were people who were in the position that I wanted to be in. One thing that was crucial was I surrounded myself with people who were where I wanted to be.

Professional development. When asked what professional strategies were implemented by the participants to ensure that barriers that were presented to them did not result in not advancing, a common theme emerged. The women expressed the professional development opportunities that they took advantage of.

In terms of professional strategies, I think about continued education, which means understanding the industry that I am in and staying relevant. I think that's probably been the strategy that I use the most, which is to stay one step ahead of the game. Always knowing what's going on and following the trends and the projections of the industry that you're in.

Another participant stated, "I took advantage of professional development opportunities. I also offered to learn how to train employees in various areas so that I had that (training experience) under my belt."

Racial and gender discrimination. Participants were asked about the obstacles that they had to overcome in order to excel into a leadership position. One participant expressed,

> I have had to endure being told that I am not good enough. This came from my White counterparts as well as senior leadership individuals. I have been told that my place is in the lower levels of the organization because "my people" do their best work at the lower level.

Another participant shared, "I would say racial discrimination. I would say gender bias. I would say scrutiny over my work on projects, which resulted in me being held to a higher degree and standard than my colleagues. Those are the three major ones.

Resilience. The women were then asked how the obstacles they faced shaped them as leaders. One participant stated, "It made me work harder as a leader." Another participant shared,

> I think it has made me more resilient as a worker because I've had to deal with so much. You go through so much and it definitely tests your patience. It tests your faith. It tests your restraint and I think just because you go through so much that you build a certain degree of inner strength.

A third participant stated, "It's made me more cautious and it's hardened me a bit."

Be consistent. Be assertive. Qualify yourself. As with the first research question, the three factors and why they were chosen was also relevant to the second research question. "Qualifying yourself is probably the number one factor. Make sure that you're always acquiring knowledge and skills to go to the next level. I think that consistency is so important. Be assertive in your aspirations."

These factors worked well for me. "I've found those to be most helpful for me and the most helpful for others. They worked for me and were given to me by my mentors."

Slow progress. The participants were asked how the lack of successful AAW effected the advancement of their careers. The resounding theme was slow progress.

> It's definitely an uphill fight; an uphill battle and the fight doesn't come easy.
> Sometimes it's frustrating because it shouldn't be rocket science. The lack of
> Black women has made it so that we have to continue the fight even in 2017!

Another participant expressed,

> It has taken longer to climb the ladder. If they're used to hiring a certain type of
> person and you come in and you don't fit the prototype, then you don't fit the
> mold. So, it takes longer to achieve the leadership goals that you have for
> yourself.

A third participant stated, "I've had to work 10 times harder for a much longer period of time. It's like a marathon that never ends but you have to keep on going and hope that you'll make it to the finish line."

Research Question 3

RQ3: How do AAW leaders perceive their intersectional identity as contributing

to their unique leadership experiences within the organizational context?

We are not at the table in the boardroom. One participant said,

Many times, women, specifically women of color, don't represent the majority of

the individuals in the meeting room. In the meeting room and in settings where

decisions and major strategies are developed for an organization, often times do

not represent the majority, who are women or women of color. So, I think the fact

that you don't have a voice in the common group, that's one challenge. You're

often isolated or the only one with that disrupting voice and it takes a lot of

strength in order to speak that and to present that impression, perspective or point

of view.

Another participant stated, "We often have to prove ourselves much more than those who

look like the rest of the people in the organization [White people]."

Blatant racism and sexism. The participants were asked to provide examples of

how their race and gender has created barriers for their career advancement. Some of the

responses included, "I have been a target. I have experienced blatant racial assault based

on me being a highly educated Black woman with stellar professionalism who is

passionate about my chosen profession." Another participant stated,

First, I always performed at an outstanding level and always received great

reviews but it always came with an asterisk next to it and innuendos that said that

I was not supposed to be able to perform at that level because of my race and sex

as well as my age. Then, I got the "you're not supposed to be at that level" remark.

One lady actually said, "your people" and followed up with "you've gotten really

far and when you think about your people . . . you should be really proud.

Uplifting other Black women. Many of the women have begun a mission to seek

out other Black women who show leadership potential. The women have taken other

Black women under their wings to help them prepare for senior level leadership

positions. Also, the women expressed helping other Black women so that there are no

negative words or feelings about their ability to be leaders.

I am a Black woman who wants to uplift other Black women. I tend to look for

Black women who need a break and I take them under my wing. I want to show

them that Black women can do it and I find myself talking to them and letting

them know that I am a leader and I am a woman and I am Black. I ensure that the

Black women in the organization know who I am and that I tell them my story.

A second participant said,

I find that I am a huge proponent of diversity but within diversity I am a huge

proponent of being equipped and well qualified for the position, specifically

Black women. If you are well prepared and you are qualified to do the things that

you're supposed to do in that position, then there are no grounds for anyone to

make statements regarding anything relating to your gender, your sexuality or

whatever. There is nothing that can be said if you are of high character and you

are able to perform whatever the position requires of you. This is what I instill in

the Black women that I mentor in the workplace.

Research Question 4

RQ4: How do AAW leaders perceive their role as mentors for the next generation of aspiring AAW leaders?

Mentors are necessary. During the interview, participants were asked about how having a relationship with a mentor influenced their rise to a senior level leadership position. Comments included,

Having at least one mentor is necessary. You need a support system, specifically someone who can share their experiences with you so that you can make informed decisions. Mentors are meant to prepare you for the craziness that you will face when attempting to break the glass ceiling.

Another woman said, "It's nice to have someone there to bounce ideas off of. A mentor can help you assess a situation and tell you the right path to take that will work to your advantage."

My mentor was a CEO. He was able to give me a good idea of what he was doing, in terms of running an entire company. He modeled what good leadership or great leadership was about in terms of being empathetic to people and being a resonant leader. He modeled understanding what people needed and being able to provide that. He taught me exactly what I needed to know to be a successful senior leader who is impactful.

Giving back to young Black girls and women. During the interviews, the participants expressed their role in mentoring Black girls and women in the community and the workplace.

I currently mentor two inner city girls whose parents are drug addicts. I specifically chose to work with this population due to my experiences with having parents who are drug addicts. I want to show them that where you come from does not have to define your future. Look at me! I was told that I would never be anything more than the daughter of two drug addicts.

The women also stated,

I do try to make myself available to anyone that requests my help. I feel that I have an easy-going personality. A personality that makes me very approachable and I try to use that in order to connect with those that I see as having potential and a desire to move forward. I am member of a sorority and my sorority has a mentoring program with local schools and I make myself available to mentor students. By being a mentor, I'm allowing the students to ask questions and I'm making myself a resource to them. I am able to help and provide information to young people through this mentoring program.

A third participant expressed,

In my previous career, I was very active in an IT mentorship program. I worked in IT and I was also head of human resources and communications. So, I was always surrounded by junior-level women who wanted to move up. Sometimes they would come to me to be mentored and sometimes I would seek them out. I would let them know that I want to mentor them and I would express to them what I can offer them and I never received a "no" response to my mentoring them.

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There are too few of us. To follow-up with the mentoring interview questions, the women were asked why the feel is difficult for aspiring AAW to find mentors within their organizations. The comments included, "There are not enough African American women in power. When they get into their spaces of leadership, they begin to forget about other Black women." Another participant shared, "It's because there are few [Black women] and far in between a lot of times in corporate America." A third participant stated,

> In my opinion, I don't feel that there are a lot of African American women in these higher-level titles. When you go to certain organizations and you look at their senior leadership team, you don't see a lot, if any, of African American women there.

Advocacy and self-worth. The participants were asked what advice they would give to another AAW aspiring to a senior leadership position. The women shared, "Always be an advocate for yourself." Another comment included, "Don't let anyone make you feel inferior simply because you're Black and female. You can do anything just as well as your White counterparts." A final statement, "Don't get discouraged by comments or sly looks. Just put in the work. Know yourself and know your strengths and just stay focused on what you want."

Summary

Chapter 4 provided information regarding the demographics and recruitment practices of the research study. It also provided pertinent information about the data collection and analysis process. Actual statements that were made by the participants

further answered the research questions and strengthened the significance of this research study, which supported the identified themes. Results of the study indicated that African American women who hold senior level leadership positions within organizations located within the Washington, D.C. area experience the same marginalization across various U.S. corporate industries. The analysis of the data revealed that AAW share very similar experiences with regard to mentorship, struggles and barriers in obtaining leadership positions in the workplace, career trajectory and overall racism and sexism. Chapter 5 will provide an interpretation of the findings, implications for social change, recommendations for future research and relevant conclusions.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions and Recommendations

The purpose of this qualitative, multiple case study was to examine the experiences of AAW who hold senior level leadership positions in organizations located in the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area. My intent for the study was to acquire knowledge about the professional experiences of AAW and to provide those women with a voice and an opportunity to share their unique leadership experiences. While examining the perceptions and experiences of the participants, I was able to draw conclusions from the analyzed data. In addition, I identified themes to answer the research questions and to strengthen the voices of the women who participated. Twenty-one themes were discussed in Chapter 4. The themes discussed in Chapter 4 represented the collective experiences of the participants. This final chapter includes the interpretation of the findings, the implications for social change that have resulted from the research study, the need and recommendations for future research, and relevant conclusions.

The findings from the interviews revealed that all 12 of the women shared similar experiences with regard to feelings of isolation and marginalization in the workplace. They have each experienced racism and sexism at work and have had to work harder than their White counterparts in order to achieve a senior leadership position. The participants could all identify with the intersectionality of race and gender and the impact that race and gender had on their career success. Although the women worked in different organizations across various industries, they all had a strong kinship when it came to the experiences of discrimination and the extra work that was required of them I order to be

seen as a potential leader and to then be offered the opportunity to be a AAW who was also a leader in an organization.

Significance of the Study

This research study is significant due to the empirical gap in understanding the perceptions of AAW in the workplace. According to Turner et al. (2011), the perceptions of AAW across industry types have not been widely studied, especially in predominantly White organizations. The women who participated in this research study all worked in a predominantly White organization and/or field. In order to fully understand the challenges that AAW face when aspiring to be promoted to senior level positions in an organization, it is imperative that research studies, such as this one, are conducted. Conducting studies of this type provides the opportunity for a better understanding of perceptions and experiences, which can yield positive organizational and social change.

Exploring the intersectionality of race and gender in organizational settings and how that intersectionality impacts the perceptions of AAW makes this study important. Stanley (2009) suggested that there are a lack of tools and knowledge available to address the increasing issues of growing a workforce that includes women and minorities. Essentially, organizations do not have the proper systems or tools in place to make positive strides towards addressing the gender and race gap in senior level positions. Scholars have identified that there is a theoretical gap in the leadership literature with regard to the intersectionality of minorities, particularly AAW (Cook & Glass, 2013; Eagly & Chin, 2010). This research study has the potential to add to the body of leadership research literature and possibly aid in organizational change. This research

study is important because it not only gave a voice to the women who participated, but it allowed me to gain critical and necessary insight into the work lives of AAW who have reached senior level positions in an organization. Furthermore, this research study may provide essential information regarding the perceptions of Black women to those who make hiring decisions or are interested in the closing the race and gender gap in an organization.

Interpretation of Findings

In this study, I was able to focus on and address the marginalization of AAW in senior leadership positions. The experiences were connected through the four research questions and the semi structured interview questions that were relevant to each research question. An explanation of each research question's theme and its interpretation is as follows:

RQ1: How do AAW describe their trajectory into a leadership position within an organizational context?

The identified themes associated with the first research question include:

1. Started from the bottom.

2. Work ethic coupled with assertiveness.

3. Lack of support.

4. Lack of representation.

5. Good ol' boy network.

6. Be consistent. Be assertive. Qualify yourself.

7. These factors worked well for me.

In the first research question, I inquired about the career trajectory of the participants. For each research question, there were interview questions that coincided with the research question. The goal of the interview questions was to answer the research question with specific comments from the participant women. Upon analyzing the data, I found that the women collectively reported that they began their careers at or close to an entry-level starting point but were able to rise up the corporate ladder by having a strong work ethic and being assertive. In addition, I found that not only was there a lack of support as they rose up the ladder, but there has also been an extremely low representation of AAW in leadership positions in Fortune 500 companies. The intersectionality of race and gender plays an important role in the lack of leadership development and opportunities afforded to AAW (Johnson & Thomas, 2012). The findings indicated that one reason for the lack of representation is because corporate America is a good ol' boy network. The women also shared the same sentiments of being consistent, assertive, and qualifying themselves for the position that they wanted. The strength of those three factors came from each of the women being given that advice by their mentors and then passing on the information to other women.

RQ2: What do AAW perceive as professional strategies that have allowed them to transform institutional barriers into opportunities for advancement into leadership positions within an organizational context?

The identified themes associated with the second research question include:

1. Mentors and examples.

2. Professional development.

3. Racial and gender discrimination.

4. Resilience.

5. Be consistent. Be assertive. Qualify yourself.

6. These factors worked well for me.

7. Slow progress.

The second research question was about the professional strategies and the transformation of barriers into opportunities. I was examining the elements of strategies used and how the women were able to overcome barriers. The results showed that the women had the shared experiences of having great mentors to help them prepare for senior level positions. Davis (2016) explained that AAW tend to emphasize the importance and necessity of having mentors and being mentors to other AAW so as to add value, guidance, and confidence to aspiring AA female leaders. In addition, the women shared the experience and importance of taking advantage of professional development opportunities that were provided or funded by their organizations when they were made available to them. In inquiring about obstacles, the women shared that racial and gender discrimination was endured and experienced both covertly and blatantly. Abrams et al. (2014) expressed that the existence of AAW leaders was a reflection of historical and economic hardship as well as the ability to endure mental and physical oppression that can be experienced in an organizational setting. The interviewed women endured these oppressions but continued to press forward and achieve their goals in spite of being discriminated against. Due to the racial and gender discrimination, the women had to learn to be resilient and to use various tactics that are different from the tactics of

their White counterparts. These tactics are different due to AAW having to overcome

challenges, barriers, discrimination, and other ostracizing factors (Mullings, 2014).

Through their experiences, resilience had become a necessity. The second research

question also included the three factors that could help an AAW move up the corporate

ladder, which include being consistent, being assertive, and qualifying yourself. The

women chose these factors because the factors worked well for them and aided in their

success. The women also shared the same experience of promotion progress being slow

due to a lack of representation at the top. The women each shared that promotions had

taken much longer for them than for their White counterparts.

RQ3: How do AAW leaders perceive their intersectional identity as contributing

to their unique leadership experiences within the organizational context?

The identified themes associated with the third research question include:

1. We are not at the table in the boardroom.

2. Blatant racism and sexism.

3. Uplifting other Black women.

The third research question took on intersectional identity and how it contributed

to the unique leadership experiences of the women. In most cases, intersectionality

includes specific focuses on marginalized people, interaction and on multiple institutions

that work together in their collective creation of inequality (Choo & Feree, 2010; Arifeen

& Gatrell, 2013). The interviewees experienced the fact that Black women are not in the

boardroom and, therefore, are not part of the decision-making processes. Researchers

Stoker et al. (2012) found that the number of organizations with only men on the board of

directors has increased. In addition, each of the women experienced blatant racism and sexism at some point throughout their careers, an experience that is not shared with their White counterparts. Festekjian et al. (2014) found that racial minorities continue to be perceived as being less suitable and less ideal for managerial positions in the United States. Although the women have experienced such marginalization, they still recognize the importance of uplifting other Black women and make it their duty to seek out potential female Black leaders within their organizations.

RQ4: How do AAW leaders perceive their role as mentors for the next generation of aspiring AAW leaders?

1. Mentors are necessary.

2. Giving back to young Black girls and women.

3. There are too few of us.

4. Advocacy and self-worth.

The fourth research question focused on mentorship and the role that mentors played in the participant's lives and the roles they play as mentors in the lives of others. Each of the women agreed that mentors are necessary for support. Mentors have the ability to guide you and help to prepare you for the next level by sharing their experiences and strategies. In terms of influencing aspiring AAW leaders of the future, AAW leaders have historically used mentorship as a way to prepare, influence, and encourage other AAW who have leadership potential (Mullings, 2014). The participants find it to be very important to give back to their communities and the Black women at work. Clayton et al. (2013) agreed with Dziczkowski (2013) by expressing that

mentoring can benefit both sides, the mentor and the mentee, due to the sharing and exchange of information, reflection, and the participation in a mutual professional development relationship. They mentor young African American girls from lower socioeconomic environments and women who show leadership potential in the workplace. The goal of their mentorship is to uplift young girls and to prepare Black women in the workforce. The women had the shared experience of feeling that there are too few AAW in leadership positions who can mentor other AA women. There are simply too few Black women at the top of the corporate ladder. In addition, the women agreed that advocating for yourself and knowing your self-worth is critical.

To further interpret the findings, I conducted an analysis of whether or not there were differences in the approaches that the women took when vying for various levels of senior management. Upon completing the analysis, I found that it did not matter what level the women were attempting to be promoted to. The lens through which they perceived their situation did not change based on the level at which they attempted to achieve professionally. Essentially, the women all had very similar, if not the same, experiences and felt the same level of discrimination and marginalization regardless of the level of senior management that they aspired to obtain. Holder et al. (2015) suggested that as Black women rise up the corporate ladder, they encounter serious challenges that limit access to the C suite positions and their overall career advancement. All 12 of the women who were interviewed spoke about their challenges, all of which were consistent across the interviewee's experiences. Therefore, the lens through which the participants

approached their difficulties in acquiring senior level positions did not differ based on the level that they attempted to achieve.

Perspectives in Relation to the Literature

According to Hagelsk and Hughes (2014), discrimination ranging from overt in the way of promotions and pay distributions to interpersonal prejudices that are expressed in comments, slurs and social interaction patterns continue to plague AAW. The women who were interviewed further supported these findings as they each mentioned not being paid the same as their White counterparts and they all mentioned being overlooked for promotions that they were qualified for and deserved. Davis and Maldonado (2015) found that the experiences of AAW tend to be plagued with the "double barrier" which leads to being marginalized multiple times do to the dual identity of being female and African American. The interviewees expressed how the "double barrier" has worked against them and continues to work against them and other AAW who aspire to hold senior level positions. A few of the interviewees mentioned how they are unable to change their sex or the fact that they are African American. It was not a choice and it is not something that can be modified. They expressed their disgust that in 2017 they still have to overcome the race and sex barrier.

Per Davis and Maldonado (2015), although there have been a few advancements toward gender and race equality, there is still a large disparity within senior level positions for AAW. The majority of the participants were shocked to find that only three percent of Fortune 500 organizations have AAW in senior level positions. Davis (2016) posits that barriers exist because AAW have been excluded from the "good ol' boy"

networks, which are usually comprised of White individuals who hold power and status within an organization. During the interviews, the "good ol' boy' network emerged frequently. It was expressed that even though AAW have had some success in obtaining senior level positions, there is still the presence of the good ol' boy network even in 2017. The participants stated that it is still a fight to be treated fairly in the workplace and to be given the same opportunities as their White counterparts. The good ol' bot network excludes AAW because AAW do not fit the mold that has been set for hundreds of years.

Implications for Social Change

In order to remain competitive in the Corporate America setting, it is imperative to implement diversification in leadership roles. Gender and race issues within organizations have long been a strong force for social change (Cortina et al., 2011). My intent of this research study was to provide real world and real-life experiences of AAW leaders. Providing these women with a voice may open the gates for communication, tolerance, and changed perceptions of Black women in the workplace. The emergence of AAW leadership in the United States represents a struggle for liberation from oppression and a means to uplift the Black community out of racial, educational, and economic subjugation (Davis, 2016). Promoting a more diverse workforce where AAW are seen in senior level leadership positions has the potential to increase the bandwidth of an organization due to the organization being seen as diverse. Currently, many organizations are still part of the good ol' boy network: "Barriers exist because women and minorities have been, for the most part, excluded from the 'good ol' boy' networks that usually are composed of individuals who hold power and status in an organization" (Davis, 2016).

This research study may soften the grip of the good ol' boy networks and open eyes to the abilities of AAW. In addition, this research study has the potential to contribute to the research of Bell's (1995) critical race theory (CRT). The contribution presents itself in the form of studying AAW, a marginalized group due to skin color and sex. Bell's CRT paradigm conceptualizes the intersectionality of race and gender (Bell, 1995). According Huber and Solorzano (2015), CRT explains how everyday forms of racism emerge in the everyday experiences of people of color. Those everyday experiences include AAW in the workplace, which was expressed during the interviewing of the 12 participants for this research study. In addition, Carbado and Roithmayr (2014) suggested that racial stereotypes are ubiquitous in society and limit the opportunities of people of color, which is explored within this research study. This research may lessen stereotypes and organizational barriers regarding Black women being offered leadership roles within organizations across various industry types.

Implications for Practice

The results of this research study may provide helpful insight for organizations that want to diversify their senior level positions. Having an understanding of the perceptions and experiences of AAW could aid in organizations taking a close look at their hiring and promotion practices and make them aware of how they may be treating AAW within the organization. Alston (2012) suggested that the experiences of AAW leaders must be examined and positioned at the center of discourse in order to discredit or discount organizational leadership misconceptions and beliefs that are based on race and gender. In addition, this research study may be the catalyst to organizations

understanding the benefits of having AAW in senior level positions. Diversifying the

senior level positions, as per Emerson and Murphy (2014), reduces identity threat

concerns and increases perceptions of company fairness. Debebe and Reinhart (2014) and

Holvino (2010) agreed that growing a diverse workforce within an organization can

benefit from a diverse clientele; which can prove to be beneficial for organizational

growth and the overall managing diversity within the organization.

Recommendations for Future Research

The main limitation to this research study is the use of AAW who hold top

leadership positions. Using only top leadership participants eliminates those AAW who

hold positions below the senior leadership levels. In addition, the participant pool is

located only within the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area. Therefore, I recommend that

a similar study be conducted with a focus on AAW in positions below the senior level

leadership threshold. I would also suggest broadening the geographical area to other large

cities. Furthermore, the research study focuses on only one marginalized group, which is

African American women. Conducting the study using other women of color may help to

add essential value to the current body of literature and may foster a bigger research

study that focuses on the experiences of women from various minority groups, such as

Hispanic, Asian, etc. and whether or not the experiences expressed are shared and

common across the various groups of minority women.

Conclusion

African American women continue to be a group that endures racism and sexism

in the workplace. It was found that climbing the corporate ladder continues to be a

challenge for African American women within the good ol' boy network, which continues to be a prominent factor in the today's work place. This study addressed the empirical literature gap in understanding the unique experiences of AAW within organizational settings. The interviews that were conducted answered the research questions and strengthened the argument for the significance of this research study. The women who were interviewed provided important insight into the perceptions that Black women have when working within organizations. Although further research is necessary, this research study adds to the body of literature regarding the intersectionality of race and gender for AAW who work in corporate America.

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Appendix A: Semi Structured Interview Questions

1. How would you describe your career trajectory?

    1a. What specific personal characteristics would you say contributed most to your

    career development?

2. Overall, why do you think being a woman and African American affects the unique

experiences of AAW who hold senior level positions?

3. Specifically, how has your race and gender affected your career development and

trajectory?

    3a. What specific examples do you have of how your race and gender, combined,

    has created barriers for your career advancement?

    3b. How has being both African American and female contributed to your unique

    leadership experiences over the years?

4. How did you prepare yourself for a senior level position?

    4a. What professional strategies did you implement to ensure that barriers

    presented to you did not result in not advancing into a leadership position?

5. How did developing a relationship with a mentor influence your ascension to

a senior level position?

    5a. What role do you play in mentoring AAW who aspire to attain a senior level

    leadership position within an organization?

    5b. Why do you think it is difficult for aspiring AAW to find mentors within an

    organization who takes a keen interest in their career development and trajectory?

6. What obstacles have you had to overcome in order to excel into a senior leadership?

6a. How have those obstacles shaped you as a leader?

7. Are you aware that only 3 percent of Fortune 500 organizations have African American Women in senior level positions?

7a. Why do you think the percentage of African American women in senior level position stands at only 3 percent within Fortune 500 organizations?

8. What advice would you give another AAW aspiring to a senior level position?

9. Identify three factors in leadership that African American women can use to assist her in ascending to the next level of her career.

9a. Why do you choose these specific three factors?

10. How did the lack of successful African American women effect the advancement of your career?