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Barriers Encountered by African American Women Executives in Fortune 500 Companies

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Walden University

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2019

Abstract

Barriers Encountered by African American Women Executives in Fortune 500

Companies

by

Sonia Marlene Greene

MA, Strayer University, 2003

MBA, Strayer University, 2005

BS, Virginia State University, 1995

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Management

Walden University

September 2019

Abstract

African American women's (AAW) presence has increased in the corporate workforce, but this increase has not transferred to a comparable rise in leadership positions. The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to explore the lived experiences AAW faced relating to race and gender differences that influenced their leadership development and limitations on advancement in Fortune 500 corporations. The research problem addressed in this study was the underrepresentation of AAW in senior leadership positions within Fortune 500 corporations and what can increase their representation and retention in senior level positions. The 10 participants included African American women holding senior level positions in corporate America. The concepts of race, gender, and stereotyping derived from intersectionality theory, critical race theory, black feminist theory, and racial microaggression were the foundation for the conceptual framework. The data collected through semistructured interviews were analyzed using the modified van Kaam method. Four themes emerged including race, gender, stereotyping in the workplace, and the lack of AAW led mentorship programs. The findings of this study may contribute to social change by assisting organizational leaders in policy changes to support the concerns of AAW in leadership roles around the lack of diversity and mentoring programs to increase retention and new recruitment.

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Dedication

I first want to give God all the glory and honor for bringing through this journey. I know without him, I am nothing. I stand very strong in my faith, knowing that God will continue to bless me and guide me through all of my life's endeavors.

I dedicate this journey to my loving parents, the last Oswald S. Redmond, Sr. and Barbara L. Redmond. My parents provided a foundation of the spirituality of putting God first in whatever we set out to accomplish. With that foundation, they taught us education would be the key to our success and to never give up on what God has planted deep within our soul.

To my support system, my husband; William A. Greene, Sr, and our daughter; Diamond C. Greene. These two have been my pillar of support from the start. They encouraged me never to give up when the going got too tough, and the road was too hard to bare. When times were overwhelming and unbearable, they continued to speak my end into the now of becoming what I have; I've worked so hard to become. They would not let me give up on my dream of completing this doctoral journey. And to the rest of my family, I extend the biggest heartfelt thank you.

Acknowledgments

Thank you, Dr. Donna Brown, my committee chair, for your continued support and believing in me and providing the guidance I needed to get through the dark tunnel of reviews, revisions, and submissions. You helped me discover a hidden talent that I never knew resided within me as a scholarly practitioner.

Thank you, Dr. Marcia Steinhauer, my second committee chair and methodologist, for your subject matter expertise. You have been with me since the beginning. As this road traveled has not been an easy one, for me, but with your wisdom and knowledge you helped me to shape and breathe life into my research.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

The struggle for career advancement, leadership, and a high-class lifestyle continues for many African American women today. African American women have played an evolutionary part in the sustainability of this country's economy by penetrating the workforce since the 1960s and 1970s (Kurtulus, 2016). Yet to many today, African American women are viewed as subaltern laborers; they are subjected to stereotypes, segregation, and conscious or unconscious biases (Koenig & Eagly, 2014). There has been a significant advancement in society regarding the progress of African American women, largely due to the acceptance of different racial groups within the workforce since the enactment of the antidiscrimination law contained in Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of the 1964 and the culmination of the women's suffrage movement in the early 20th century. Social categorization occurs regarding African American women in leadership roles (Nkomo & Hoobler, 2014). African American women's perceived access to career advancement was limited compared to that of European American men and women counterparts.

Business managers have made extraordinary progress to end the exclusiveness of leadership roles. However, Paustian-Underdahl, Walker, and Woehr (2014) stated that males were perceived to have more managerial characteristics than females. Females were believed to display attitudes and temperaments inimical to managerial success; this belief has been used to impose a cynical categorization of their leadership abilities. The stereotypical image of senior level managers in corporations was generally middle- to

upper-class European American men who displayed an appearance of authority (Koenig & Eagly, 2014).

According to the U.S. Census Bureau (2018), European American men still dominated the top leadership positions in most companies, representing 69.2% compared to the 2.2% of African American women. However, the quest for leadership positions continues for many African American women. Giving African American women the opportunity to explore senior level roles in corporate America would provide them with the platform to demonstrate their formal education and skills alongside those of other ethnic groups.

This chapter contains scholarly literature relevant to the scope of this study and how the problem expressed in this topic is current and relevant today. Further defined in this chapter is the purpose of the study, the research question upon which this study was founded, and the theories that served as the conceptual framework of this study. Additionally, this chapter contains definitions of terms used in the study, assumptions believed to support the study, the research scope, delimitations and limitations, and the significance of the study and its contribution to positive social change.

Background of the Study

For many years, a woman's place was in the home, and the man of the house was the dominant provider for the family (Smith, 2015). During World War II, the roles of women began to change as many men went to battle. Women began to take on the domestic and military production jobs left behind by men who entered the U.S. armed services. As the women worked jobs that were left behind, they had no idea of the

challenges that they would face as they became accustomed to their independence and freedom. As women integrated into the male dominated workforce on a more permanent basis, men and women working side-by-side was becoming more accepted before the end of World War II (Hall, Orzada, & Lopez-Gydosh, 2015).

To ease the restriction and challenges that women faced in transitioning into the workforce, President John F. Kennedy issued Executive Order 10925 in 1961 (Bendick & Nunes, 2012). This order mandated fair hiring and employment practices that were free from racial bias (Bendick & Nunes, 2012). Since its creation, Executive Order 10925 has been misconstrued, with many believing it was intended to provide preferential treatment to people of color (Chun & Evans, 2015). The executive order instructed federal contractors to treat all applicants equally without regard to race, color, creed, religion, sex, or national origin (Ray, 2014). As people of color, including women, were rejected when seeking employment, they began to think that they were being discriminated against, and the newly signed policy was not protecting them against such discriminatory actions. The Affirmative Action policy that was invoked after the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s was intended to provide equal opportunities for members of all minority groups and women (Bendick & Nunes, 2012). In 1965, more than a year after the Civil Rights Act of 1964 became law, President Lyndon B. Johnson issued Executive Order 11246, which was commonly identified as creating Affirmative Action. This order ensured equal opportunities for all minorities in federal contractor recruitment, hiring, training, and other employment (McLaughlin, McLaughlin, & McLaughlin, 2015).

African American women have experienced more difficulty obtaining senior level leadership positions in corporate America than have African American males (MacNeil & Ghosh, 2017). As more African American women push to acquire leadership positions, they face opposition; they are often placed in precarious positions (Sabharwal, 2015). Although women are breaking through the barriers of the *glass ceiling*, African American women are still less favored, receive less support from their peers, and are excluded from important networking opportunities; moreover, African American women are steadily failing to meet goals set for themselves, leading to more disappointments and challenges, thereby leading to a *glass cliff* (Sabharwal, 2015). The glass cliff refers to a situation in which women or members of a minority group face challenging circumstances where there is a high risk of failure in attaining leadership positions (Ryan & Haslam, 2007). According to Catalyst (2017), African American women represented 1.2% of all chief executive officers (CEO's) of Fortune 500 companies, which was significantly less than the rate of African American women in the workforce as a whole.

Men and women of other ethnicities not classified as African American women will not fully understand the perception of African American women seeking acceptance into a career field where they are not wanted (Holder, Jackson, & Ponterotto, 2015). African American women have experienced limitations on their advancement more so than their female European American counterparts (Cook & Glass, 2015). Beckwith, Carter, and Peters's (2016) research findings were similar in outcome as those of Sanchez-Hucles and Davis (2010) concerning the intersection of race and gender and how those factors have had an impact on upward mobility in corporate America.

However, prior research on African American women seeking leadership roles in corporate America and the barriers faced should have provided enough evidence of this phenomenon. The results of my transcendental phenomenological qualitative study showed evidence of the barriers that still existed for African American women in senior level leadership positions in corporate America and the influence of stereotypes on their performances and retention factors.

I focused my study on the multiple intersections of race and gender as found in the research literature. This study was needed to develop further career management models and diversity intervention strategies to increase representation of African American women in senior level positions. The purpose of this qualitative transcendental phenomenological research study was to explore the lived experiences that African American women faced regarding barriers relating to race and gender differences that influenced their leadership development and limitations on advancement in a Fortune 500 corporation.

Problem Statement

In the 21st century, the workplace has become increasingly racially diverse, but there is still an undeniable disparity relating to cultural and gender differences (Soni, 2000). The underrepresentation of African American women in senior level positions is problematic for several reasons. First, this underrepresentation could be an indication that such positions are unattainable due to physical characteristic biases. Managers of corporate America may be focused on the physical characteristic or makeup of the individual (e.g., choosing those who are male and European American), which causes

organization leaders to lose the opportunity to capitalize on the skills and talents that African American women can contribute to their organization (Hoobler, Lemmon, & Wayne, 2014). European American male and female counterparts may have an interest in continuing the imbalance and underrepresentation of African American women in leadership roles for fear of becoming outnumbered in the boardroom (Lowe, 2013).

Another reason for the underrepresentation is that African American women find little or no mentorship at the senior leadership level. Without the opportunity for equality of mentorship or seasoned women in place to mentor them, African American women will not be prepared to handle the political undercurrent of being successful (Hutchings, Lirio, & Metcalfe, 2012). With the lack of mentorship, women of color will feel they are not equipped to apply for those higher-level positions due to the scarcity of support (Killian, Hukai, & McCarty, 2005). The general management problem of my study was that African American women in senior level positions in corporate America felt physically visible, yet invisible in their leadership position. The specific management problem was how race, gender, and stereotyping could influence the career paths of African American women in senior level positions, affecting their appointment, disrupting the dynamics of the position, and creating a need to develop coping strategies to deal with gender and racial bias as they execute their roles in corporate America.

The available literature concerning African American women in senior level leadership positions in corporate America has become more relevant with today's societal changes. However, the available literature does not address lived experiences regarding the barriers to advancement; therefore, additional research would be beneficial for

scholars and leaders of organizations (Sanchez-Hucles & Davis, 2010). Most, if not all, past and present literature that I reviewed was written from the European American male perspective, that was written to depict the weakness of the African American women's ability to possess leadership abilities. Therefore, the gap in the literature represents an insufficiency of data for organization managers who would hire qualified African American women with skills to succeed in the senior level leadership roles but who lacked the mentorship opportunities for them to achieve advancement.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative transcendental phenomenological research study was to explore the lived experiences of barriers that African American women faced relating to race and gender differences that influenced their leadership development and the limitations for advancement in a Fortune 500 corporation. I aimed to explore the lived experiences as they related to the workplace and the coping mechanisms that African American women holding senior level positions in corporate America used to deal with biases resulting from intersectionality. I used the data collected to support the concepts derived from several theories focused on the categorization of lived experiences of African American women surrounding race and gender—of racial discrimination and sexism—and the coping mechanisms they developed.

I used Black feminism, racial microaggression, and intersectionality theories to guide this study with emphasis on stereotypes of race and gender toward ostracized groups (Aiken, Salmon, & Hanges, 2013); Crenshaw, 1989; Nadal et al., 2015). I aimed to identify discriminatory factors through lens of the participants responses regarding

barriers that participants might have encountered through their careers; and if participants attributed the barriers to discrimination on the basis of race or gender. Second, I aimed to obtain a deeper understanding of coping strategies developed by African American women in the workplace to deal with such discrimination (see Lewis, 2015).

Research Question

I conducted this qualitative transcendental phenomenological study to explore the lived experiences of the underrepresentation of African American women in senior level leadership positions in corporate America. I designed my research question to explore the lived experiences of how African American women in senior level positions chose their career paths and what made them stay in that trajectory. The participants included 10 English speaking African American women who held senior level positions in a Fortune 500 corporation in the United States. The targeted outcome from the structured questions were for each participant to share feelings, perceptions, and experiences on the paths that they took to obtain their positions and what influenced their individual leadership development opportunities. The overarching research question for this study was the following:

RQ: What are the lived experiences of African American women in their career paths that helped them attain a leadership position and remain in it?

Conceptual Framework

Conceptual frameworks are products of qualitative processes of theorization that aid exploration of contexts to provide a comprehensive understanding of a phenomenon (Jabareen, 2009). For this transcendental phenomenological research study, the concepts

from the grounded theories related to the underrepresentation of African American

women in corporate America, which aided a better understanding of how they could be

successful in reaching leadership positions. To support this framework, I incorporated

literature on *feminism,* which promoted women having political, social, and economic

equality with their male counterparts, as well as women of other ethnicities; *Black*

feminism, which described sexism, class oppression, and gender identity; and *racial*

microaggression, which applied to the themes of environmental conditions and

stereotypes regarding African American women in the workplace. I selected

intersectionality theory, critical race theory (CRT), Black feminist theory (BFT), and

racial microaggression theory to provide me with the theoretical grounding to address

issues associated with the concepts of race, gender, class oppression, and stereotyping.

In the late 1980s, Crenshaw (1989) introduced the term *intersectionality*, a term

derived from Black feminism and CRT. Crenshaw (1989) introduced the intersectionality

terminology to address the critical marginalization of African American women affected

by the antidiscrimination laws, as well as feminist and antiracist theories (Carbado,

Crenshaw, Mays, & Tomlinson, 2013). Ocen (2013) described how the intersection of

race, class, and gender concentrated African American women's vulnerability to

harassment and violence. Cho, Crenshaw, and McCall (2013), Cook and Williams

(2015), and Ocen (2013) provided evidence supporting the belief that negative affects

surrounding gender and race would influence African American women.

BFT was developed from early studies of situations that mainly affected middle-

class European American women. However, feminists generalized their findings for all

women to included African American women who came from different circumstances than those of European American women. Due to the different challenges that the African American woman faced, the new emerging feminist theory was coined BFT. BFT focused on the various struggles and oppressions faced by African American women in their communities and social organizations (Carbado et al., 2013).

Researchers could use the CRT to address the issues associated with justice, race, class, gender, education, and power in the mid-1970s, which were a reactionary attack on the achievements of the civil rights struggle (Gillborn, 2015). Crenshaw (1989) defined CRT and intersectionality as focusing on two key elements: an empirical basis and an activist component. The empirical basis of intersectionality was used to understand social problems more clearly, and the activist component was used to understand coalitions between diverse groups aimed at resisting any change in the status quo (Carbado et al., 2013). Researchers can use CRT to provide a foundation to assist with the understanding between racial microaggression and racial power structure, which affects the inequality amongst races post the civil rights era. Crenshaw (1989, 1991, 2014) supported the belief that intersectionality of race and gender negatively affected African American women in the workplace.

Pierce (1970) first introduced the term *microaggression*; 40 years later, he meticulously theorized the concept of racial microaggression influencing African Americans' experiences with racism every day. Racial microaggression demonstrates how racist events are systemically mediated by institutionalized racism (Huber & Solorzano, 2015). Researchers can use the theory of racial microaggression to support

that the supremacy behind separations of class, race, and gender continue to play an

important role in career advancement of African American women. Racial

microaggression can be viewed as a guided theoretical overview of how to understand the

concept of racial divide and how a categorized group experiences racism. I used these

theories in this qualitative study to provide research support for the underrepresentation

of African American women concerning the struggles that they face to obtain and

maintain senior level leadership roles in corporate America.

Nature of the Study

According to Finlay (2012), transcendental phenomenological research starts with

a researcher who has a curiosity or passion that is turned into a research question. I chose

to use the transcendental phenomenological approach to explore lived experiences of the

consistent underrepresentation of African American women in senior level leadership

positions in corporate America. I focused on how race and gender could have influenced

the career paths of African American women and how intersectionality could disrupt the

dynamics of their positions.

African American women in leadership positions have historically faced multiple

racial and gender challenges in attaining upward mobility (Sabharwal, 2015). This

approach was based on personal knowledge with an emphasis on the importance of a

personal perceptions of lived events. The transcendental phenomenological method

allows a researcher to employ diverse types of questions, such as unstructured or

semistructured (Dicicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). No interview process could be truly

unstructured; conversations are guided through predefined questions. However, most

widely used are unstructured questions derived from the ethnographic tradition of anthropology (Spradley, 2016). Ethnographic researchers gather data from observation or by joining in with the activities that they observe. Ethnographic unstructured questions would not have been conducive to the format of this study. Unlike unstructured interviewing, semistructured interviewing (open-ended) is often the sole data collection process of qualitative research. Semistructured interviewing could occur either with an individual or with a group with interviews that usually last from 30 minutes to several hours (Petty, Thomson & Stew, 2012).

Considering the five different human sciences research approaches that use the phenomenological method, the transcendental method is the most appropriate for the human subjects (see Dowling, 2007). When using the transcendental method, the interview questions are semistructured in a fashion to explore the cognitive operations and transcendental percepts of the subject. The overall focus of this study was to understand better how African American women could be successful in reaching executive leadership positions in a Fortune 500 company. For the scope of this qualitative approach, I used in-depth questioning to probe for responses regarding the experiences of 10 English speaking African American women in corporate America. The interview question was designed for each participant to elaborate on their lived experiences in their current positions, obstacles, life histories, and perceptions on their career paths.

The selection of participants for this study was intentional to include only those African American women in senior level leadership positions of corporate America, specifically targeting those in Fortune 500 corporations. I solicited volunteers for this

study by utilizing social networks through private and public avenues. All participants were made aware of the nature of this study, and any participation in this study was solely on a volunteer basis. The structure of the questioning was a semistructured (open-ended) format to allow for the participants to respond freely regarding their workplace experiences. To ensure accuracy of the participant's responses, I audio recorded each session and invoked the member-checking process.

Definitions

For this research study, I have provided the following terms to add value and clarity for the readers:

Affirmative action: Affirmative action refers to programs that give unique consideration to or support of disadvantaged or socially discriminated against groups (Leslie, Mayer, & Kravitz, 2014).

African American or Black: African American or Black refer to people who are of racially or ethnically mixed descent, categorized by some earlier standards in the United States as having a single drop of *Negro blood* (Jordan, 2014), but more recently as self-identified (i.e., as identifying with a census demographic group).

Black feminist theory (BFT): BFT consists of ideas formed by Black women to clarify the conditions and situational contexts for other Black women facing various expressions of oppression (Taylor, 1998).

Coping mechanism: Coping mechanism is defined as an ongoing cognitive and behavioral efforts to manage specific external or internal adversities such as conflicts or intense emotions (McCrae, 1989).

Intersectionality: Intersectionality refers to the interactivity of social identity structures such as race, class, and gender through life experiences, particularly as related to experiences of privilege and oppression (Valentine, 2007).

Intersectionality theory: Intersectionality theory is the study of how different power structures interact with the lives of African American women (Crenshaw, 1989).

Racial microaggression: Racial microaggression is the casual degradation of any marginalized group via verbal insults particularly towards African American from non-African American races (Huber & Solorzano, 2015).

Assumptions

An assumption in research is something that researchers believe true, but no adequate evidence exists to support this belief (Leedy & Ormrod, 2010). I designed this qualitative study based on assumptions that were uncontrollable regarding the underrepresentation of African American women in corporate America. One assumption was that all participants were truthful with identifying themselves as senior level English speaking African American women leaders working in corporate America's public or private sector and truthful in their responses to interview questions. The second assumption was that the interview question effectively promoted detailed discussions on leadership development experiences and the influences of intersectionality and stereotyping focusing on gender and race. I expected the responses would come from an inner recollection of experiences and personal interpretation. To document assumptions of this study, I confirmed this study was developed on the basis of personal recollection of events. I also assumed the participants would provide detailed experiences of strategies

implemented to overcome the glass cliff encountered in their rise to the leadership position. My last assumption was the participants understood that participation in this study was on a volunteer basis, and the data collected from this study would provide more information on a positive social change for African American women in leadership roles in corporate America.

Scope

The scope of a study refers to the parameters under which the study is operating, what the study covers, and how it is closely connected to the framing of the problem (Leedy & Ormrod, 2010). The purpose of this qualitative transcendental phenomenological research study was to explore the lived experiences of barriers that African American women faced relating to race and gender differences that influenced their leadership development and the limited advancement in a Fortune 500 corporation. The process of data collection involved a semistructured interview question to obtain detailed information regarding the lived experiences each participant encountered during their career paths toward leadership (Appendix A). I used semistructured interviews as opposed to utilizing structured interviews to provide flexibility needed to obtain in-depth data. This study was limited to English speaking African American women currently working in senior leadership to provide a better understanding of the work ethics, experiences, and barriers faced by each participant. The sample size for collecting data was 10 English speaking African American women currently in senior level leadership roles. Each interview with participants was manually transcribed to obtain the full details of the responses given to the interview questioning.

Delimitations

Creswell and Creswell (2017) defined delimitations as identifying factors that narrowed the scope of the research and defined research boundaries. Delimitations identify what is not included or intended in the study (Leedy & Ormrod, 2010). Delimitations of this study included participants meeting specific criteria, mainly being an English speaking African American woman holding a senior level position in corporate America, specifically a Fortune 500 company. This topic was selected because of my interest in the discriminatory practices in corporate America toward African American women, specifically the influences of the barriers around race, gender, and stereotyping faced when pursuing positions. I specifically excluded other ethnic groups and genders of senior level positions. I interviewed a limited sample of 10 English speaking African American women who held senior level positions in the public and private sectors of corporate America. I focused on the underrepresentation of the African American women in corporate American.

Limitations

Simon and Goes (2013) defined limitations as factors that a researcher could not control that would reveal weaknesses in a research project. I involved the social research of human responses to selected interview questions, requiring that individuals recount experiences, wanted or unwanted. With any study utilizing the human subject, trustworthiness of the information being gathered must have legitimacy. The human subject responses had their limitations because I was dependent on what was being

recorded. Authenticating the validity of the responses from each participant depended on the ability to include extensive details of the data collection.

Researcher bias occurs when a systematic error is introduced into sampling or testing by selecting or encouraging one outcome or answer over others (Pannucci & Wilkins, 2010). Researcher bias in the study results can go undetected when data are generated from a single researcher. In my study, data were collected, analyzed, and transcribed accurately to avoid interjecting personal biases. A researcher's bias could hinder the interpretation of the findings and obstruct the data.

The chosen sampling size of 10 participants reflected limited access to resources. A significant constraint imposed on this study involved me identifying qualified participants who met the criteria of being an English speaking African American female currently working in a senior level position in corporate America.

Significance of the Study

The significance of this study was in addressing lived experiences of the underrepresentation of African American women in senior level leadership positions in corporate America. Another important aspect of this study was the lack of research regarding factors that had negatively influenced the economic advancement of African American women and the barriers that limited diversity in the workplace. I used a transcendental phenomenological approach to offer a better understanding of the lived experiences of the selected participants of African American women working in senior level leadership positions in corporations. The specific management problem was how race, gender, and stereotyping could have influenced the career paths of African

American women in senior level positions. Those negative attributes could have affected their appointments and could have been disruptive to the dynamics of the positions. Also significant was the need for the women to develop coping strategies to deal with gender and racial bias as they executed their roles in corporate America.

I addressed the problems of African American women being underrepresented in corporate America to bring awareness of the knowledge and skills needed for African American women to maneuver through the complexity of social and cultural barriers to advancement. By conducting this study and sharing its results, managers might create better, more sensitive employee relations programs. These programs could focus on diversity in the promotional opportunities offered African American women in the workplace. Increasing the visibility in African American corporate leadership roles might provide an increase in wealth in African American communities, thereby promoting an environment of positive social change.

Significance to Practice

My transcendental phenomenological study was significant to practice because of the potential benefits to human resources executives, policy creators and procedure analysts, and other decision makers when considering changes to existing policies of organizations as they affect their African American female stakeholders. The results of this study could provide improvements to an the organization's Equal Employment Opportunity Act policies, which are intended to prevent employment discrimination based on race, color, religion, sex, or national origin. I could provide human resource administrators with the tool to explore professional development seminars that could

address discriminatory activities in the workplace. There could be the development of additional resources that could strategically target African American women to be paired with mentors to guide them in overcoming racial biases and finding ways of being successful in advancing in leadership roles.

My study might be significant to practice because the findings showed strategies for African American women to be successful in pursuing advancement in their employment. The findings addressed within this study documented the lived experiences of the participants, which could provide reliable information to serve as a guideline for future leadership opportunities for other African American women.

Significance to Theory

The comparison of intersectionality theory, BFT, and racial microaggressions theory were essential components of the theoretical framework of this study focusing on the concepts of race, gender, and stereotyping. Past researchers have revealed studies that related to the influences of race and gender stereotyping as unique to the limitations for leadership development of African American women in corporate America (Reynolds-Dobbs, Thomas, & Harrison, 2008; Richie et al., 1997). I provided information about how race and gender stereotyping influenced African American women who achieved senior level leadership roles through information obtained from the interview responses collected from selected African American women. The data gathered may provide additional information to help overcome discrimination when seeking senior level positions.

Significance to Social Change

The significance to social change of this study is that it could be beneficial to African American women, policymakers, and human relations personnel in corporate America. The information from this study could provide a process to navigate the processes required to obtain senior level positions for other African American women. The findings of the study indicated strategies to be used to overcome discriminatory actions encountered in the workplace that could be utilized in positioning African American women to be successful and contribute to positive social change.

Summary

In Chapter 1, I addressed the underrepresentation of African American women in senior level leadership positions in corporate America. I provided background information and an introduction to intersectionality theory regarding race, gender, and stereotyping. I contrasted the BFT with the racial microaggression theory as the best approach for comparing the influences of race and gender as contributing factors to the underrepresentation of African American women in senior level corporate positions.

In Chapter 2, I explain my literature search strategies; provide a thorough review of the literature to establish a detailed background for the study in support of the overarching problem of my study and introduce the conceptual framework in detail. I explore the gap in the literature regarding African American women and race, gender, and stereotyping limiting the numbers of African American women who occupy senior level leadership roles in corporate America. Chapter 3 includes discussion of the research design, rationale, and methodology of the study. In Chapter 3, I discuss the researcher is

the primary tool in collecting the data and analyzing the responses from participants. I used purposeful sampling and snowball sampling to vet potential participants for this study. In Chapter 4, I further describe the research setting and how the data was collectedd. Chapter 4 presents the demographics of the targeted population and the manner in which the analyzed data supports the literature review that was conducted in Chapter 2. In Chapter 5, I provide discussion, conclusions, and recommendations based on the findings of my study. Other details that will be included in Chapter 5 are the interpretations of findings, limitations of the study, and recommendations.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

The general management problem of my study was that African American women in senior level positions in corporate America felt physically visible, yet invisible in their leadership positions. The specific management problem was how race and gender stereotyping could influence the career path for African American women in senior level positions by affecting their appointments. According to Catalyst (2017), there was a two-seat upward shift in the number of board seats held by African American women in 2016. Contrary to the increase, there remained a significant gap in the representation of senior level positions held by African American women in corporate America. The reported shortage of leadership positions held by African American women could result in continuing the trend expressed in the glass ceiling metaphor.

The purpose of this qualitative transcendental phenomenological research study explored the lived experiences of barriers that African American women faced relating to race and gender differences that influenced their leadership development and limitations on advancement in a Fortune 500 corporation. I aimed to incorporate conceptual views to focus on lived experiences as related to discrimination, oppression, and coping mechanisms of African American women. Corporation leaders should consider the benefits and skillsets that racial, gender, and ethnic diversity could bring to the boardroom. Therefore, I documented the lived experiences and perspectives of African American women at the level of senior management in corporate America. During observations of the selected participants, the recalled experiences of barriers and

discriminatory practices encountered yielded a better understanding of the continued

limitations faced by African American women in leadership roles. I focused primarily on

the prolonged underrepresentation of African American women in senior level positions

in corporate America emphasizing the influences of intersectionality.

Literature Search Strategy

I used the Walden University online library research databases as my principal

source of scholarly literature for this review. In addition to the use of Walden

University's online database sources, I reviewed and included literature from ProQuest

Central, PsychInfo, SAGE Premier, EBSCOhost, Science Direct, Books, and Thoreau. I

utilized the dissertation database to search for similar topics taken from the ProQuest

Dissertations database. Other outside sources of reference that provided data included

Catalyst, Google Scholar, U.S. Department of Labor, and the U.S. Census Bureau.

The keyword search that I used for the literature review included the following

terms: *African American woman, Academia, barriers, Black female leaders, Black*

feminist, Black feminist theory, board diversity, business leaders, CEO, corporate

boards, critical theory, critical race theory, discrimination, diversity, diversity

management practices, ethnic equality at work, equality, gender, gender differences,

gender inequality, glass ceiling, intersectionality, intersectionality theory, leadership,

leadership development, microaggression, oppression, transcendental phenomenological

research, qualitative research method, racial microaggression theory, racism, sexism,

sexuality, socially responsible leadership, stereotypes, underrepresentation, women of

color, and *women in leadership*. The scholarly literature was concentrated on the *African*

American woman, leadership development, the influences of intersectionality, race, gender, and *stereotypes.* The availability of peer-reviewed journals was limited to current data. I used dissertations, books, and professional journals published from 2012 to 2018 to support the purpose and the significance of the study.

Conceptual Framework

Conceptual frameworks are products of qualitative processes of theorization that aid exploration of context to provide a comprehensive understanding of a phenomenon (Jabareen, 2009). For this transcendental phenomenological research study, the concepts from the grounded theories related to the underrepresentation of African American women in corporate America, which aided a better understanding how they can be successful in reaching leadership positions. Through this transcendental phenomenological research study, I chose to focus on the lived experiences based on gender and race from the intersectionality theory regarding the underrepresentation of African American women in corporate America. To support this framework, I incorporated literature on feminism, which promoted women having the political social, and economic equality with their male counterparts. Feminist researchers have used the qualitative method to conduct studies that exhibit awareness and sensitivity toward the lived experiences of underrepresented African American women (Davis & Maldonado, 2015). Intersectionality theory, BFT, CRT, and the racial microaggression theory have been found to be appropriate when studying the African American woman (Allen, & Joseph, 2018). I used the theoretical framework to explain the developmental and societal issues facing African American women in senior level positions of corporate America.

Intersectionality Theory

Intersectionality directly correlates with the Black feminism and CRT, and intersectionality introduces the social movement that advocates against violence directed at African American women. Extended from the evolutionary social movements of Black feminism and CRT, intersectionality is focused on race, gender, and social class. Racism, sexism, classism, and oppression plagued African American women in society throughout the 1800s, which were based on an institutionalized system modeled on legalized slavery (Curington, 2015).

In the 1990s, Crenshaw (1991) was credited as being amongst the first to articulate the term intersectionality as a theoretical framework in a legal study. During the emergence of the term intersectionality, Crenshaw (1991) identified three types of intersectionality to explore domestic violence, rape, and remedial reform for specific groups of people (Few-Demo, 2014). The three types included structural intersectionality, political intersectionality, and representational intersectionality.

Structural intersectionality refers to the political, economic, and institutional forms of discrimination and domination of a particular group of people (Few-Demo, 2014). This concept of subintersectionality connects biases through legal systems and societal matters that affect the individual or certain groups granting privileges to nonminority groups and placing restrictions on the minorities. Political intersectionality refers to how traditional feminist and antiracist politics have contributed to the marginalization of racial and ethnic minority women (Few-Demo, 2014). Historically, African American women have been excluded from many pivotal historical events, such

as the suffragist movement for women's voter rights, sexual health movement, and the denial of the scholarship for a better educational opportunity. Political intersectionality places emphasis on ways in which the African American women are being positioned against political conflict and disempowerment for social improvement (Few-Demo, 2014). Unlike structural and political intersectionality, representational intersectionality refers to ways race, class, gender, and sexual orientation contribute to creations of political referendums and mandates to protect racial and ethnic minority groups.

Crenshaw (2014) argued that African American women had been discriminated against in ways other than racism and sexism separately, but sexism was the widely recognized offense as it included European American women in the injustice. Injustices rendered the African American women as invisible and without legal recourse. In a 1947 article written by a law student at Howard Law school, the student experienced the diminishing characteristic actions against for being a minority woman, which resulted in the overwhelming emotions of the feeling of not belonging (Azaransky, 2013). Through the experiences of Pauli Murray of being discriminated against because of being a African American female, a new term, *Jane Crow*, was coined. Azaransky (2013) defined Jane Crow as an African American women's experiences of being discriminated against due to racism and sexism. Crenshaw (1989) mentioned that leaders argued intersectionality in legal cases by race and sex comparing court cases; Crenshaw (1989) cited the following cases as examples: *DeGraffenreid v. General Motors* (1977), *Payne v. Travenol* (1976), and *Jefferies v. Harris County Community Action Association* (1980).

Black Feminist Theory

The feminist theory grew out of early studies of situations that mainly affected middle-class European American women. However, feminists generalized their findings for all women to include African American women who came from different circumstances than those of European American women. BFT is recognized as the foundation by which African American women assert their political and social movement seeking equality. Researchers can use BFT to expose domination, ways of controlling power, the path of struggle, and empowerment of all, while highlighting the struggles and difficulties in combating intersection of oppression (Few-Demo, 2014).

In the 1970s, feminists were divided into subgroups such as exploited domestic or societal outcast. According to Few-Demo (2014), a liberal feminist believed social integration would cure the concerns African American women faced in being accepted by society. Black feminists connect the sociology of the pith of the issue of separation of the relationship between the individual and society or between human agency and social structure (Alinia, 2015). Due to their different challenges, African American women brought about a new feminist theory and coined it BFT. The emergence of BFT included a focus on the various struggles and oppressions facing an African American woman in her community and described occurrences of sexism, racism, and classism as experienced by African American women (Rousseau, 2013).

An African American woman has untapped leadership skills that are not being utilized, which arises from the substantial social and environmental barriers that they must face. A society that has assigned negative stereotypes and judgments against them

(Rousseau, 2013) has imposed these barriers. The racial biases and stereotypical stigmas faced by African American women affects them when they interact with or attempt to build a relationship with others. Coping with the strain imposed by such stigmas poses potential risk to their career advancement. To rectify this, organization managers should embrace gender, racial, and social diversities to lead to a stronger multicultural leadership base for an organization.

Over time, African American women gained more education, developed various leadership skills, and gained experience that can be utilized to significantly benefit any organization. If managers can rise above the biases, discrimination, and inequality of keeping the African American women oppressed, they would see the untapped potential and abilities.

Critical Race Theory

CRT emerged in the United States in the 1980s as a way of providing awareness and support for political, intellectual, and sociological development in the academic legal discipline. Civil rights advocates and legal scholars such as Derrick Bell, Allan Freeman, and Richard Delgado came together and called themselves critical race theorists to seek out explanations for why formal legal equality opportunities were not being offered to African Americans and other people of color (Harris, 2012). According to Crenshaw (1989), CRT was the offspring of a post-Civil Rights institutional activism that was generated and informed by an oppositionist orientation toward racial power. Researchers can use CRT to challenge the assumption that race is no longer necessary given the mantra of all being treated equally before the law (Coram & Hallinan, 2017). Researchers

can use CRT to examine narratives of personal experiences and accounts and counter stories of others to reveal experiences exclusive to African American women (Osorio, 2016).

Researchers can use CRT to theorize that there is a clear purpose behind both racial classification and racism. Racial distinctions are not something natural, biological, or scientific; instead, the race is a deliberate social construct. CRT Scholar Harris (2012) posited that research numbers of empirical claims were focused on race, law, and society. According to Carbado and Roithmayr (2014), a list of 10 empirical arguments represent the claims of the theory based on the consensus among practitioners in the United States:

1. Racial inequality is hardwired into the fabric of U.S. social and economic landscape.

2. Because racism exists at both the subconscious and conscious levels, the elimination of international racism will not eliminate racial inequality.

3. Racism intersects with other forms of inequality, such as classism, sexism, and homophobia.

4. U.S. racial past exerts contemporary effects.

5. Racial change occurs when the interests of European American elites converge with the interests of the racially disempowered.

6. A race is a social construction whose meanings and effects are contingent and change over time.

7. The concept of color blindness in law and social policy and the argument for ostensibly race-neutral practices often serve to undermine the interests of people of color.

8. Immigration laws that restrict Asian and Mexican entry into the United States regulate the racial makeup of the nation and perpetuate the view that people of Asian and Latino descent are foreigners.

9. Racial stereotypes are ubiquitous in society and limit the opportunities for people of color.

10. The success of various policy initiatives often depends on whether the perceived beneficiaries are people of color.

For many years, professional African American women have experienced racism, discrimination, and marginalization that has influenced their views of the world and have made accomplishing mobility upward in leadership positions unattainable (Lewis & Neville, 2015). The study of social, cultural, and theoretical frameworks that includes the CRT deemed are necessary as complex issues surrounding the experiences of African American women in predominantly European American organizations (Rocco, Bernier, & Bowman, 2014). Within a predominantly European American organization, the noted themes are revealing, and there is still much work to be done to address diversity in organizations. Secondly, women, particularly African American women, are positioned below the European American male to assert dominance and White privilege; work performance evaluations are marginalized based on racial, gender, and class

dissimilarities; and initiating diversity in the workplace can result in a more competitive, competent workforce.

Racial Microaggression Theory

African American psychiatrist, Chester Pierce, and colleagues coined the term *racial microaggression* targeting African American with using verbal, behavioral, and environmental indignities whether intentional or unintentional, which communicates hostile, derogatory, or negative racial slights and insults (Lewis, Mendenhall, Harwood, & Browne Huntt, 2013). Racial microaggressions are a form of systematic, every day racism that people use to keep those at the racial margins in their places (Huber & Solorzano, 2015). Many U.S. African American women have experienced a combination of racial and gender discrimination every day, which some scholar-researchers have suggested that psychological and physical health detrition derived from such stressors (Lewis et al., 2013). There are every day stressors of family and work, such as psychological and physical health challenges on all persons, specifically the widespread and pervasive exposure to racism and discrimination. According to Krieger (2014), decades of researchers have shown that when people are chronically treated differently, unfairly, or poorly, they may experience low self-esteem or develop stress-related health condition (e.g., anxiety and depression).

Racial microaggression has three types of transgressions, such as subtle snubs or dismissive looks, gestures, or tones. Researchers have defined those three types of transgressions as microassaults, microinsults, and microinvalidations.
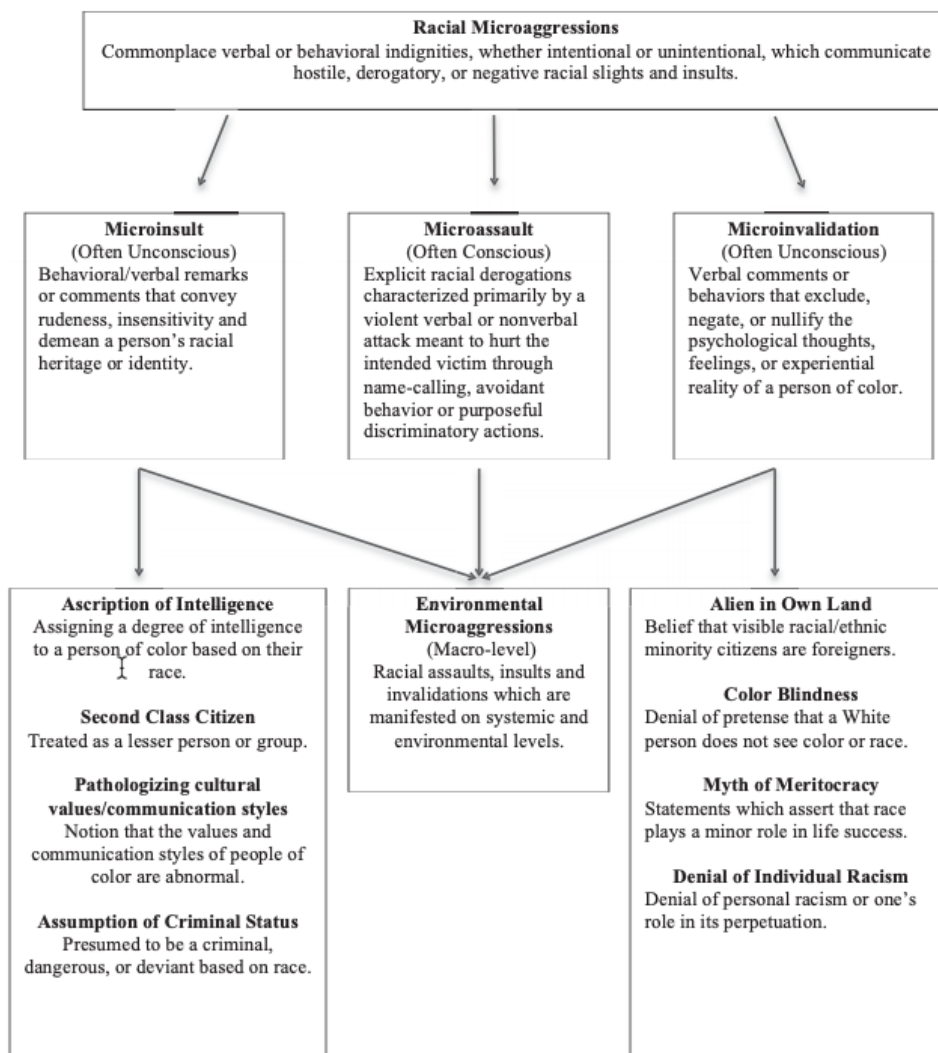
Figure 1. Illustration of the three categories and their relationship as it relates to racial microaggression. Adapted from "Experiences of racial microaggressions and coping strategies of Black women in corporate America," by A. M. Holder, 2013 (https://fordham.bepress.com/dissertations/AAI3554163/). Copyright 2013 A. M. Holder. Reprinted with permission.

Microassaults. Microassaults refer to verbal or nonverbal attacks intended to hurt or offend someone whether it is spoken directly or indirectly (DeCuir-Gunby & Gunby, 2016). Microassaults occur when someone or a group of people use racial slurs or display racially charged symbols, such as a noose or other derogatory symbolization, toward a

person or a group of people. An example of microassault is when an African American male walking down the sidewalk approaches a European American woman, and as he gets closer, the European American women clutches her purse as an indication of fear. The European American women may be conscious of her decision to protect her belongings, but she may be unaware that she is representing a stereotype that African American males are dangerous. Microassault is the most severe and explicit form of microaggression; using traditional racism as the behavior is deliberate and intentional. The method of racial or gender-based slurs or jokes is offensive to a particular group of people (Offermann, Basford, Graebner, Sumona, & Jaffer, 2013). When considering the substandard motives of microassault, the actions are like the constructs of social discrimination and bullying with the intent to harm or interference with performances specifically toward minorities.

Microinsults. Microinsults are rude or insensitive behaviors or statements that people use to degrade another's racial heritage or identity (Nadal et al., 2015). The perpetrator will not recognize the statement or message as insensitive; however, the person that the comment is directed toward will interpret the insult in a negative aspect. Microinsults are deeply-rooted in beliefs of White superiority and are like microinvalidations regarding statements of belittling, challenging, or negating experiences of people of color. Microinsult refers to often senseless acts (Nadal et al., 2015). This particular racial microaggression can be further broken into two additional categories of verbal microinsult and behavioral microinsult (Nadal et al., 2015). An example of a verbal microinsult includes telling an African American woman that she "is pretty for a dark

woman," and an example of a behavioral microinsult involves when everyone in an office has a key to the front door except the only African American female working in the building. The first examples include conveying a message that darker skinned women are not usually pretty, and in the second message, people are communicating that the African American female worker is not trustworthy enough to possess a key to the office.

Microinvalidations. DeCuir-Gunby and Gunby (2016) defined microinvalidations as statements used to belittle, challenge, or negate the experiences of color. People often commit microinvalidation unconsciously with comments or actions that exclude or nullify a person's experiences, thoughts, or feelings based on his or her belonging to a marginalized group. Some examples of microinvalidation include color-blindness, the myth of meritocracy, and denial of individual homophobic experiences. Color-blindness is the most common microinvalidation directed to people of color. An example of microinvalidation includes when a European American person tells a person of color that "racism doesn't exist anymore," or "stop complaining about racism;" she or he then invalidates the racial realities of people of color who experience racism in their everyday lives (Nadal et al., 2015). Racial microaggression or subtle forms of discrimination affects the lives of people of color in their everyday living. African American women and other people of color have suffered an array of microassaults, microinsults, and microinvalidations. They face experiences that have influenced their health and mental capacities, thereby creating impediments for becoming the societal change agents that their families and communities expect of them. Next, I present the literature review comprised of scholarly literature on diversity in corporate leadership;

African American Women's experience in corporations; social and cultural barriers; glass ceiling; race, gender, and class; coping; and stereotyping as it aligns with the underrepresentation of African American women in corporate American. I documented the lived experiences through open-ended questioning.

Literature Review

I aimed to explore the lived experiences of African American women in senior level positions within corporate America and how race, gender, and stereotyping influenced leadership development. I examined the challenges faced by African American women aspiring to achieve executive level positions.

Historical Overview

In recent years, researchers have studied women's leadership, but few have explored the leadership styles and skills of African American women in corporate America (Davis & Maldonado, 2015). Researchers have categorized African American women at the subordinate status regarding other women, as well as their male counterparts (Ashley, 2014; Davis & Maldonado, 2015). The subordinate status has played a significant role in shaping the African American experience in the workplace. All too often, African American women are viewed as a less valued component in the workforce (Ashley, 2014). Although researchers have studied African American women in leadership positions, most have focused on the barriers to equal opportunities or the lack of career advancement but have not focused on the individual lived experiences of the African American women concerning their career paths, education, and feelings. Despite substantial advancements toward gender equality, evidence of disparity still

exists within the senior level leadership position for African American women seeking leadership roles in corporate America (Azaransky, 2013).

Women in Leadership Today

With an understanding of corporate management, there was also the need to understand the roles that women played in the business world concerning positions of leadership. Women have outnumbered men on college campuses since approximately 1988, earning at least one-third of law degrees since 1980, while accounting for one-third of medical school students in 1990. However, women have not moved to positions of importance and power in America anywhere near the expected rate (Wagner, 2016).

According to Warner, Ellman, and Boesch (2018), women make up 50.8% of the U.S population. Among that 50.8%, women are accounted for 47% of the U.S labor force. According to Warner et al. (2018), approximately 52% of all professional level jobs are taken by women. However, women continue to fall substantially behind men when viewing representation in leadership positions within the United States (Warner et al., 2018). Women hold only 29% of executive and senior level officials and managers, as well as 2% of CEO positions within the financial services industry (Warner et al., 2018).

The representation of women of color, which include all women not noted by the U.S. Census Bureau (2018) as "White alone" or "non-Hispanic," has been noted to have the worst representation in corporate leadership than any of their counterparts. In 2015, women of color were at 38% of the nation's female population and 20% of the entire U.S. population. Women of color made up the workforce at 35%, and 16.5% of women of color worked in the S&P 500 companies (Catalyst, 2019). Warner et al. (2018)

documented that 3.9% of women of color held positions of executive, senior level, or management positions. In 2015, 0.4% of CEOs were held by women of color (Warner et al., 2018). Women of color are noted to exclude any woman who is "White alone" or "non-Hispanic" (U.S. Census Bureau, 2018).

Diversity in Corporate Leadership

Diversity has no precise definition; it fluctuates and adapts from generation to generation. Subcategories can be developed to show the makeup of groups of people into factors of age, gender, race, orientation, ethnicity, environment, and other personal attributes. Diversity can be summed into a more concise term to include communicating the limited aspects of culture, behaviors, attitudes, and environments. In understanding the makeup of diversity, managers can shape successful, artistic leaders in organizations.

The changes in the demographics of the workforce, the expectations of ethical conduct, and the pressures from the global marketplace have forced those in executive management positions to deal with employee diversity (Ravazzani, 2016). Workplace diversity may have adverse and positive outcomes. The positive results stem from the relationships between employees and the climate in which they work. Other factors that drive the diversity of a workplace include that of organizational commitment, the climate for innovation, and fair treatment with the organization (Chrobot-Mason & Aramovich, 2013).

When diversity is efficiently managed, and the workplace supports a diverse workforce, employees from all demographic backgrounds feel included the organization. When an employee feels valued and included, they are more productive and care more

about the future of the organization in which they work. Hence, they support the positive work environment. Conversely, the negative impact of not having a diverse workplace environment can occur. When an employee of an organization perceives their presences as tolerable but not valued, they may view this issue as unfair or unequal management practices, thereby resulting in marginalization. According to Chrobot-Mason and Aramovich (2013), by not having a diverse workplace with multicultural staff, a negative outcome may result from an increase in harassment, discrimination, and high turnover. The integration of a multicultural work environment that combines members of all sociocultural backgrounds can lead to employees working to their full potential, as well as bringing innovative skills to an organization.

Although there has been an increase in the representation of African American women in management and other positions, inequalities persist. Leaders of U.S. organizations have insisted their diversity rankings have risen tremendously, yet corporation data have shown otherwise. For example, Peterson (2016) showed men were 30% more likely than women to be promoted from entry level to management. The data from Catalyst (2017) indicated a drop in the visibility of women, and women of minority races remained underrepresented in the boardroom. In 2016, fewer than 7.9% of board seats were occupied by African American within U.S. *Fortune 500* companies (Catalyst, 2017). To breakdown statistics further, of the 7.9% of positions held, 3.8% were held by African American males, 0.4% was held by African American women, and other races classifying as a minority held the remaining 3.7%.

Diversity within the workplace is an essential factor that contributes toward creating an inclusive environment of committed leadership who cultivates employees to reach deeper for untapped talents and skills. According to Sabharwal (2014), diversifying the workplace positively influence an organization by creating an inclusive work environment for all employees.

African American Women's Experience in Corporations. In the 1960s, Derrick Bell (1980, 1987) began the research of the CRT in legal studies concerning racism, discrimination, and racial subordination. African American women experienced racism, discrimination, and marginalization in positions of corporate America beyond that of any leadership position. In considering the African American women's experiences, researchers could use CRT to elucidate the various ways in which African American women have been oppressed, particularly the double jeopardy of race and gender (Jean-Marie, Williams, & Sherman, 2009).

For many years, the African American women's experiences have been omitted, devalued, and misinterpreted, but they have used their strength and connections to Afrocentric epistemology to navigate different avenues of the institutionalized racism, sexism, and discrimination that have continued as a part of their experiences (Aiken et al., 2013). Historically, women have fought for equality since the 1960s, starting with the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (CRA). Leaders of the CRA sought to abolish discrimination based on race, color, religion, sex, or national origin in American society (Aiken et al., 2013).

From the development of the CRA, there were also other movements that developed, such as the Women's Right Movement. Leadership developed this movement to dismantle inequality for women in the workplace. The Women's Right Movement was not the first movement to exist in protecting women against workplace discrimination; in 1935, Mary McLeod Bethune organized the National Council of Negro Women, a coalition of African American women's groups that lobbied against job discrimination, racism, and sexism (Malveaux, 2013). The employment situation for African American women is compounded by the pay gap that these women experience in the workplace (Malveaux, 2013). In 2017, about 4-in-10 working women (42%) said they experienced gender discrimination at work, compared to the 2-in-10 men (22%) who said the same (Graf, Brown, & Patten, 2018).

Cook and Glass (2015) described women leaders as having the potential to contribute positively to an organization. As time elapsed, the representation of women in leadership ranks has increased, reducing the overall gender segregation within organizations. However, African American women remain significantly underrepresented in corporate leadership positions. The double standard for female and male leaders remains perpetuated today (Davis & Maldonado, 2015). Corporation managers would rather hire an African American male over a qualified African American female into a leadership position.

Several factors that impede the advancement of women into senior positions include the following: human capital barriers, gender-based stereotyping, differences in communication styles, lack of mentors and role models, and attitudinal and

organizational biases (Sabharwal, 2015). According to Fischbach, Lichtenthaler, and

Horstmann (2015), leadership is generally associated with masculinity, the belief that

women and men differ in women's leadership. Researchers have posited women are

overly emotional and unable to make sound decisions, which can hinder women

leadership. Schein (1975) developed the manager-think male paradigm to provide a direct

association of the belief of the emotional characteristics of female managers. As time and

research progressed, Schein's theory decreased, but his description of the male success

rate paralleled to that of the female manager remained. African American managers not

only have to encounter the lack of support, but they also battle with on-the-job

discrimination.

People may face discrimination in any organization in the form of the strongly

possessed values, beliefs, and perceptions about the social roles and behaviors of men

and women (Sabharwal, 2015). Women are generally hired into occupations with lower

income and fewer opportunities for advancement than the European American female

who possesses the same qualifying credentials. Women, more so African American

women, are less likely to be appointed to leadership positions, resulting in the glass cliff.

The glass cliff refers to the tendency of women to be more likely than men to be

appointed to leadership positions that are risky and precarious in a failing organization

(Ryan et al., 2016). With all past research showing the need for a strategic change in the

leadership of women, there was no mention of this woman being African American.

Significant research and data were collected on how women were strategically placed in

leadership positions; however, there has not been data collected on the race of the women

being appointed (Kulich, Lorenzi-Cioldi, Lacoviello, Frankio, & Ryan, 2015; Ryan et al., 2016).

Organizational Practices and Policies

Several researchers have discovered causes for the continued gender gap between women and males in senior leadership positions. Researchers have shown returned organizational, structural, and cultural barriers have prevented all women from advancing in organizations (Johns, 2013; Pullen & Rhodes, 2014; Schwanke, 2013). Long work hours, mobility, the culture of masculinity, social capital, and limitations on authoritative assignments that women can access are all categorized as organizational, structural, and cultural barriers (Johns, 2013).

Social and cultural barriers. Women in the workplace have made significant strides within the last century; despite the substantial increase of women in mid-management positions, males have continued to dominate executive positions. Women are underrepresented in governance, directorship, and executive leadership positions (Schwanke, 2013). By focusing those structural, organizational, and personal barriers that African American women faced in the workplace, I revealed a better understanding the internal and external obstacles.

Structural barriers. During a recruiting, hiring, and promotional process; managers are proceeded to portray a particular image at a managerial level. Organization leaders will most likely consider a male for a mid- to top-level manager position. Success, strength, aggressiveness, and competitiveness are some characteristics that organization managers view as determining a successful leader (Yousaf & Schmiede, 2017). Managers place

expectations on employees to focus on statuses, genders, or roles within the organization and enhance the potential for advancement or responsibility. Researchers have documented stereotyping as a major barrier for African American women as they ascend to top managerial positions. Stereotyping is not just a corporate issue; it can also be found in the dwellings of academia. There has been cultural stereotyping communicated to men and women alike since early childhood, which can be embedded into their behavior. Society plays a part in the shaping and molding of the mind of the individual from what roles in life should take on as they evolve into adulthood. The domesticated belief that women should be a homemaker, staying home and raising a family has been implied for decades. This cultural stereotyping convinces women they are only good for staying at home raising children, cooking, and cleaning. Without that psychological barrier of the "stay-at-home mom" mentality, women may obtain the same merits or compete on the same terms of men. Such structural factors are the reason for holding women from advancing to their full potential (Yousaf & Schmiede, 2017). According to Schwanke (2013), organizational structures can interfere with and inhibit female advancement.

Organizational barriers. According to Oakley (2000), the organizational barriers created cause a gender imbalance that often favors the recruitment, retention, and promotion of males over females. Organizational structures can interfere with and inhibit female advancement (Schwanke, 2013). Other factors can show why women are not being considered for upper management positions beyond elements of discrimination, race, and gender. These may include extending training opportunities, career development, promotions, and compensation; these are components of the glass ceiling

that African America women or women in general face. In senior level positions, women have faced being overlooked for advancement, but they have also been labeled as stereotypes, faced tokenism and sexism, and experienced the framing of the current state of gender inequalities that are all prevalent today (Schwanke, 2013). Researchers rationalized that men were better leaders than women to explain why there were more men in leadership roles compared to women; this disparity reinforced the idea that men were more suited to leadership positions (Ibarra & Petrieglieri, 2016). Women faced challenges when they attempted to align a networking relationship among their male counterparts. Ibarra and Petrieglieri (2016) stated that regarding networking based on gender, rationale hindered the advancement of women in leadership positions when networking was with women only.

Corporate Salary Gap

According to Blau and Kahn (2017), the gender wage gap was intensively investigated for some decades providing new empirical estimates delineating the extent of trends in the gender wage gap and potential explanations. The most substantial period of wage convergence between men and women was in the 1980s, and the progress has been slower and more uneven since then (Blau & Kahn, 2017). In the 1990s, the increase in the female labor-force plateaued, which caused a reduction in occupational segregation by sex. Blau's and Kahn (2016) provided statistical information associated with key characteristics, such as schooling, experience, industry, occupation, and union states. Women have become more highly educated than men in the overall population of the workforce, in turn, the educational gender gap narrows allowing the increase of women

into higher paying professional positions formerly provided for the male managerial and professional positions (Blau & Kahn, 2017).

Pucheta-Martinez and Bel-Oms (2014) stated that for decades, the remunerations received by males was higher compared to those of females, thereby giving rise to the gender pay gap. Blau and Kahn (2017) reported the most common gap in pay was explained by the capital theory and the occupational theory. Researchers can use the HCT to posit that individuals invest in themselves, thereby building their stock of knowledge, experience, and skills over the years (Blau & Kahn, 2017). Human capital can be occurred by investing in education, labor markets, or measured by the number of years of one particular job. Unfortunately, women tend to take less stock in human capital because they feel they are best served to address the domesticated responsibilities, and they are less committed to obtaining a career.

The occupational segregation approach refers to the exclusion of women from certain kinds of work, resulting in women concentrating on the lower-paid occupations (Pucheta-Martinez & Bel-Oms, 2014). Segregation can arise as due to employer discrimination in hiring and promotions, or even from the human capital differences in educational levels (Yousaf & Schmiede, 2017). Women are discouraged from entering higher wage occupations because of the discriminatory barriers that they face within the workplace.

Labor force participation is a major factor in understanding the developmental stages of women's wages. According to the 2016 U.S Bureau of Labor Statistics, women who were fulltime wage and salary workers had median weekly earnings that were 82%

of those of male fulltime wage and salary workers. Comparing the earning of 1979,

women's earning was 62% less than the earning of men. The significant growth in

women's earning occurred in the 1980s and 1990s. Since 2004 to today's current year,

the women-to-men earnings ratio has remained in the 80% to 83% range, as shown in

Figure 2.
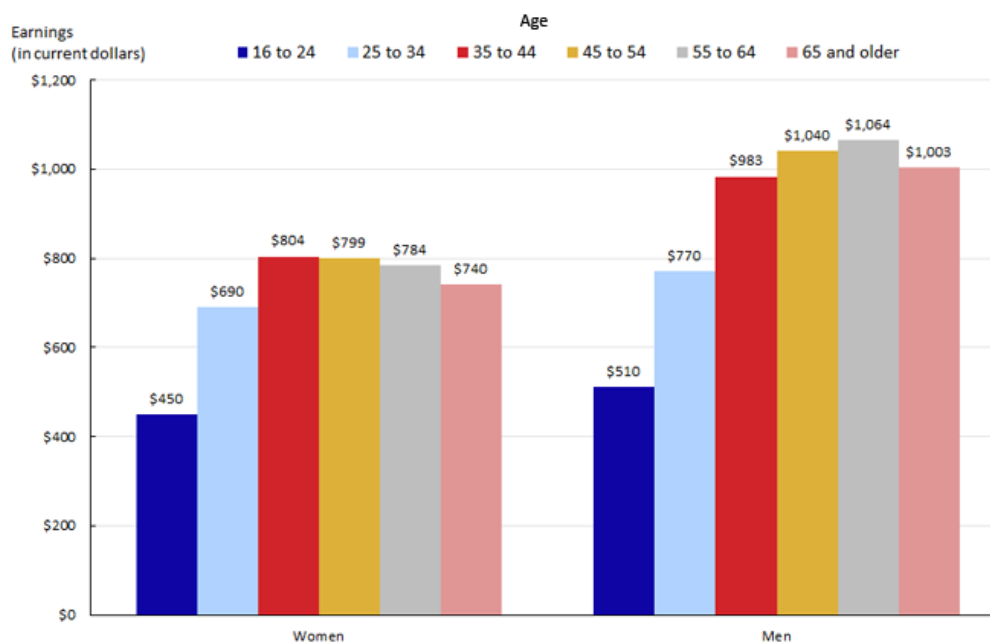
Figure 2. Women's annual earnings in percentage as it relates to that of the male earning for the years of 1979 – 2015. From "Highlights of women's earnings in 2015 (Bureau of Labor Statistics Report)," by U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2016, November (https://www.bls.gov/opub/reports/womens-earnings/2015/home.htm). Copyright 2016 by U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. Reprinted with permission.

During a further investigation of the gender wage gap analysis, researchers found

that the median, year-round, full-time workers showed slight changes among women

versus men. Blau and Kahn (2017) provided data from a period of 1996 to 2004 that

analyzed the wage gap between African American and European American women,

finding that European American women were above the median in salary.

Glass Ceiling to the Glass Cliff

In 1986, writers of the *Wall Street Journal* published a special report using the term glass ceiling to express how women were frustrated globally by oppression and challenges caused by an invisible barrier of corporate traditions and prejudices (Dyson, 2013). The underrepresentation of women in senior leadership positions is problematic for several reasons (Cook & Williams, 2015). The lack of women in senior level positions may constitute upper level positions being attainable, or there may be the perceived notice of the inherent values and culture of the organization. The organizational culture, such as the "old-boys club," which is discriminatory in its hiring and retention practices. The underrepresentation of women in senior level positions has become a global problem. Researchers have recognized this workplace social problem and have weighed in on the reasons of why there is such a lack of women, specifically African American women in top jobs.

Hoobler et al. (2014) suggested that four standard explanations centered on the underrepresentation of women in top managerial jobs. The first was the glass ceiling, which referred to discrimination due to sex-role stereotyping and so on; second, the pipeline explanation, which referred to why women were historically fewer in preparatory programs, leading to the assumption that there was not enough qualified women to promote. The third explanation was the psychology category, which is the idea that women were not genetically predisposed to top management roles; for example, men preferred the high stake managerial roles, while women would rather opt out and work from home doing the family responsibilities. The fourth explanation was the "24/7

economy," which focused on the way work was structured that required time and energy needed for all employees in an organization to be competitive. In today's world, women are the head of the household as single mothers, responsible for the greater percentage of the parenting duties of raising a family. This explanation indicated that women would not be suitable for the responsibilities of a top level management position because they would not have the ability to stay late or come in early because of the household responsibilities of caring for a family.

Sahoo and Lenka (2016) stated that gender diversity by organizations improved the organization's brand image, corporate governance norms, corporate communication, social responsibility, and work ethics. According to Holder et al. (2015), as African American women in corporate America ascend the upper management ladder, they encounter serious challenges that will limit the access to the C suite (a term used to refer to a corporation's senior executive levels). African American women corporate leaders likely use coping strategies to protect themselves against the humiliation, marginalization, and frustration experienced while breaking barriers to access the C suite (Holder et al., 2015).

The representation of African American women who currently hold senior level positions within organizations resembles the characteristic of tokenism; they hardly have any say in the management decision making and have low access to power (Sahoo & Lenka, 2016). The term glass cliff was first used in business literature when referring to the phenomenon whereby women may be preferentially placed in leadership roles that are associated with an increased risk of negative consequences (Sabharwal, 2015). As

women break through the glass ceiling, they fall from the glass cliff, as they remain categorized as beneath the male counterpart in organizations.

Race, Gender, and Class

With gender, there were issues and barriers based on this study, especially when viewing diversity in the workplace. Although women have entered the workforce in high statistics and moved forward into professional positions, admission to senior leadership positions has remained limited for African American women (Barton, Burns, & Kerby, 2012). Researchers have studied how gender and race have interacted to inform African American leadership development. Women of color experience double jeopardy of having a non- European American ethnic background while also being female. These women are discriminated against due to the duality of being women as well as a minority (Davis & Maldonado, 2015). As a result of this issue, African American female leaders may find the need to refrain from what is viewed as a full authentic expression of self in the workplace hoping to achieve organizational acceptance and credibility. This process can also hinder these women from being prepared to become the leaders they desire to be (Byrd, 2008)

This guarded presentation of self in the workplace can stifle the ability of these women to develop as leaders. Having this guarded personal can also enable African American women to feel like they do not belong in the workplace, thereby feeling like being the "other" in the workplace. Personal attributes can include gender, race, ethnicity, or nationality, which are the lenses that are used by people to view the world. The more different people are, the more they feel they do not fit in the workplace (Thorpe-Mascon

& Pollack, 2014). And whether it is believed or not, African American Women are subject to overt and covert racism. African American women experience bigotry that women face in society; however, research on racism and sexism in the United States ignores the interactions of race and gender for African American women (Davis & Maldonado, 2015).

Organization managers face challenges as the workplace has become even more diverse with applicants being of immigrants, people of color, and women who can now apply for entry into positions and industries that were once not open to them. For this reason, the major obstacles to upward career mobility are no longer at the recruitment and job entry stages of the employment process but at the advanced stages. One study arose from a desire to fill gaps in knowledge regarding the unique experiences of African-American, Hispanic, and Asian-American women in business careers (Giscombe & Mattis, 2002).

Managerial ranks are segregated not only by race but also by gender which means that few people of color are holding important positions. Studies concerning African-American managers' experiences with people training and sponsoring them; reveals that it is harder for them to obtain trainers that can assist them in building the type of developmental relationships necessary for long term career development. Researchers also found that African Americans with MBA's experience significantly less access to role models and mentors than European American (Giscombe & Mattis, 2002).

Research has demonstrated that people of color entering the organization must accept existing corporate normality's that have been created by the European American

male majority as a matter of organizational survival which can be challenging for people of color (Sabharwal, 2014). Research has shown corporate cultures of big business promote a "lukewarm, reserved, and impersonal" interpersonal bearing among its members, which is not usually shared by non- European Americans (Killian et al., 2005, p. 155). Giscombe and Mattis (2002) revealed that groups of non- European Americans held the more collectivist-cooperative orientation to a work task than European American s, while European American s displayed more competitive behavior.

Even in the field of education, the African American woman educational leader must learn approaches to gender inclusiveness to disrupt such things as racism and sexism when holding the position of leadership. These women must learn how to develop a leadership style that is comprehensive while enabling teamwork within the workplace that they manage. Teamwork is an all-important issue as the workplace includes demographic changes in society allowing more opportunities for women of color to rise to leadership roles within professional organizations thereby having the ability to become prevalent (Jean-Marie et al., 2009).

Though much research has been performed concerning the subject of leadership, most of the literature on leadership pursues the discovery concerning the differences between male and female leaders while ignoring the differences that race and gender may play in allowing an individual to have access to leadership development. The literature is rising with studies on understanding how double jeopardy for minority women might reveal itself in organizations; however, this oversight has left a gap in the understanding

of how African American women's racial and gendered identities influence their development as leaders (Warner et al., 2018).

Coping

Everett, Hall, and Hamilton-Mason (2010) believed the best way for African American women to understand the stressors involved exploring the interlocking effects of race, gender, and social class stressors and the influences on their abilities to cope. African American women and women, in general, face substantial barriers in advancing to top-level management positions in organizations. Researchers have suggested that African American women tend to have more negative experiences in the workplace than European American men and women (Linnabery, Stuhlmacher, & Towler, 2014). The interconnection between race and gender, the African American women, seems not just encounter the glass ceiling but a concrete wall as it addresses obtaining top organizational leadership positions. Despite the negative rhetoric, African American women must navigate through in the workplace; it is worth understanding the strengths they rely on whether it is social support or coping strategies. African American women or Blacks, in general, are prone to seek more social support across a variety of contexts such as family, their job, their friends, or something else important to them (Linnabery et al., 2014).

Stress is a concept that is a word that is not consistent to define because it affects everyone differently. Stress could cause psychological changes in the body as well as changes in a person's behavior, mood, and emotions. Some stressors can originate from within an individual's environment and various intense situations. Researchers have categorized stressors as acute or chronic; acute stress consists of changes in conditions or

a disruption of the status quo, whereas chronic stressors are those that are an ongoing aspect of the internal or external environment (Hall, Everett, & Hamilton-Mason, 2012). Stressors come in all forms; African American women experience discrimination in the workplace in ways, such as stereotypes, excessive demands, an absence of mentorships, exclusion from the workplace cliques, being ignored or harassed, and the assumptions that they are incompetent. African American women corporate leaders are more likely to use coping strategies, such as self-empowerment. Self-empowerment is an adaptive behavior that is practiced by African American individuals to respond to racial microaggressions in the workplace (Holder et al., 2015).

For many centuries, African American people coped through stressors by leaning on their historical roots of religion or spirituality, as well as armoring, shifting, support network, sponsorship and mentorship, and self-care. As researchers considered the processes that African American women had to process discrimination, they concluded with the charting of racial microaggressions illustrated in Figure 3.
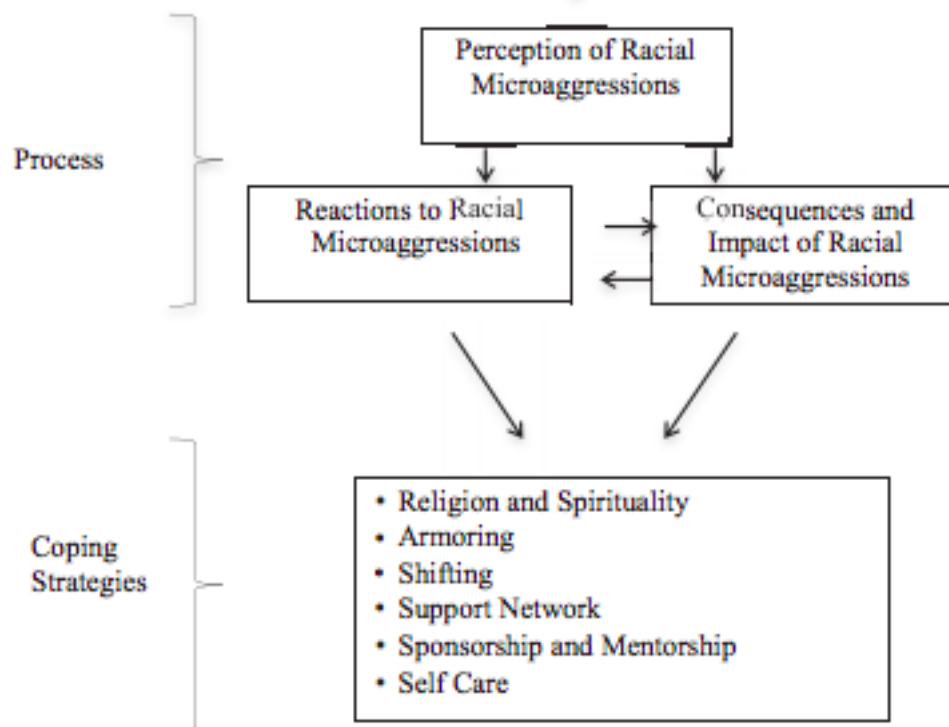
Figure 3. The Organizational framework: Racial microaggression, processes, and coping strategies. From Racial microaggression experiences and coping strategies of Black women in corporate leadership, by A. B. Holder, M. A. Jackson, & J. G. Ponterotto, 2015, *Qualitative Psychology, 2*, p. 164. Copyright 2015 by American Psychological Association. Reprinted with permission.

African American women use shifting and self-care as coping strategies to deal with stressors in the workplace beyond the factor of racism, which is the most common stressor. Shifting is an internal process that that breaks down the African American women's sense of self and wholeness. Shifting is an invisible stressor that can cause devastating effects in physical, emotional, and spiritual wellbeing. When someone experiences the shifting, they will show signs of being sleep deprived, severe cases of hypertension, anxiety attacks, weight gain, or emotional eating. Armoring coping is an adaptive protective mechanism that is used to instill self-pride, family, and culture to function in the workplace. With African American women holding leadership positions in

corporate America, not sharing that space with other women who resemble them, they tend to gravitate to the support network of coping. Support network coping is having a circle of trusted advisors who could provide strategies and guidance for addressing discriminatory actions.

Despite the use of adaptive coping strategies and racial microaggressions, the African American woman remains underrepresented in senior level positions, which creates a feeling of hypervisibility; therefore, their behavior is scrutinized and intensely monitored (Holder et al., 2015). African American women experience psychological distress on a much higher level than other employed women hired within organizations. African American women identify with two types of resistance coping strategies; using one's voice as powerful and resisting Eurocentric standards of beauty. Using one's voice as power refers to actively speaking up and directly addressing microaggression to the perpetrator as a way of regaining power (Lewis et al., 2013).

Stereotyping

According to Cundiff and Vescio (2016), gender stereotypes provide a viable explanation for why women are underrepresented, and men are overrepresented in senior leadership positions. Cundiff and Vescio conducted at the study of gender disparities, examining whether stereotypes influence attributions to discrimination. Research conducted by several researchers explains the underrepresentation of women in the leadership positions in the field of science, math, technology, and engineering (STEM). Having a leadership role in the fields above lead people to believe those positions should be possessed by men and that women lack the skills and traits necessary to be successful.

Although slavery as a formal institution ended almost 150 years ago, ethnic minorities continue to face a social and economic environment of inequality that invariably takes a toll on mental health (Ashley, 2014). There is a metaphoric phrase coined about the African American woman, "angry Black woman." This mythology presumes African American women are irate, irrational, hostile, and negative despite what circumstance they face. As these negative undertones describe the African American women to be someone is unwelcoming, strained relationships, and aggressive. However, these stereotypes lack representation in professional literature.

Lewis et al. (2013) defined the stereotype of the "strong Black woman" as a positive stereotype because they showed strength, resilience, and perseverance; however, this stereotype could also be harmful enough to inordinate stress. From birth to death, barriers of stereotyping and oppression are consistent with African American women based on their gender and race (Lewis et al., 2013). African American women must contend with racial and ethnic legacies where they are segregated from workplace advancements because they are viewed as not containing the intellect or moral standards as their counterparts. Researchers have consistently documented the stereotype that Blacks are generally perceived as less competent than European Americans; they are lazy, ignorant, and stupid with expectations of failure.

The media have become the main communication source to portray the positive and negative characteristics of individuals. Edwards (2016) stated that media played a significant role in the negative stereotyping of all nationalities, not just the African American woman. Stereotypes of African American women and the usage of the media

creates images that discredits the effectiveness of their leadership abilities, professional

standards, and intelligence. African American women continue to find ways to preserver

beyond the whispers of the degrading labels placed upon them such as Mammy, Sapphire

the Matriarch, and Jezebel. The iconic figure of the mammy came into fruition during the

time of slavery that speaks to the notice of gender oppression. Sewell (2013) described

the mammy as the "Black mammy," as a household servant who generally had specific

duties to perform; duties that are mainly connected with caring for the slave owner's

children. The mammy's primary duties in the household of her slave owner was not

limited to childcare, but to serve as a direct juxtaposition to her head of household.

Researchers further defined mammy as a husky, mannish African American

woman with broad shoulders, strong arms, and firmly planted large feet to support a wide

stance. Unlike the icon of the mammy, an indigenous African American woman, the

Matriarch takes the African American female outside the European American home and

looks at her life with children and a husband (Sewell, 2013). According to Bergmann

(2011), European American women in comparison to African American women during

slavery epitomized purity and were set upon a pedestal. The namesake Sapphire is given

to the African American women who worked in the fields and labored alongside the men.

Sapphire is characterized as a pushing, aggressive, overbearing woman that will drive

family away from cohabitation. Unlike the mammy being a large woman and the

Sapphire being field help; the Jezebel is known for her overly flirtatious and sexually

explicit nature (Sewell, 2013).

There have been numerous stereotypes to emerge describing the African American female since slavery to continue the marginalization of the group. Having the negative stereotypes assigned to your racial make-up is not only demoralizing but damages the image of the African American women as well as impacts devastation on her psychological well-being. When labels are placed upon someone in such a manner it depicts a stigma on their character as not being suitable for high-ranking leadership positions.

Summary and Conclusions

Researchers showed the experiences of African American women and the barriers they face. I discussed barriers, such as race, gender, sexism, inequalities, organizational practices and procedures, support, stereotypes, the glass ceiling influence, and the attempts that African American women faced as they attempted to ascend to leadership in corporate America. In many ways, African American women have displayed themselves as appropriate and professional as possible through education, advanced skills, and knowledge. The negativity placed on African American women has caused a great deal of subjective racist and sexist behavior to occur within organizations leading to policy and procedural changes to take place to protect against punitive damages. However, there is still a gap in the literature that researchers have not placed emphasis, that is the African American women who has advanced into executive level roles during the last year (Catalyst, 2017).

There has been substantial literature research on the lack of African American women in chief executive positions of corporate America. I presented evidence that there

was still much needed research to be done for studying the lived experienced of African American women aspiring to chief executive leadership positions in corporate America (Davis & Maldonado, 2015). Results of previous studies disclosed race, gender, class, and the intersection as major contributors to the underrepresentation of African American women in leadership roles. Although there have been support structures that African American women have built for themselves, as well as coping mechanisms (e.g., family bonds, faith, and friendship) that have assisted with the psychological stress placed on them, these still do not compensate for the injustice faced through job seeking opportunities.

Chapter 2 included the literature supporting the research topic and affirmed that gaps in the literature persisted. A qualitative research methodology with a transcendental phenomenological research design was the most applicable in gathering information for this study of lived experiences of African American women in senior executive leadership positions in corporate America. Therefore, Chapter 3 includes a discussion of the research method, design, role of the researcher, the selected methodology, and issues of trustworthiness. The selected qualitative methodology using a transcendental phenomenological research design was deemed appropriate for gathering the necessary information to support this study.

Chapter 3: Research Method

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative transcendental phenomenological research study was to explore the lived experiences of African American women regarding the barriers they faced relating to race, gender, and stereotyping differences that influenced their leadership development and limited advancement in a Fortune 500 corporation. I aimed to explore the lived experiences of African American women holding senior level positions in corporate America as they related to microaggression in the workplace and the coping mechanisms they used to deal with biases resulting from the effects of intersectionality. The theoretical framework of intersectionality, CRT, and BFT served as a window through which I focused on lived experiences r of discrimination, oppression, and intersectionality of African American women in corporate America.

I used the conceptual framework to guide this study emphasizing race, gender, and stereotypes of an ostracized group, African American women (Aiken et al., 2013; Crenshaw, 1989; Nadal et al., 2015). I aimed to explore the underrepresentation of African American women in corporate America by identifying factors that contributed to increased visibility of the African American woman in positions of CEO, chief operating officer (COO), or chief financial officer (CFO). Second, I aimed to obtain a deeper understanding of coping strategies African American women in the workplace used to deal with discrimination (Lewis, 2015).

I could have taken a quantitative approach in which the variables of race and gender stereotypes and organizational procedures were subject to statistical analysis to

explain the phenomenon of lack of advancement of African American women in business. In using a quantitative approach, there were limited advantages, such as being able to measure the *when, how,* and *how many* regarding the variables and the lack of African American women in senior level leadership roles (see Palinkas et al., 2015). The disadvantage of using the quantitative approach was the research data would lack the comprehensive views and understandings of the experiences that the African American women who aspired to leadership positions faced.

Because of the disadvantages listed above for quantitative approaches, a qualitative research method was the most appropriate for gathering the desired information on the lived experiences of African American women aspiring to senior level leadership positions in corporate America. I selected participants based on their reaching leadership positions to inquire into the essence of their experiences as reflected in the conceptual framework.

Research Design and Rationale

I collected data for this qualitative transcendental phenomenological study to answer the following overarching question:

RQ: What are the lived experiences of African American women in their career paths that helped to them attain a leadership position and remain in it?

The central concept of this study was the underrepresentation of African American women as senior level leaders in corporate America. Although the number of African American women at the executive level increased in corporate America in the last several years (Catalyst, 2017). African American women continued to face barriers related to

race, gender, class, stereotyping, and organizational policies and procedures. Previous researchers have found disparity regarding what African American women have faced when occupying executive positions in the U.S. workforce (Chrobot-Mason & Aramovich, 2013; Cook & Glass, 2015; Killian et al., 2005). By incorporating the literature reviewed with the qualitative research method, I examined the lived experiences of African American women who held senior level positions in corporate America. The 10 African American women participants provided their lived experiences of the barriers they faced advancing their careers in corporations.

Research Method

The primary focus of this study was the underrepresentation of African American women in corporate America. A qualitative research method was the most appropriate for this study, as opposed to the quantitative research method. The qualitative research method probes the reasoning behind the experiences or phenomena along with the *why* and the *how* of the decision-making process (McCusker & Gunaydin, 2014). Qualitative researchers use the open-ended question format in interviewing participants to gain understanding of their experiences. By collecting data from the semistructured questioning format, themes and patterns emerge are then interpreted through the lens of the conceptual framework.

Moustakas (1994) suggested that the research questions should be broad, consisting of a central research question studied. The questioning process of this research involved me using the broad questioning format blended with a central, focused question. Using the broad questioning format elicited responses that led to textual and structural

experiences of each participant. After reviewing the research strategies of quantitative and the mixed method approaches, I determined the qualitative transcendental phenomenological method was best suited for developing an understanding of the lived experiences of the African America women in corporate America. After the approval of the Walden University Institutional Review Board (IRB), I posted a request for participants, after which I scheduled interviews with qualified participants. I used a semistructured interview model to examine the lived experiences of 10 African American women in higher positions than that of management, assistant management, director, or assistant director positions. I conducted the interview process using the web conferencing software GoToMeeting.

Research Design

Matua and Van (2015) defined phenomenology as a discipline that researchers use to investigate people's experiences to reveal hidden truths. I chose the transcendental phenomenological research design because it allowed me to gain a deeper understanding of the lived experiences of the African American women currently working in a corporate leadership position with the aspiration of advancing to a chief executive position in corporate America. The attributes associated with the transcendental phenomenological inquiry were shared and mutually understood experiences of all those who participated in the study.

A qualitative research method is used when researchers want to understand how people interpret experiences, construct individualized worlds, and make meaning of experiences (Daher, Carre, Jaramillo, Olivares, & Tomicic, 2017). I used the

transcendental phenomenological design to support the lived experiences of the participants. According to the processes set forth by Moustakas (1994), the transcendental approach provided me with the flexibility to attain essential descriptions of experiences using logical, systematic, and coherent approaches to obtaining useful information. The qualitative phenomenology method of this research enabled me to connect the complexities on issues of race, gender, class, stereotyping, and organizational processes and procedures.

The quantitative research approach would not apply to the format of this study, as quantitative research is generally focused on data from large populations. Quantitative methods would not provide the opportunity to researcher to develop probing questions to gain additional information from the selected participants. Quantitative research methods use predefined questionnaires that would limit the amount of useful data collected from the participants to provide a clear understanding of the lived experiences. From a broader perspective, quantitative research is a type of empirical research into social or human problems, testing a theory consisting of variables that are measured with numbers and analyzed with statistics (Yilmaz, 2013). The qualitative method was a more practical choice for this study because of the inherent design of the study to allow the opportunity to individualize probing questions to obtain supporting information from the participants in the data collection process. The qualitative approach allowed the participants to verbalize their experiences with their own words through interviews (see Yilmaz, 2013).

Role of the Researcher

As the researcher, I was the data collection instrument. Phenomenology requires the researcher to investigate the perceptions of the study participants' experiences, and thus offers windows for new themes through awareness of the people's perceived ideas (Vogl, 2013). Additionally, phenomenology brings forth knowledge as experienced cognizance, a discipline that details what people essentially and appreciate in their immediate experiences and awareness. The application of this approach calls for *epoché* in observation, resisting being limited to previous assumptions based on past experiences and giving room for new knowledge to emerge (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). Creswell and Creswell (2017) defined epoché as the initiative taken by a researcher to desist from being influenced by past feelings, experiences, and prejudices on a given phenomenon, which is a crucial aspect of any transcendental phenomenological research.

My role as the researcher included conducting a literature review on the research topic, developing research questions, and interviewing a purposeful sample of participants. According to Onwuegbuzie and Byers (2014), in qualitative research, a greater emphasis is put on the researcher as the instrument of analysis, encouraging the expansion of a more collaborative, mutual, and dialogical process concerning the individual being evaluated. I collected and analyzed the data, which included interviews with and journaling on 10 English-speaking African American women in senior level corporate positions. I also presented the study results to interpret the findings and provide recommendations based on the conclusions.

I conducted semistructured interviews using a web platform GoToMeeting or by telephone if requested by the participant. Vogl (2013) noted that face-to-face, semistructured interviews were more effective than conducting telephone interviews. Telephone interviews tended to miss the visual communication cues of the participant. The use of GoToMeeting video conference helped provide visual communication indications of the participant becoming uncomfortable or distracted. The use of both methods was due to the participants being located outside of a reasonable driving distance in order to avoid unnecessary expenses to either the researcher or participant. The interviews occurred with those participants who completed the informed consent to participate and the demographic form that was sent via e-mail.

My role as the researcher during the interview process involved me speaking less to remain neutral and allow the participants to have the flexibility needed to describe in detail each experience. I maintained a professional rapport with the participants and used the interview protocol to guide the data collection when interviewing. My work as the interviewer involved being thorough; therefore, I rehearsed and followed the script in the interview protocol (Appendix B). The analysis of the interview data referenced my journaling notes. I employed the art of a successful interview with participants by rehearsing the interview questions (Appendix A).

I used reflective journaling to remain neutral as the researcher and avoid bias. Vogl (2013) suggested that researchers should document or record the feelings they experience during the events, along with behaviors or conditions that might invoke subjective emotions from the researcher. Journaling provides a means of reflection of the

researcher's thoughts and feelings, which aids in the suspension of judgement of the data being collected. As the researcher, I had no personal or professional relationship with the participants chosen for this study.

Research Bias

As stated in the role of the research, I was the instrument of analysis in this study. Pannucci and Wilkins (2010) defined researcher's biases as any tendencies that prevented unprejudiced consideration of a question. In research, bias occurs when systematic error is introduced into sampling or testing by selecting or encouraging one outcome or answer over others (Pannucci & Wilkins, 2010). In research interviewing, bias can occur at any phase of research, such as in the study design, data collection, the process of data analysis. There is some degree of bias presented in any research study.

In utilizing the qualitative transcendental phenomenological research, the biases of the researcher could alter the results of the research study; therefore, the processes of bracketing and interpreting the biases before the analysis of the data was critical. As a researcher, I abstained from biases or judgement about the phenomena under investigation. I focused on epoché, another name for bracketing. Epoché was a Greek term used by Husserl meaning to stay away or abstain from presupposition or judgements about phenomena un the investigation (Yüksel & Yildirim, 2015). The aim of epoché was to describe the narrative experiences of the participants and set aside my own natural attitude or assumptions of the data being collected. My preparation as the interviewer for this study involved me rehearsing and following the script in the interview protocol (Appendix B).

I am an African American woman employed in a middle-management position that is not within corporate America. My position was within a local state government agency, which my desire was to obtain a position as director. I found that I possessed common experiences relatable to other African American women's experiences mentioned in the reviewed literature for this study. My life experiences in the local state agency included the advancement to middle-management, which placed me in line for an executive- level role. However, my progression to middle-management was not a direct placement; there was delay in my placements, as there was lack in mentoring, role models, and exposure, in addition to possible race and gender barriers.

To minimize the personal biases, I documented all prior experiences that I associated with the phenomenon to ensure that focus was on the lived experiences of the participants and not my own. With the information collected from the participants, I bracketed experiences, information, and viewpoints before analyzing data. Bracketing was a technique used to document firsthand experiences, biases, prejudices, and positions that influenced any interpretation of data before an interviewing process was to begin (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). Each participant's interview was recorded and transcribed according to the practices, policies, and standards of qualitative phenomenology research.

Methodology

Population

The population of this study consisted of African American women who were employed at the senior level leadership role in corporate America. After the approval by Walden University IRB, I selected 10 English-speaking African American women who

worked in the senior level leadership role in corporate America. Participants were purposely selected from the data received of the completed criteria questionnaire (Appendix C) matching the criteria of being African American women currently holding senior level positions in a corporate America company. I focused on *Fortune 500* companies within the United States.

Sampling Strategy and Criteria

I used purposive sampling technique because this approach led to an accurate representation of the population under study, and thus necessitated an accurate generalization and a rich description of the phenomenon under study (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). I used purposeful sampling to facilitate the identification of English-speaking African American women who had the knowledge and experience required to relate the phenomenon. In the case of not being able to recruit enough participants for this study, I utilized the snowball sampling. In the snowball sampling process, participants were asked to provide the names of additional African American women who met the criteria of the phenomenon and if they would be interested in participating. Although, I did not expect there was a need to evoke the snowball sampling as a backup plan to obtain additional participants.

The criterion for this study was that all participants must be African American women holding senior leadership positions in corporate America. To identify possible participants, I utilizes several social media outlets. I held accounts to social media for LinkedIn and Facebook to send messages and emails about my study. I phoned or emailed those meeting the inclusion criterion to request that they take part in the study.

Additionally, a snowball technique was employed where the recruited potential

participants were requested to refer any of their friends who met the same criterion.

Those who opted to take part in the study were briefed about the set inclusion criterion

and requested to refer people in their contacts who met the said criterion. In addition,

cold calling normally was not very productive; therefore, I used the snowball technique to

navigate past those challenges. These techniques helped in selecting the 10 participants

needed for this study of African American women in senior level leadership roles who

aspired to attain the positions of CEO, COO, or CFO positions in U.S. organizations.

      I increased my participant response up to 20 people to increase the chances of

reaching the set mark of 10 as soon as possible. Patton (2014) recommended that

sampling sizes in qualitative research should remain small to anticipate rational coverage

of the phenomenon of the study. Bryman and Bell (2015) noted that a small sample size

was vital in qualitative studies because it allowed collection and exploration of data.

      During the recruiting process, I provided the link to SurveyMonkey to access the

demographic criteria questionnaire mentioned within LinkedIn; this questionnaire listed

the requirements for taking part in this study. The criteria for participating in this study

was given to the participant in the request for participants, the interview protocol, and the

informed consent information; I reiterated the requirements before beginning the

interviewing process. The criteria questionnaire was used to eliminate those participants

who did not meet the requirements to participate in this study.

      Morse (2015) defined saturation as "data adequacy" and operationalized as

collecting data until no current information was obtained. In the case of a transcendental

phenomenological study, the point at which data saturation was attained was different than if I used a case study design. I used probing questions and created a state of epoché in a phenomenological study in the quest for data saturation. The relationship between saturation and sample size occurred once the participants' information was collected, analyzed, and there was no additional insight on the phenomenon investigation retrieved from the African American women participating in this study. For data saturation, I examined, re-examined, and analyzed the data in case there were any new concepts or issues that emerged from the data collected.

Instrumentation

The data collection strategy for my research study included multiple data collection methods. In my study, the data sources derived from interviews, journaling, and the analysis of other sources, such as government reports and databases of African American women in senior level positions in corporate America, to increase the dependability of the study results.

Interviews. I used semistructured interviews as a data collection method to ensure the comfort of the participants to share their views of their lived experiences in senior level positions of corporate America (Appendix A). I used open-ended questions to gain in-depth, rich information based on participants' responses. I conducted semistructured interviews of 10 African American women who were in positions at the senior level of corporate America to understand their lived experiences.

Journaling. I used journaling to sustain a neutral state as the researcher. I utilized reflexivity, which was a state of being that monitors the research. When there is a study

of a person's historical implications of events, researchers use journaling to develop a practical and visible process of reflexivity (Malacrida, 2007). I used reflective journaling to capture my feelings and emotions as I identified with accounts of situations told by the participant experiences with discrimination and gender bias. As I journaled about my feelings, I considered the dates, time, places, and themes that emerged. Through the reflective journaling process, I focused on the data being collected from the account of the participants without entangling my own thoughts and feelings.I also incorporated government reports of African American women in senior level positions of corporate America. These additional fact-finding literatures were publicly available online. Despite the additional literature reading, those data were not substantial enough to compliment my study.

Recruitment

To conduct recruiting for this study, I posted a request for participants on the LinkedIn message board, a professional networking website. To gain as many qualified African American women to participate, I also posted the request for participation into a private group of over 3,000 members on Facebook, which was administered by college-educated African American women from many geographical areas within the United States. Any African American woman responding to the request to participate received the demographic criteria questionnaire to complete through SurveyMonkey.

Once receiving the criteria questionnaire, I reviewed all responses to ensure that I confirmed the set number of 10 participants. Each participant meeting the criteria received the informed consent form through email to acknowledge "I consent," which

they then returned by replying to the original email. After the informed consent form was returned agreeing to participate in the study, a follow-up email was sent to the participants to schedule a day and time for the interview. Within the informed consent form, the participants were made aware that the participation was strictly on a volunteer basis and their decisions to participate could be withdrawn at any time without repercussions.

The interviews were conducted using GoToMeeting for those who could not make the face-to-face interview. All participants received the interview questions (Appendix A) within 24 hours of confirming the interview date and time to provide a clear understanding of what will be asked of them. After beginning the interview questioning session, I reviewed the purpose of the study with each participant to ensure the open-ended questions remained in-line with the research.

Data Collection

Data collection occurred in my home office using the telephone and computer. My role as the researcher was to collect the data. I consistently used the interview protocol for each participant to ensure maximum data integrity. The primary source of data collected for this study consisted of transcripts generated from semistructured interviews conducted with qualified participants. I utilized the open-ended interview question of the interview protocol, which was supported by the theoretical framework of this study. The data collection was generated from the one semistructured interview session with each participant individually; these lasted between 45 minutes to 1 hour. I used the Moustakas's (1994) modified van Kaam's transcendental phenomenological

data analysis technique to analyze the participants' interview answers. The data analysis

procedure was the manual process using themes to transcribe the individual participants'

account of their lived experiences verbatim as it was being recorded (Bendick & Nunes,

2012).

I used several platforms to interview participants, such as face-to-face, video

conferencing, telephone, and computer. GoToMeeting video conferencing was a software

that I used to conduct interviews of those participants who could not confirm the

scheduled face-to-face session. To GoToMeeting software was an internet-based

software, thereby allowing me to conduct a virtual face-to-face session with participants.

The video recording via GoToMeeting enabled me to capture the facial expressions and

body languages of participants, which was an important communication component.

Another benefit to using the GoToMeeting as an interviewing tool to conduct research

was that participants were in the comforts of their own surroundings and could be as

private as they wished. Initial data were obtained from the consent form and completed

demographic form submitted by participants. I took case notes during the semistructured

interviews; I recorded those interviewees who agreed to the video conferencing and

recorded the audio recording from memo recording on my computer. These data were

converted into an Adobe readable pdf format and uploaded to NVivo11 for

methodological transfer to answer the research question.

Before completing the data collection process, member checking occurred by

sending each participant a copy of their raw data, which I transcribed for their review.

Once the participants received the transcribed data and approved those data for accuracy

of capturing the recorded lived experiences, I reiterated with them that participating in this study was on a volunteer basis, and all information collected would remain confidential. To show gratitude for their participation, I provided them with a completed copy of my dissertation.

Data Analysis Plan

I utilized the Moustakas's (1994) modified van Kaam's transcendental phenomenological data analysis technique to analyze the participants' interview responses combined with the NVivo11 computerized software. I used NVivo11 software to assist with data collation of patterns and themes from the collected data. The process of transcribing the interview responses was a manual process of transcribing the recorded lived experiences of each participant. During this data analysis phase, I examined all the responses, grouping and noting every expression relevant to the life experiences from which each participant recalled their stories. I sent a copy of raw data to each participant to review for accuracy. Should any of the participants return with changes or additions, an addendum to their initial recording was added to ensure all data followed the interview protocol process. After the final transcription of all the participants' interviews, each participant received transcripts as part of the final review and verification process.

The Moustakas's (1994) modified van Kaam technique was designed to assist with identifying underlying meanings of lived experiences. The use of this process was more feasible to my study and permitted me to transcribe the raw data into useful data. The Moustakas's (1994) modified van Kaam method was comprised of the following seven steps:

1. The first step was the process of horizontalization or the process of treating all data equally. This step began the preliminary coding and grouping by listing every quote relevant to the experience utilizing a manual process.

2. The second step was reduction and elimination of data; two questions were asked while analyzing the data: (1) Is this quote important to the participant's lived experience of the phenomenon, and (2) can this quote be reduced to its latent meaning? This process helped separate the invariant constituents of the experience from redundant and ancillary information.

3. The third step was clustering and thematizing the invariant constituents or the process of grouping significant statements and saying which were repetitive and overlapping together.

4. The fourth step was checking the themes again the data, which was the process of validation of the transcribed data and placing that data into meaningful units based on what the participants reportedly experienced.

5. The fifth step was construction of textural description, which was used to utilize verbatim excerpts and quotes for the participants' lived experiences.

6. The sixth step was construction of structural description, where I developed a structural description containing the participants' experiences.

7. The seventh step was construction of textural description for participants, which involved merging both the textual and structural to give a comprehensive understanding about the phenomenon.

The goal of this data analysis was to reduce the what (textural) and how (structural) meanings of the experiences into a summation that characterized the experiences of each participant to develop a comprehensive description. In the analyzing the manual data process, I chose to combine NVivo11, a computerized assisted qualitative data analysis software) in conjunction with the Moustakas's (1994) modified Van Kaam method to analyze the data collection for my study. NVivo11 software was a more user-friendly software to manage, access, and analyze the data collected. NVivo11 qualitative software aided in the classification of the participant's responses, carefully managing the data extracted from each session. This software coded the interviewees' responses to produce patterns and themes. I used interviews, journaling, and the analysis of public government reports and databases of women on corporate leadership to increase the dependability of the study results. I utilized NVivo11 to create a database to store and manage the data.

Issues of Trustworthiness

Credibility

In a qualitative research paradigm, credibility refers to how confident participants are that a study's findings are trustworthy, believable, and sound (Morse, 2015). Credibility calls for the collection of only accurate data, but the researcher is not guaranteed that all the responses are 100% true or are expressed in the most truthful way (Morse, 2015). To ensure the credibility in this qualitative study, I used prolonged engagement, persistent observation, and member-checking. The process of ensuring the participants that their interview responses were transcribed with accuracy was member-

checking. Potential biases could surface during the study that might be unsettling or uncomfortable to an organization or group. Creating discomfort for the organizations or groups could occur by exposing obvious discriminatory acts or challenges for the participant. As the study was conducted and the process became too uncomfortable for the participant, they could reject or cancel the invitation to participate without penalty.

Transferability

Morse (2015) defined transferability as how well the research could be applied or generalized to similar contexts or settings. Transferability is a criterion for trustworthiness that the researcher can determine as the study if the results of the study are transferable to his or her own situation. Generalizations are often made following the conclusion of a study to indicate how the findings of the representative sample compare with the larger population from which the sample is collected. Another way that Morse (2015) mentioned to enhance the transferability involved including participants from diverse settings. However, with this transcendental phenomenological approach, the experiences of the participants in a given area might resonate with those of similar participants in a different area; therefore, the results might be transferable. The recruitment process to select participants derived from a variety of resources, targeting different locales within U.S. boundaries.

I continued to conduct data collection until data saturation is obtained. Fusch and Ness (2015) defined data saturation as occurring when there was no current information, coding, or themes. If data saturation was not reached during the initial interview with the participants, I requested an additional interview with the participant to obtain more

information. Any additional note taking was dated and captured by documenting those notes in the notebook used for the duration of this study.

Dependability

Dependability in qualitative research is comparable to the of reliability in quantitative research (Shenton, 2004). In a quantitative research approach, reliability is assumed repeatable. To establish the dependability aspect of this research, I used the triangulation approach. I cross-checked and compared the data sources to ensure consistency. In this research, an instrumental data source was the literature reviewed in the context of the research issue. The second source of information was the interviews conducted with the senior level African American women. To ensure the outcomes of the research project, the two sources were cross-checked to ensure that these provided matching information. The use of the interview protocol and scripts of the semistructured interview questions aided in being consistent in documenting information as a means of the results being dependable.

Confirmability

Houghton, Casey, Shaw, and Murphy (2013) defined confirmability as the neutrality and accuracy of the data as closely related to dependability. I followed confirmability to protect myself and the data collected from unconscious bias that might occur. To aid in the avoidance of unconscious bias, I included bracketing and the practice of reflexivity of journaling of my emotions and beliefs about the data I collected to avoid research bias and improve confirmability.

Ethical Procedures

Confidentiality

During the process of utilization human subject, there were extreme ethical concerns that could arise between the researcher and the participants. The ethical treatment of the human subject (participants) required that the privacy and confidentiality of each participant remained a priority throughout the study, which was vital to the success of the study's outcome. Researchers could use ethical qualitative research to protect participants from adverse consequences, primarily through confidentiality agreements (Pollock, 2012).

In this study, I was the only one to identify the African American participants. An internal coding system ranging from AAWSL01 to AAWSL10 was used to identify each participant to protect their identities and keep their participation confidential. By conducting the interviewing process by using GoToMeeting conferencing software, I ensured sovereignty and confidentiality of the participants.

Informed Consent

The success of this research study depended on the informed consent of the study participants (Nishimura et al., 2013). All participants were sent an informed consent form that explained the purpose of the study, perceived risks, measures to guarantee proper process, and the confidentiality. All participants were asked to reply to the original email with the response of "I consent" to participant in the study. Within the informed consent form, the participants were informed that they could withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. All the participants' personal information, including informed consent

forms and other identifiable data, were assigned an internal code to conceal their identities.

Treatment of Human Participants

Access to potential study participants was made possible by utilizing the professional networking site, LinkedIn, which allowed subscribed members to post to open message boards; permission was not required when using this site. Besides using the LinkedIn professional site, participants were solicited through a private Facebook group with over 3,000 college educated African American women within this closed group. The members of this Facebook page were located within U.S. boundaries with a variety of professional backgrounds.

To ensure there were not ethical concerns regarding the recruiting process, I used purposeful sampling by selecting only African American women who met the criteria for this study. Women interested in participating in this study received a criteria questionnaire to complete and return through email (Appendix C). Internal coding was assigned to each criteria questionnaire to mask the identify of each qualified participant. I required only 10 English-speaking African American women to meet the criteria. I contacted those women who qualified; at that time, I reviewed the purpose of the study. With the initial contact, I also informed each qualified participant that their participation in this study was voluntary, and they could discontinue their participation at any time without penalty.

The IRB was necessary to ensure that myself and my faculty committee complied with Walden University's ethical standards and U.S. federal regulations. All staff and

faculty members from the major research areas reviewed the information submitted to

provide an IRB approval based on their assessments of the risks and benefits of study.

Participant selection began after the university research reviewer (URR) approval and the

IRB approval 11-27-18-0158636 was assigned to ensure the study methodology and

design adhered to the ethical research principals of the university.

Treatment of Data

There was no foreseen risk in participating in this study. The participants' safety

or well-being was protected through a secure coding system to protect the identity of each

participant. The data collected for this study were used exclusively for the purpose of my

research dissertation. The online interviews conducted via GoToMeeting were

completely private and secure. According to the GoToMeeting frequently asked

questions, the software solutions featured end-to-end Secure Sockets Layer (SSL), and

128-bit encrypted information and nonencrypted information was never stored in the

system. The collected data were stored on my personal computer within a password-

protected file folder in my home office. Files associated with this study were stored in the

computer software Nivo11, which was also encrypted and password protected. Should

the computer system that housed the research data become corrupted, the data was

backed up on an encrypted USB drive protected by password and locked in a personal

file cabinet in my home office. The personal file cabinet located in the home office has

the capability to be locked with a key. All protected documents associated with this

study, such as notes, transcriptions, and journals, will be protected for 5 years after the

completion of this study. After the 5 years have passed, I will destroy all associated documents and item by means of burning.

Summary

Chapter 3 presented the methodology of the transcendental phenomenological study with the use of qualitative research method. I used this method to examine, describe, and understand the underrepresentation of the African American woman in corporate America. The purpose of this qualitative transcendental phenomenological research study was to explore the lived experiences of barriers that African American women faced relating to race and gender differences that influenced their leadership development and limitations on advancement in a Fortune 500 corporation. I used this transcendental phenomenological qualitative research design to focus on the individual experiences, beliefs, and perceptions of the African American women who agreed to participate in the study (Smith, 2015).

The sample size of this study consisted of 10 participants. The criteria for participation in this study included only African American women willing to share their lived experiences, including aspirations of advancing their careers to CEO, COO, or CFO. The semistructured interview questioning occurred using GoToMeeting.

I ensured that I followed the proper ethical procedures to protect the privacy and confidentiality of each participant during and after this study. The data analysis process occurred immediately after the completion of each interview. The data analysis process was applied using Moustakas's (1994) modified van Kaam's method, and interpretive

transcendental phenomenological approach utilizing a qualitative analysis software
Nivo11.

Chapter 3 included a review of the research method, design and rationale, role of
the researcher, methodology, issues of trustworthiness, and the protection of the human
participants. Chapter 4 presents the findings of the study and includes a review of the
background, group demographics, analysis, evidence of trustworthiness, results, and
summary and conclusion. Chapter 5 presents a summary of findings, implications, and
recommendations.

Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of this qualitative transcendental phenomenological research study was to explore the lived experiences of barriers that African American women faced relating to race and gender differences that influenced their leadership development and limitations on advancement in a Fortune 500 corporation. The focus of the study was to understand better how African American women could be successful in reaching leadership positions in Fortune 500 companies. The overarching research question addressed in this study was:

RQ: What are the lived experiences African American womenin their career paths that helped them attain a leadership position and remain in it?

In this chapter, I present the research setting, demographics of participants, data collection, and data analysis of this study. Evidence of the trustworthiness, creditability, and study results are included in this chapter. These are summarized at the end of the chapter in transition to Chapter 5.

Research Setting

As the researcher, I was the data collection instrument. During the data collection process, the researcher involves having the ability to listen attentively to what is being said by the participant, knowing the research behind the collected data, maintaining control over any potential bias, and asking meaningful questions to yield the information to support the research (Slembrouck, 2015). Data were collected through the process of semistructured interviewing by asking one overarching research question. The interviews of the 10 participants were recorded and manually transcribed verbatim to ensure all

elements of the responses were captured accurately. I conducted the interviews of the 10 African American women who held leadership positions in Fortune 500 corporations in the United States in my home office in Virginia using my telephone and computer.

The 10 English speaking African American women in leadership positions in a Fortune 500 company were solicited to participate through posting a recruiting message on the public facing site, the LinkedIn social network, as well as using a private social group of African American women on Facebook. As the researcher, I was contacted either by e-mail or telephone, and interviews were scheduled according to the availability of the participants. The social media message was posted for 63 days; during that timeframe, 47 individuals expressed interest in participating. From the 47 individuals who showed interest, 12 did not meet the basic criteria to participate. Participant AAWSL08 requested to withdraw her participation in the study after receiving the transcription of her interview, stating she no longer felt comfortable with being a part of this study due to organizational changes in her company. Due to the number of interested participants, another participant was scheduled and interviewed so as to not delay the analysis of data.

Demographics

To be considered a participant in this research study, each person met specific criteria. The target population consisted of English speaking African American women who were in a senior leadership position of a Fortune 500 corporations in the United States and met the study's selection criteria. Participants were identified through purposeful sampling to aid in the identification of English-speaking African American

women. As stated in Chapter 3, I considered snowballing sampling should there be a situation of not reaching the minimum number of participants. I obtained the 10 participants needed to conduct the research without using snowball sampling. The locality of the participants was not captured, other than being employed in a Fortune 500 corporation in the boundaries of the United States.

The purposeful sampling of the participants included 10 English-speaking African American women currently employed in senior level positions of a Fortune 500 corporations in the United States. These participants were asked to describe their lived experiences in their current positions to explain what made them stay in that position. The participants were chosen based on meeting the basic criteria of the research study by submitting general information through a SurveyMonkey link provided in the initial contact message.

As the researcher, I collected the responses generated through the SurveyMonkey link. Through this link, general demographic information was collected to ensure only those individuals who met the criteria were contacted to participate in the study. From the data collected through SurveyMonkey, the criteria questionnaire was e-mailed to the participants who met the criteria of the study to fill out and return through e-mail. After receiving the completed criteria questionnaire, the informed consent and interview scheduling forms were e-mailed to each participant to be completed and returned to me using the e-mail address provided.

To conceal the identities and ensure the privacy of the participants, I assigned all participants a code for data collected, rather than their names. The coding was assigned to

each participant using a coding system, AAWSL01 through AAWSL11, for all related

data collected. Participant AAWSL08 requested to withdraw her participation in the

study, which was why there was an 11th participant code. The codes used were

represented as labels on all documentation received from the participants to engage in

this research study (see Table 1).

Table 1

Participants' Characteristics

Participant code	Job title	Age	Yrs. in current position	Education
AAWSL01	Sr. program manager	41-50	15	Masters
AAWSL02	Manager	31-40	6	Bachelors
AAWSL03	Human resources director	41-50	11	Masters
AAWSL04	Lead comptroller	51-60	14	Masters
AAWSL05	Sr. financial manager	51-60	23	Masters
AAWSL06	Director	51-60	17	Bachelors
AAWSL07	Director of marketing	41-50	11	Bachelors
AAWSL08*				
AAWSL09	Sr. account manager	31-40	7	Masters
AAWSL10	Director	41-50	2	Masters
AAWSL11	Sr. manager of sales	31-40	4-1/2	Masters

Note: Participant AAWSL08 requested to withdraw from the study due to no longer feeling comfortable about being a part of the study due to changes within her organization.

According to the age range and education shown in Table 1, most participants

indicated they voluntarily furthered their education. Each participant indicated they

believed that they would be more marketable when competing for leadership positions if

they had obtained an advanced degree (Figure 4). I used the data collected from the one

overarching question from each participant to explain the need to further their education.

Data in Figure 4 were not from a data collection question, but each participant believed it

was important enough to mention the accomplishment of obtaining an advanced degree.

Education
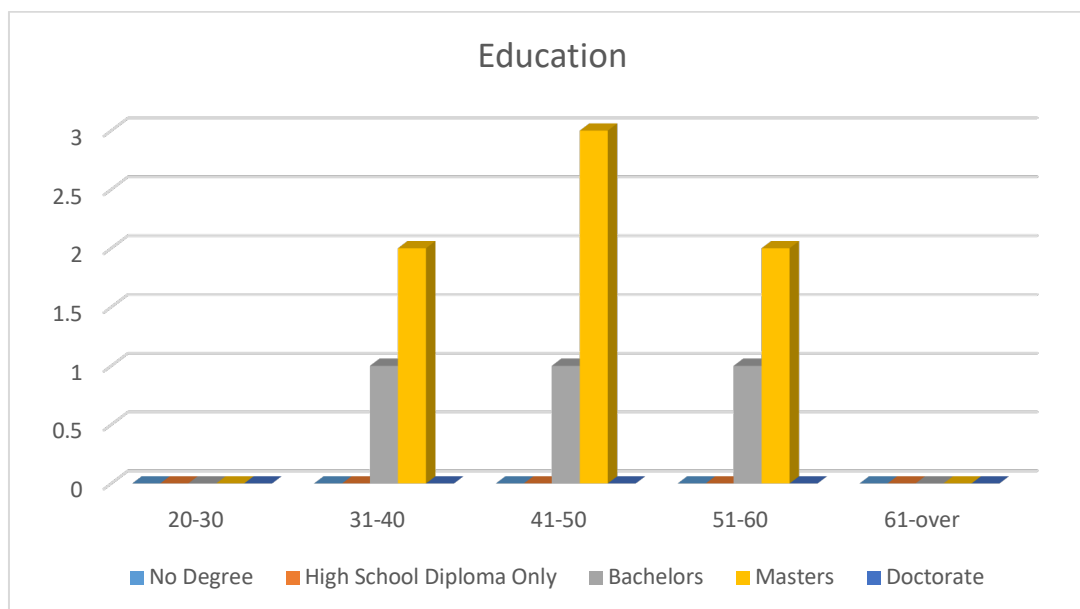
Figure 4. These data were gathered during the interviewing process with each participant. Although this question was not a data collection question, each participant volunteered this information in their responses to the overarching question.

Cook and Glass (2015) suggested that women's promotions to leadership positions depended on performance and the motivation to prove their worth. All participants stressed the importance of obtaining an advance degree. They believed it was going to be their only way of advancing and obtaining leadership roles in their current working environments.

Data Collection

Data collection started on November 28, 2018, following the Walden University IRB approval (approval number 11-27-18-0158636). I recruited participants using the professional social networking site, LinkedIn, and a closed Facebook group of college educated African American women with over 40,000 members from around the world. As stated in Chapter 3, to be eligible to participate in the research study, the participant

had to meet the research criteria of being an English-speaking African American woman

currently in a senior leadership position in a Fortune 500 company located in the United

States. The data collection phase of this study ended on February 28, 2019, when data

from the semistructured interviews and journaling did not generate any new themes,

therefore indicating saturation. Data saturation of the themes materialized during the

AAWSL05 participant's response to the open-ended, semistructured question. Due to the

withdrawal of participant AAWSL08's responses to the study, I conducted a reevaluation

of data saturation to ensure there remained evidence of saturation. The emerging themes

from the open-ended, semistructured interviews and journaling included *education,*

mentoring, diversity, and *stereotyping*.

During the process of collecting data, I followed the data collection plan indicated

in Chapter 3 with one modification of not using the GoToMeeting video conferencing

platform. The participants did not feel comfortable being video recorded. They all stated

they felt the video recording would not completely protect their identity. As the

researcher, when I was contacted from an interested participant, she was instructed to

submit a brief demographic criteria survey that was powered through SurveyMonkey. As

the demographic criteria surveys were received, I sent follow-up e-mails for the

participants to complete the criteria questionnaire (Appendix C). Once I received the

criteria questionnaire from the participant, the individual was next sent the informed

consent form, followed by the schedule semistructured interview form, to submit three

options for the best date and time to participate in the interviews. I created a data

collection timeline using a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet that I stored on my personal

computer (Table 2).

Table 2

Semistructured Schedule Interview Log

Participant code	Date of interview	Permission to record	Audio or video recording	Start time	End time	Duration (in minutes)
AAWSL01	Friday, December 14, 2018	Yes	Audio	9:00 a.m.	9:42 a.m.	42
AAWSL02	Tuesday, December 18, 2018	Yes	Audio	3:00 p.m.	3:38 p.m.	38
AAWSL03	Friday, December 21, 2018	Yes	Audio	10:30 a.m.	10:40 a.m.	40
AAWSL04	Monday, January 7, 2019	Yes	Audio	12:00 p.m.	12:32 p.m.	32
AAWSL05	Friday, January 11, 2019	Yes	Audio	9:00 a.m.	9:20 a.m.	20
AAWSL06	Wednesday, January 16, 2019	Yes	Audio	11:30 a.m.	12:15 p.m.	45
AAWSL07	Thursday, January 17, 2019	Yes	Audio	2:00 p.m.	2:47 p.m.	47
AAWSL08 *						
AAWSL09	Tuesday, January 22, 2019	Yes	Audio	4:30 p.m.	4:53 p.m.	22
AAWSL10	Wednesday, January 23, 2019	Yes	Audio	9:00 a.m.	9:37 a.m.	37
AAWSL11	Monday, February 25, 2019	Yes	Audio	1:00 p.m.	1:47 p.m.	47

Note: Participant AAWSL08 requested to withdraw from the study due to no longer feeling comfortable about being a part of the study due to changes within her organization.

After receiving the IRB approval, I started the initial contact to recruit participants

for this study on November 28, 2018, by posting a recruiting message on LinkedIn and

having the administrator post a message on the closed group on Facebook. The LinkedIn

message remained active from November 28, 2018, to February 28, 2019, and was made

public to nonmembers through the LinkedIn social networking site. The Facebook

message was posted on the same date as the message on LinkedIn. The Facebook

advertisement was posted within a closed group that reached over 40,000 members.

When viewing the statistics of how many viewed the message from Facebook, there were

over 6,000 views.

The interviewing process began on December 14, 2018 with the first participant. I followed the Interview Protocol (Appendix B) to ensure I stayed within the written procedure that was approved by the university's IRB committee. During each interview process, I received permission to audio record the semistructured interview. The interview times varied between the hours of 9:00 am and 5:00 pm, as indicated in the approved interview protocol documentation. The duration of the interviews ranged from 22 minutes to 47 minutes in length. After each interview was completed, I took journal notes on how the responses from each participant influenced my emotions and thoughts. The journaling was a practice of reflexivity of note-taking of a researcher's emotions and thoughts to avoid researcher bias (Malacrida, 2007).

I was the data collection instrument. I utilized a recording device to capture the recorded interviews. After each interview, I journaled my notes of reflection and let the recording and my notes rest for few days to give myself some time to release any after thoughts of any biases. After resting from the recordings, I manually transcribed each interview separately. The transcribed interviews were stored on my personal computer in an encrypted folder, as well as on an encrypted external USB drive that was in a locked filing cabinet in my home office. Once each interview had been transcribed within 24 hours of transcription completion, I emailed to each participant separately to complete the member checking process for accuracy or to make additions that the participant felt would be relevant information to include. Each participant had 14 days to review and return a response if they agreed with what was transcribed or to submit changes or to include additional information.

As the researcher, I stored the audio recordings, transcription, and member checking in NVivo11. I used member checking, a technique for exploring the trustworthiness and credibility of the respondent's responses (Birt, Scott, Cavers, Campbell, & Walter, 2016). In the next section, I discuss the data analysis using Moustakas's (1994) modified van Kaam method to analyze raw data.

Data Analysis

The data collection of in this study included semistructured, open-ended interviews and journaling to answer one overarching research question that enabled the creation of emerging themes based on the lived experiences of the underrepresentation of African American women in senior leadership roles. The data analysis process was completed in collaboration with the data collection process. Once the first semistructured interview was completed, I began to use the data to formulate the comparison of responses from the remaining participants.

I used Moustakas's (1994) modified van Kaam technique, which was designed to assist with identifying the underlying meaning of lived experiences. Moustakas's (1994) modified van Kaam six-step process of included horizontalization, reduction, elimination, thematization of the invariant constituents, investigation of the themes against the data, creation of individual textural descriptions, and creation of individual structural descriptions. I catalogued and managed the transcribed interviews using NVivo11 and journal notes to reduce research bias.

Horizontalization

The horizontalization step was the initial step that involved me categorizing and evaluating the narrative data collected during the participant's open-ended interviewing process and grouping data into a relevant and organized pattern. As specified by Moustakas (1994), the grouping of expressions or relevance to phrases was relative to the experiences noted from the interviews of all participants based on repetitiveness and similarity in meaning and language.

Reduction and Elimination

This process of reduction and elimination of responses from the data collection involved me determining the invariant constituents by querying each expression to two requirements: (a) an occurrence of the lived experiences being relevant and adequately important to be addressed for this study and (b) the ability to abstract and label latent expressions (Moustakas, 1994, p. 121). Should there be a statement not meeting the requirements in the analysis of overlapping and repetitiveness, the remaining criteria resulted in the invariant constituents relevant to the phenomenon of this study.

Clustering and Thematizing the Invariant Constituents

Clustering and thematizing involved the process of taking the excerpts and quotes to explore latent meanings and groups. During this process, the grouping formed the themes derived from the experiences captured from the participant. Using NVivo11 as a qualitative data analysis software, I analyzed the themes with the datasets that were representatives of the participant's story. Having already manually transcribed the

interview responses into separate files, I used NVivo11 to import the text from the document to analyze the frequency of terms and phrases.

Identification and Validation

Moustakas's (1994) modified van Kaam involves checking the invariant constituents and equivalent themes and patterns against the transcribed narrative of the interview of each participant. During this process of comparison of the invariant constituent and the themes, I identified if the themes were clearly expressed within the transcription. If the themes were irrelevant to the participant's experience, I considered whether data could be deleted, as based on Moustakas (1994, p. 121). Carefully analyzing the transcription data imported into NVivo11 was necessary to ensure the recounting of expressions was captured accurately.

Individual Textural Description

Individual textural involved the process of creating descriptions that utilized verbatim excerpts and quotes from the narrative of the participants' experience. The structuring of invariant constituents into themes provided the textural description of the African American women's leadership experience in corporate America. Due to having the ability to record the audio interviews of the participants, I could hear the emotional responses from the question being addressed. The goal of the interviews was to provide an opportunity for participants to elaborate on social and cultural factors contributing to the underrepresentation of African American in senior level leadership positions.

Identification of Key Themes

Collected during the data collection section, participants' responses were analyzed to categorize into a thematic order to reveal shared themes related to the one overarching research question. The examination of the electronic copy of the interview transcripts resulted in the generating of repetitive words to create the major theme category. These data were examined and reexamined with the consciousness that something new or unpredicted could emerge. The major themes from the analysis of the data were from all 10 participants' interviews created saturation of data. Through the data analysis of the lived experiences of African American women in senior leadership position in corporate American, four major themes and several subthemes appeared. All 10 participants (100%) referenced the four major themes. Six participants referenced the subthemes (60%). The themes and subthemes eluded to some perceived factors of barriers that African American women faced as they aspired to climb the corporate ladder to executive level positions. All 10 participants noted the major themes. There was also some emergence of subthemes to derive from the major themes not expressed by all participants.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

Creditability

I applied credibility without adjusting any strategies noted in Chapter 3, which was the process of ensuring the participants' interview responses would be transcribed as recorded. The technique to ensure credibility in the qualitative study involved me including prolonged engagement, persistent observation, and member checking. Nine of

the 10 participants agreed the analysis and interpretations of their semistructured for member checking were accurate. Participant AAWSL03 responded with wanting an opportunity to include additional information after ending the recording, stating she had additional thought-provoking information that she wanted to add. I compiled the additional information from participant AAWSL03 with the original transcription and resubmitted for member checking accuracy.

Participant AAWSL08 withdrew her participation after receiving the manuscript of her transcription, stating she no longer felt comfortable participating due to organizational changes within her company where she worked. The quality of the data was extracted from the process of coding to describe the themes and patterns of the responses from the participants within this study. Due to having to replace AAWSL08 with AAWSL11, the process began of sending the criteria questionnaire, informed consent, and scheduling forms to the new participant to move forward with the data collection to meet the minimum participation requirement.

Once the interview schedule was set and completed with AAWSL11, a copy of the transcription was emailed to AAWSL11 to review for accuracy. After receiving the last transcription, I began the process of analyzing the data collected. I used reflective journaling to note my thoughts, emotions, and feelings after each interview to avoid researcher bias before transcribing the participant's narratives.

Transferability

I applied transferability without adjusting any strategies noted in Chapter 3, which involved using purposeful sampling of 10 English-speaking African American women in

a senior leadership position within *Fortune 500* corporations located in the United States.

Data collection continued until saturation was achieved. Data saturation was reached

when there was enough information to replicate the study when the ability to obtain

additional new information was attained and when further coding was no longer feasible

(Fusch & Ness, 2015). I attained data saturation through semistructured interviews and

journaling. Data saturation did not begin to materialize until the completion of the fifth

participant's open-ended, semistructured interview with Participant AAWSL04. The

responses from AAWSL01, AAWSL02, and AAWSL07 were similar in the context of

the emerging themes. Transferability was a criterion of trustworthiness that could occur if

I determined if the context of the study's findings could generalize regarding the

phenomenon (Cope, 2014).

Dependability

I applied transferability without adjusting any strategies noted in Chapter 3, which

involved performing the cross-checking and comparison of the data sources to ensure

consistency and the stability of emerging themes. In my study, data sources included

interviews and journaling of 10 English-speaking African American women in senior

level positions in corporate America. Coded themes of the responses of the participants

provided evidence of the quality of the data.

Confirmability

I applied transferability without adjusting any strategies noted in Chapter 3, which

involved controlling unconscious bias. To aid in the avoidance of unconscious bias, I

used reflexivity of journaling after each open-ended, semistructured interview was

completed. The reflexivity journaling was evoked to capture my emotions and beliefs about the data I collected to avoid research bias. This process was performed immediately after the conclusion of each interview. I allowed at least a day to return to the audio recording of the interview to transcribe it into a written narrative to allow my thoughts to reset.

Study Results

The overarching research question was as follows: What are the lived experiences African American women, on their career path, that helped them to attain their leadership position and remain in it? I supported the overarching question from using interviewing and reflexivity journaling in the understanding of barriers that African American women in senior level positions faced in aspiring to obtain executive leadership positions.

In this section, I discuss the sources that support the emerging themes of *education*, *mentoring*, *diversity*, and *stereotyping*. The responses captured from the participants show a better understanding of concepts that may help African American women attain leadership positions. Themes and tables are generated using NVivo11 to indicate the occurrences of themes in the data. In this study, discrepant cases or nonconforming data are discussed where applicable.

Emergent Theme 1: Education

The education theme occurred in 100% of the responses transcribed from all participants. The subthemes that emerged from the theme education included job stability and salary. Subtheme occurrences in the data ranged from 30% to 60% (Table 3).

Table 3

Emergent Theme 1 – Education

| | Semistructured interview participants: AAWSL | | | | | | | | |
Education	01	02	04	05	06	07	11	Journaling	Percentage
Job stability	X	X		X	X	X	X	X	60%
Salary increase		X	X			X		X	30%

Interviews. Participants expressed a formal education would increase their chances in obtaining a promotion to a higher-level position in their organization. Education, coaching, formal training, and informal mentoring could provide African American greater opportunity to succeed in the workplace (Beckwith et al., 2016). All the participants had formal education at the bachelor's level; most continued their education endeavors to achieve a masters level degree. Out of the 10 participants interviews, seven (70%) earned a master's degree, and three (30%) had a bachelor's degree. Participant AAWSL01 stated,

> In my current position others were getting promoted around me, and I couldn't understand why. As I begin to analyze the situation, I noticed those who were getting promoted either were of the opposite sex and race that I was but did not have an advance degree. I took a long hard look at what I was missing because I really enjoyed my job, but I knew I was qualified to do much more that what I was doing. It seems like to me that for me having a bachelor's degrees, as for what the job required was not enough. I knew I really didn't have the time or money to go back to school to further my education. I eventually made the sacrifice to put myself through school to back to get a master's degree. It was a

debt that I really didn't want or could afford, but if I was going to advance at anything, I felt I needed to do this.

The transcription of this response was captured on the scheduled, open-ended, semistructured interview on December 14, 2018. The participant confirmed the analysis and interpretations of the interview data were accurate through member checking. Participant AAWSL02 stated,

> From the time I arrived into my current position, I am constantly having to prove that I am start enough to be in my current position. I started out in the organization with just a high school diploma and I did my job well. I had the experience to perform my current job duties but was told that I would not advance any further unless I go back to school to get a bachelor's degree. My company only gave partial financial assistance, the rest I had to pay for. If I didn't feel having my degree would benefit me to go elsewhere, I would have quit.

The transcription of this response was captured on the scheduled, open-ended, semistructured interview on December 18, 2018. The participant confirmed the analysis and interpretations of the interview data were accurate through member checking. Participant AAWSL07 stated,

> I was often asked what school I attended for my undergraduate degree. Being from a small rural area of only having access to two-year community colleges, I was so proud to tell people that I attended an HBCU (Historically Black College and University) to get my Bachelors. They way my coworkers kept asking the

same question made me feel like my degree was no better than having a high

school diploma.

The transcription of this response was captured on the scheduled, open-ended,

semistructured interview on January 17, 2019. The participant confirmed the analysis and

interpretations of the interview data were accurate through member checking.

Journaling. During my reflexivity journaling, I highlighted subthemes related to

education, such as job stability and salary increase. My journal notes from Participant

AAWSL01 were the following:

I sense the participant was getting a little emotional as she spoke candidly as she

remained in her current position, watching others around her get promoted. She

felt resentment of feeling forced to return back to school to attain another degree

but yet not having the guarantee to be promoted after completion of the degree. I

heard the anger in her voice because she felt she was forced into a financial

situation of having to pay for school without the increase in pay to compensate. I

could hear she was still uncertain of her job situation of being promoted. (journal

notes, December 14, 2018)

My journal notes from Participant AAWSL02 were the following:

I could hear that she was proud of her accomplishment of graduating from

college, but there was something else there. I could feel there was something else

that she was not telling, perhaps how she was made to feel like she would not

keep her job is she did not go back to school to earn a college degree. (journal

notes, December 18, 2018)

My journal notes from Participant AAWSL07 were the following:

> The moment she began to talk about receiving her degree, I could hear how proud she was in the accomplishment. How she talked about how proud it made her family. That happiness was short lived. She focused on trying to figure out the "why did it mattered where she earned her degree." (journal notes January 17, 2019)

Subtheme: Job stability. A subtheme emerged from the major theme of education in the responses from four of the 10 participants (40%). Job security was the guarantee that an employee could keep their job without becoming unemployed. Most people evaluated that the most crucial factor for job contentment was job stability (Sypniewska, 2014). Participant AAWSL01 stated,

> I felt I was very secure in my position and what I do because I have been working in my field for many years. I do know that I don't take my position for granted because I have seen people let go around me. It was kind of scary because coworkers who I have built a relationship with was being let go and I didn't know if I was going to be next. I was even afraid to take days off to take care of medical issues for myself.

The transcription of this response was captured on the scheduled, open-ended, semistructured interview on December 14, 2018. The participant confirmed the analysis and interpretations of the interview data were accurate through member checking. Participant AAWSL06 stated,

There were many scares at my job because it is heavily driven by what the market

value is doing. I have witnessed when the market value of trade drops below

certain numbers upper management has gone through the company and performed

massive layoffs. It doesn't matter how good you are at your job and what you do,

it the corporation is losing, you will lose.

The transcription of this response was captured on the scheduled, open-ended,

semistructured interview on January 16, 2019. The participant confirmed the analysis and

interpretations of the interview data were accurate through member checking.

Subtheme: Salary increase. From the major theme of education, a secondary

subtheme emerged relating to salary increase. According to Blau and Kahn (2017), key

characteristics associated with the salary gap amongst male and female in the workforce

included schooling, experience, industry, occupation, and union states. According to del

Rio and Alonso-Villar (2015), there was occupational and monetary segregation in racial

and ethnic groups working in the United States. African American women were

segregated and underrepresented occupationally from their counterparts (del Rio &

Alonso-Villar, 2015). Participant AAWSL02 stated,

I am very pleased with my company and how they take care of you. I have good

benefits, and my salary is comparable to my skills and education. Do I feel that I

should be making more? Of course, we all feel that we could be making more

money. I took this job knowing that salary increases would be far, few and

between but, it was more for the benefits and the flexibility of work hours because

I have children.

The transcription of this response was captured on the scheduled, open-ended, semistructured interview on December 18. 2018. The participant confirmed the analysis and interpretations of the interview data were accurate through member checking. Participant AAWSL04 stated,

I know there is another female in my office of the non-African American race that we perform the same duties and carry the same job title that I know she makes more money than I do. She treats me most days like I am just an admin (secretary status). I can't really tell you how I know that she makes more, but I know.

The transcription of this response was captured on the scheduled, open-ended, semistructured interview on January 7, 2019. The participant confirmed the analysis and interpretations of the interview data were accurate through member checking. Participant AAWSL07 stated,

I was told coming into my position by other coworkers that our boss does not give salary increases unless he is forced to by the board. Hearing that felt like a punch in the gut because I feel I am not getting paid my worth, but I stay because of my family, and we can't afford to go down to one salary in the household.

The transcription of this response was captured on the scheduled, open-ended, semistructured interview on January 17, 2019. The participant confirmed the analysis and interpretations of the interview data were accurate through member checking.

Emergent Theme 2: Mentoring

Interviews. Participants described the need to have mentoring programs because of the lack of communication and involvement that they had with upper management for

support. Participant AAWSL03 stated upper management believed a mentoring group

could cause an unhealthy work environment. Participant AAWSL10 expressed that

having a supportive group as an outlet helped her stay in her current position. In the

workplace, mentoring helped employees reach their full potential, personally and

professionally, as they could share ideas and information in a supportive group setting.

Leaders in over 71% of *Fortune 500* companies offered mentoring programs (Ramalho,

2014). Leaders of mentoring programs within the workplace offered individuals the

opportunity to join groups or engage in open dialogue with people of common

characteristics. The mentoring group could have been formed on the merits of offering

support to all female or male employees from the same ethnicities or backgrounds.

Benefits in incorporating mentoring programs in the workplace included reducing

turnover rates, sharing education and learning experiences, and reducing formal training.

Three out of the 10 participants stated mentoring helped them with lack of support. They

stated mentoring provided them with an outlet to talk candidly about topics other than

work issues and offering informal assistance (Table 4).

Table 4

Emergent Theme 2 – Mentoring

	Semistructured interview participants: AAWSL				
Mentoring	03	05	10	Journaling	Percentage
Lack of support	X	X	X	X	40%
Outlet of communication		X	X		20%

Subtheme: Lack of support. From the major theme mentoring, there emerged a

subtheme for lack of support around mentoring offered by the companies. According to

Linnabery et al. (2014), African American women or Blacks in general usually sought

more social support across a variety of contexts, such as family, jobs, friends, or faith, as

coping mechanisms for the workplace barriers that they faced. Participant AAWSL03

stated,

> Through my experiences working in a corporate environment, mentoring
>
> programs was not something that was part of built-in company programs. Not that
>
> having a mentoring program was going to be a deal breaker of me accepting
>
> employment, but I did ask around because I was interested in being a part of a
>
> supportive group of like-minded women that looked like me. I asked one
>
> individual was there one, and it was responded that upper management does feel
>
> programs like that are meaningful, they are just an opportunity to tear down the
>
> company. It promotes an unhealthy environment. That is what human resources
>
> are for, is to be the conduit for issues.

The transcription of this response was captured on the scheduled, open-ended,

semistructured interview on December 21, 2018. The participant confirmed the analysis

and interpretations of the interview data were accurate through member checking.

Participant AAWSL05 stated,

> When I was hired onto this company, I found there was no support groups for
>
> women of color. Meaning the Black women who worked within the company. So,
>
> I asked other Black women in the company what did they do to support each
>
> other, was there any meetings, official or unofficial that they attend? I continued
>
> to ask questions about professional development opportunities and peer to peer

groups. There was nothing that had been established as I was told. But there

seemed to be a great interest in having that support. So, I thought about ways I

could try and establish something for women to have the support they needed.

When I went to upper management to inquiry about starting a mentoring group, I

got told no with no explanation. I was not going to let just one no stop me, I went

to another executive in the company and got support I needed but there were some

stipulations that I had to adhere to. I realized the support was there but not like I

thought it would have been in an organization of this magnitude. When I asked if

any of top leadership wanted to be involved in the planning or sessions, they

declined to participate. It made me to believe they really didn't care about the

health and well-being of their employees enough to support an initiative of a way

of communicating with their staff.

The transcription of this response was captured on the scheduled, open-ended,

semistructured interview on January 11, 2019. The participant confirmed the analysis and

interpretations of the interview data were accurate through member checking.

Subtheme: Outlet of communication. From the major theme of mentoring, there

emerged a subtheme addressing mentoring groups as being a conduit for communication

among peers within the organization. From the interviews, some organization managers

had programs in place for different groups as a source of informal communication that

was not monitored or regulated through any higher executive in the organization. Most

mentoring programs were designed to offer professional development and establishing

relationships of shared goals for a positive outcome of employee satisfaction and

motivation. Participant AAWSL03 stated,

> Through my experiences working in a corporate environment, mentoring
>
> programs was not something that was part of built-in company programs. Not that
>
> having a mentoring program was going to be a deal breaker of me accepting
>
> employment, but I did ask around because I was interested in being a part of a
>
> supportive group of like-minded women that looked like me. I asked one
>
> individual was there one, and it was responded that upper management does feel
>
> programs like that are meaningful, they are just an opportunity to tear down the
>
> company. It promotes an unhealthy environment. That is what human resources
>
> are for, is to be the conduit for issues.

> The transcription of this response was captured on the scheduled, open-ended,

semistructured interview on December 21, 2018. The participant confirmed the analysis

and interpretations of the interview data were accurate through member checking.

Participant AAWSL05 stated,

> I had a very rough experience trying to get to my desired position, one that I felt I
>
> deserved based on my drive to better myself by returning back to school and my
>
> extensive work experiences. Now that I am in a position to be creative and feel
>
> that I have a voice to make a difference. I asked for permission from my manager
>
> to create a mentoring group because the position that I hold I hear a great deal of
>
> things that happens throughout the organization. I was told that I could develop a
>
> program, but it could not be called mentoring and I could not be involved because

of my position. I created it for the sake of others, but I felt that I had no outlet to talk to anyone about issues within my own department.

The transcription of this response was captured on the scheduled, open-ended, semistructured interview on January 11, 2019. The participant confirmed the analysis and interpretations of the interview data were accurate through member checking. Participant AAWSL10 stated,

My overall experience with my current job situation is not the best, I really cannot elaborate on the situation. I can say if it had not been for the supportive group of women at my job, I would have been quit. It is a group of Black women from many areas of the company that come together outside of the office to talk and offer up support that is not often job related. I feel we have created a bond outside of the workplace. The group of women that get together serves as a coping mechanism because they understand the work environment. Through all the jobs I have held, I have never felt so isolated in a position.

The transcription of this response was captured on the scheduled, open-ended, semistructured interview on January 23, 2019. The participant confirmed the analysis and interpretations of the interview data were accurate through member checking.

Journaling. During my reflexivity journaling, I noted my inner thoughts after each interview to refrain from interjecting my own biased thoughts regarding the need for mentoring programs in an organization. My journal notes from Participant AAWSL03 were the following:I sensed this company was more worried about keeping the rumor mill of issues in a controlled container by suggesting the open-door policy to human

resources. I also had the feeling there was little support being offered to ensure the uptake of employee retention by supporting mentoring groups in whatever fashion they would be created. (journal notes, December 22, 2018)

My journal notes from Participant AAWSL05 were the following:

> After listening to participant AAWSL05, I sensed still some strong uncertainty of her longevity with her current company. The reason I state that is because I do not think she liked the stipulations that were placed on semi approval that created a coaching program for the employees of the company. (journal notes, January 12, 2019)

My journal notes from Participant AAWSL10 were the following:

> I felt this interview made the point that this individual really needed to have someone to hear her story or to at least allow her the opportunity to speak. She spoke a great deal about the lack of diversity and how she was treated by others in her department. (journal notes, January 24, 2019)

Emergent Theme 3: Diversity

Diversity has no precise definition, as it fluctuates and adapts from generation-to-generation. Subcategories were developed to show the makeup of groups of people into factors of age, gender, race, orientation, ethnicity, environment, and other personal attributes. Diversity was summed into a more concise term to include communicating the limited aspects of cultures, behaviors, attitudes, and environments. By understanding the makeup of diversity, individuals could mold and shape successful artistic leaders in organizations (Yang & Konrad, 2011). Due to the changes in demographics of the

workforce, the expectations of ethical conduct, and the pressures from the global marketplace, organization managers must deal with employee diversity (Ravazzani, 2016).

Interviews. Participants described the diversity in their organization as being unequal regarding African American women in leadership positions. They shared that women were visible within the company, but most were in support roles or other capacities other than leadership. In my study, these data showed that 10 participants (100%) referenced the inequality of diversity. No subthemes emerged from these data. Participant AAWSL04 stated,Because of the field that I am in, there are not many women that look like me; there are women but not my race. When I look around, I see the European American male and female. It does not intimidate me because the good thing is that we all have our own offices and I can go into mine and shut the door. I know it sounds like I shut myself off from everyone, but I just don't like to be treated like support staff or have my work questioned.

The transcription of this response was captured on the scheduled, open-ended, semistructured interview on January 7, 2019. The participant confirmed the analysis and interpretations of the interview data were accurate through member checking. Participant AAWSL10 stated,

> I work in a male dominated environment which could be a gift or a curse.
> Working around a lot of men affords me the opportunity to take the lead on
> projects that no else wants. In taking the lead on different projects allows me to
> truly show case my abilities, the drawback is that I most of the time feel

overworked. And because I initiate the lead on most projects, my boss looks to me

work outside of my qualification and job duties. I sometimes think he is trying to

set me up for failure by continuing to pile work on me. I don't complain because I

need my job, I have a family that I support financially. I can't afford to lose my

job.

The transcription of this response was captured on the scheduled, open-ended,

semistructured interview on January 23, 2019. The participant confirmed the analysis and

interpretations of the interview data were accurate through member checking.

Journaling. During my reflexivity journaling, I noted my inner thoughts after

each interview to reframe from interjecting my own biased thoughts regarding the lack of

diversity in the organization and how work was being distributed unequally. My journal

notes from Participant AAWSL04 were the following regarding the fear of

unemployment:I did not like the fact the participant AAWSL04 felt the need to seclude

herself from the rest of the staff because of the way they treated her. I also felt that she

preferred to be left alone because she spoke about how much work she was able to

complete in a day's time compared to those who stood outside of her office talking. I feel

she would be happier in her position if she would interact with others.

My journal notes from Participant AAWSL10 were the following:

> I really felt sorry for participant AAWSL10. No one should feel if they suggested
>
> to distribute the work equally, they would lose their job. That comment really
>
> stayed in my mind. It took me a longer to transcribe this interview because of the
>
> feelings of hurt and desperation I could hear in her voice.

Emergent Theme 4: Stereotyping

According to Cundiff and Vescio (2016), gender stereotypes provided a viable explanation for why women were underrepresented, and men were overrepresented in senior leadership positions. A metaphoric phrase was coined about the African American woman: "angry Black woman." This mythology presumed the African American woman was irate, irrational, hostile, and negative despite her circumstances. According to Lewis et al. (2013), the stereotype of the strong African American woman could be considered a positive stereotype because it assumed strength, resilience, and perseverance; however, this stereotype could also be harmful enough to contribute to excessive stress. When labels are placed on someone in such a manner, it depicts a stigma on his or her character as not being suitable for high-ranking leadership positions.

Interviews. Participants described the labeling of the stereotyping in the workplace as being a game changer for how they viewed their futures in the company. Data indicated the major theme was stereotyping. From stereotyping, there was the bias of race and gender, attitude, and assertiveness. All participants (100%) revealed some aspects of having been labeled a stereotypical type (Table 5).Table 5

Emergent Theme 4 – Stereotyping

	Semistructured interview participants: AAWSL								
Stereotyping	01	02	04	05	06	07	11	Journaling	Percentage
Dual bias – race and gender	X	X		X	X	X	X	X	60%
Attitude		X	X		X	X			40%
Assertiveness		X			X				20%

Dual bias–race and gender. As the interviews were conducted, and the participants began to share their lived experiences, the subtheme on race and gender

reoccurred on several responses. Women of color experienced double jeopardy of being stereotyped by their races and genders, having been overlooked for advancement (Davis & Maldonado, 2015). Participant AAWSL01 stated,

> There is an unconscious bias when it comes to race and gender. Black women are not viewed as being intelligent, strong women; instead, we are viewed as being uncooperative, loud and mean-spirited. Very confrontational. I can remember being in a meeting and there was a strong discussion amongst the leadership. There was a lot of opinion swirling in the room. What stood out to me is when one European American male was expressing with great emotion, and I guess he didn't realize that he had slammed his portfolio so hard on the table it made a loud sound. I felt right then he was going to reprimanded for his actions, nothing happened.

The transcription of this response was captured on the scheduled, open-ended, semistructured interview on December 14, 2018. The participant confirmed the analysis and interpretations of the interview data were accurate through member checking. Participant AAWSL05 stated,

> The good ole' boy mentally is very prevalent in my organization. There have been many times that my manager would call me into the office to have a "general" conversation with me in regards to an agenda for a meeting. Each time we met, I felt like I should have been taking notes and getting coffee together for the meeting. There was nothing discussed in our private meetings that was beneficial the would be bought to the group meeting. After some time and repetition, I

realized that I was being called in the go through my agenda to avoid having me speak in the meeting. At first, I thought it was to condense the meeting and others were having to do the same thing. I felt that I had nothing to contribute to the meeting. But then I noticed my ideas were being presented as if they were not my own. When I bought it up in the group, I was told that I was not a team player. My ideas were good but needed substance and that is why it was being presented in that particular fashion.

The transcription of this response was captured on the scheduled, open-ended, semistructured interview on January 11, 2019. The participant confirmed the analysis and interpretations of the interview data were accurate through member checking.

Attitude. Situations might occur due to an unconscious bias within the workplace. One unconscious bias that seemed to plague to African American woman when speaking passionately or authoritatively was society labeling them as having an attitude. If an African American woman did not socialize throughout the workplace or was not talkative, then others would consider her nonsocialable with an attitude. Through conducting the interviews, the subtheme of having an attitude was revealed by several participants. Participant AAWSL11 stated,

I was told that I have a demeanor that makes people think that I am unapproachable. I have been told many times the way that I talk to people, that I do not have a personality, that I should soften my tone. I didn't get to my position by softening my tone and making people feel good. I am not out of line, but I do not mix my words either. That may make some people have an opinion that I am

abrasive and assertive. That is not the case, I am compassionate about my work and what I do. If I come off that way to some people, that may be my internal shield of protection.

Journaling. During my reflexivity journaling, I noted my inner thoughts after each interview to reframe from interjecting my own biased thoughts regarding stereotyping and the subthemes that derived from the interviews.

Assertiveness. Being assertive was considered a negative emotion, thereby becoming aggressive in body language or tone. Assertiveness was a social skill that one might display as effective communication. People who were assertive were usually people who knew how to communicate their wants/needs and could articulate their clear thoughts/goals. Assertiveness was often associated with persons of high self-esteem and confidence.

Participant AAWSL06 stated,

I have been told by many of my peers that I have a very aggressive demeanor. When I am speaking to someone or giving directions that my tone is attacking. I didn't really understand why I was being labeled as aggressive. I usually take the approach of getting to the point of what is needed to be relayed in a message. I have never been a person who would play with words to spare someone's feelings. Through my experiences of coming up through the ranks of my employment my communication skills were never questioned. Not until I reached a platform of leadership that I now have to taper my tone. I will never forget the time during my annual review, my manager stated that some of my peers and

subordinates feel that my tone when speaking with them borders the line of bullying. I had never critique of being a bully. When my manager formed his mouth to say that word, I felt attacked. I felt that I was being targeted, that my peers and subordinates did not understand me and who I really was as a person. Not that anyone of them really sat down to have a general conversation with me about nothing.

Notes. The transcription of this response was captured on the scheduled, open-ended, semistructured interview on January 16, 2019. The participant confirmed the analysis and interpretations of the interview data were accurate through member checking.

My journaling notes from Participant AAWSL01 were the following:

"Felt that coworkers' action should have been dealt with by upper management." My journal notes from Participant AAWSL05 were the following: "I can hear that she felt used and underappreciated for her ideas and not given the opportunity to express her own idea in front of her peers." My journal notes from Participant AAWSL11 were the following: "I hear protection and the protection of boundaries while in the workplace."

My journal notes from Participant AAWSL06 were the following:

I heard a great deal of concern and hurt that her peers would think of her being aggressive in nature. I heard hesitation in her voice of wanting to say more but chose not to. While conducting the interview, at times I could hear her tone

change which could have been interrupted to be aggressive. I classify it as being

passionate.

Summary

In this chapter, the discussion of the research setting, demographics, data

collection, and data analysis process using Moustakas's (1994) modified van Kaam phase

analysis was addressed. To answer the one overarching research question, I used the

qualitative transcendental phenomenological study to explore the lived experiences of the

underrepresentation of African American women in senior level positions of Fortune 500

companies in the United States. The data sources for this study included open-ended,

semistructured interview questions; purposeful sampling; and journaling.

The sample included 10 English-speaking African American women who

currently hold senior level leadership positions in a Fortune 500 company located in the

boundaries of the United States. The participants described their experiences on how they

could remain in their current positions and what made them stay. Each participant was

asked the overarching research question which provided them the opportunity to

elaborate on the lived experiences. Their responses indicated support for the conceptual

framework on the context of theories to support the barriers faced and what successes

contributed to the longevity of employment.

Evidence of data trustworthiness of this study was presented through data

saturation. Data saturation was obtained through two sources: interviews and reflexivity

journaling. Using reflexivity journaling, I could control my emotions and avoid research

bias during the data collection, which did not have any influence on the results of this

study. I analyzed and interpreted the study results with the conceptual framework and how the results of this study added to the body of knowledge relating the biases of gender and race, stereotyping, and lack of diversity in a leadership position with African American women.

In Chapter 5, I provide discussions, conclusions, and recommendations based on the finding of my study. Details of Chapter 5 include interpretations of findings, limitations of the study, and recommendations.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

The purpose of this qualitative transcendental phenomenological research study was to explore the lived experiences of African American women regarding the barriers they faced relating to race and gender differences that influenced their leadership development and limitations on advancement in a Fortune 500 corporation. There was a lack of research on the underrepresentation of African American women in senior level leadership positions in corporate America, a situation that negatively influenced the economic advancement of African American women and created limits on diversity in the workplace. I aimed to explore the lived experiences as they related to microaggression in the workplace and the coping mechanisms that African American women holding senior level positions in corporate America used to deal with biases resulting from the effects of intersectionality.

I used the qualitative phenomenonology method to facilitate the in-depth data collection and analytical details of my study. To collect the data necessary to address my research question, I used semistructured interview questioning and journaling to capture the responses from the 10 English speaking African American women. Using social media, I recruited 11 English speaking African American women in senior level positions who worked in Fortune 500 companies in the United States. Although my maximum study sample had been set to recruit 10 African American women, one participant dismissed herself from the study, which caused me to recruit another qualified individual.

The findings of the study indicated that African American women thrived in their leadership positions because they sought out supportive conditions and advanced their

education to achieve the leadership positions that they had attained. Managers of some organizations had mentoring groups in place for peer support, but most did not have mentoring support established for their workers; therefore, the individuals had to develop their own mentoring/peer support groups. Having adequate access to peer groups of other African American women in the organization played an essential role in sustaining their leadership positions. This study showed that African American women in leadership roles sought additional advantage points to enhance their careers by seeking advanced degrees and engaging in mentoring.

In this chapter, I summarize the key findings and provide a discussion, conclusion, and recommendation based on the findings of the study. Also included in this chapter are the interpretation of findings, limitations of the study, and recommendations. I close with the implications of the study and conclusion.

Summary of Key Findings

The interview question was the following: What lived experiences, as an African American woman, in your career path helped you to attain your current position and what made you stay? This question was presented to each participant of this study and their responses disclosed four themes and several subthemes involving their leadership experiences when working in positions not dominated by individuals sharing their racial and gender identification. The analysis of the findings yielded four major themes, education, mentoring, diversity, and stereotyping.

With the first theme of education, the subthemes of job stability and salary were identified. The participants' qualifications indicated their desires to be better equipped

academically (70% masters' degrees; 30% bachelors' degrees) to fulfil their duties as leaders. In addition, the participants perceived a need to hold higher degrees to secure their current leadership positions in their organizations. Higher academic qualifications provided increased job security to the African American women participants. Furthermore, holding higher education degrees resulted in participants earning better salaries. According to the lived experiences of the participants, higher education was needed to both attain senior leadership positions and maintain these positions.

The second major theme was mentoring. The participants explained that formal and informal mentors supported them in their roles of senior leaders of Fortune 500 companies. The participants experienced a lack of communication and interaction with upper management; participants found that mentors provided the needed support and direction. The mentoring situation enabled the participants to discuss issues and offer their opinions frankly; this communication outlet was found to be highly supportive. Participants believed that the mentors assisted them to maintain their positions and fulfil their roles as senior leaders.

During the interviewing process, all participants stated there was a lack of diversity, that African American women were underrepresented in senior management positions. The participants observed that women were often appointed in support roles or positions other than leadership. Some participants indicated being overworked, having to take unpopular projects, and secluding themselves to maintain their work positions.

Lastly, all participants mentioned the theme of stereotyping. The stereotyping phrase "angry Black Woman" coined about African American women, ascribed negative

characteristics to African American women regardless of their circumstances (Lewis et al., 2013). Such stereotypical labels cause stigmatization of a person's character as not being suitable for high-ranking leadership positions. All participants reported being labeled according to some stereotype held about African American women. These labels were unflattering and ascribed characteristics to the participants that were limiting and discriminatory. Although there was the lack of diversity within each of the participant's organizations, each participant used their existing platform to bring awareness to the circumstances they faced. They worked beyond the negative stereotyping as well as continuing to advocate for more diversity in higher level positions.

Interpretation of Findings

The double standard for female and male leaders remains perpetuated in today's workplaces (Davis & Maldonado, 2015). The overall research question of this study asked how African American women in senior level positions chose their career paths and what made them stay in their positions. This question was posed to explore the experiences of barriers that African American women faced relating to race and gender that influenced their leadership development and limited advancement to leadership roles in corporate America (see Sanchez-Hucles & Davis, 2010).

The findings of this study aligned with the concepts found in BFT and the CRT regarding race, gender, diversity, and stereotyping of African American women in leadership roles. The participants of this study related experiences with racial and gender stereotyping treatment during their careers, validating the need to focus on how race and gender influenced the leadership experiences of African American women in corporate

America. The four significant themes derived from the interview question were the following: (a) a need to pursue higher education to become more marketable for promotions that lead to job stability and salary increases, (b) the value of mentors, (c) the need for diversity in higher level positions to increase equality within the organization, and (d) the negative effects of race and gender stereotyping on career advancement. Each of these themes showed a unique aspect of the lived experiences of African American women advancing into a leadership position in corporate America.

Theme 1: Education

Researchers have indicated that formal education has increases the chances of women being promoted to senior-level positions (Sanchez-Hucles & Davis, 2010). All 10 participants (100%) perceived education as a factor in their abilities to secure senior level leadership roles in their organization. Managers of many organizations have continued to display reluctance to hire African American women into leadership positions because they have not yet overcome the uncertainty of the women having the skills, leadership ability, and competency to perform effectively in an executive leadership position (Brückmuller, Rink, & Haslam, 2014). In this study, some participants were hired into their positions due to possessing degrees, but some believed they needed to return to school to remain marketable and in that leadership role. This finding was consistent with the findings of Ogbu (2004) and Beal (2008), which indicated that having obtained or being in the process of completing a formal degree aided in the decision-making process of hiring an African American woman in a senior level leadership position. Although the degree was obtained, participants still perceived some inequalities that existed in a salary

gap compared to to their counterparts who did not possess an advanced degree.
Regarding the need for further formal qualifications for African American females,
inequality seemed to persist, thereby confirming previous research on this topic.

Theme 2: Mentoring

Researchers have suggested that formal mentoring relationships that cut across
traditional organizational boundaries might facilitate positive interactions among an
increasingly diverse workforce (Murrell, Blake-Beard, & Perkins-Williamson, 2008).
Managers of over 71% of Fortune 500 companies offer mentoring programs (Ramalho,
2014). In this study, participants described the need to have mentoring programs because
of the lack of communication and supportive involvement from upper management in
regard to the participants' career advancement. When provided by managers to
employees in the workplace, mentoring programs aided employees reaching in their full
potential, personally and professionally. Sabharwal (2015) discussed the importance of
mentoring in the advancement of women into senior positions and found that a lack of
suitable mentorship might prevent women's promotion into senior leadership positions.
Three participants stated that by having a mentoring group as an outlet, they stayed in
their current positions. African American women could find solace in participating in a
peer mentoring group to overcome some barriers and unfair treatment that might keep
them from advancing in their organizations (Killian et al., 2005). Findings about the
importance of mentoring served to confirm current knowledge.

Theme 3: Diversity

The CRT has a distinct purpose of providing awareness of and advocating against inequality practices in the workplace. The changes in demographics of the workforce, the expectations of ethical conduct, and the pressure from the global marketplace are forcing organization managers to deal with employee diversity (Ravazzani, 2016). African American women are discriminated against due to the intersectionality of being women and minorities (Davis & Maldonado, 2015). For many years, professional African American women have experienced racism, discrimination, and marginalization that affected their views of the world and their abilities for advancement into executive level positions (Lewis & Neville, 2015). When there is diversity in an organization, the organization's brand image, corporate governance norms, corporate communication, social responsibility, and work ethics improve (Sahoo & Lenka, 2016). Employees feel valued and included and are more productive and care more about the future of the organization when they see more people who resemble them in race and gender. A multicultural work environment of all sociocultural backgrounds can lead to a higher quality of work and lower workforce turnover rates.

The findings in this study regarding diversity derived from the a lack of inclusion of African American women in certain positions. Instituted in 1941, leadership who created the Fair Employment Act (hereinafter PEFEA or Act) aimed at promoting diversity in the workplace to enforce and investigate complaints by aggrieved workers (Collins, 2003). Although there was an increase in the representation of African American women in senior level positions, inequalities persisted. According to Oakley

(2000), the organizational barriers created caused a gender imbalance that often favored the recruitment, retention, and promotion of males over females. Data collected from the participants disclosed that European American males held the majority of senior level positions.

Diversity in the workplace was an essential factor that contributed toward creating a positive cohesive environment. All 10 participants (100%) stated they were the only African American women in their departments but not the only African American women within the organization. This issue led them to being isolated and underscored inequality in promotional practices. I designed my research question to explore the lived experiences of how African American women in senior level positions chose their career paths and what made them stay in that position. Education and mentoring helped them move forward in their positions. The lack of diversity in the organizations for which they worked, the positions they held provided a platform to bring awareness to the inequality of diversity in the organization. These 10 African American women did not conform to the negative stigma of stereotyping that was whispered, instead they were able to work hard in every aspect of their position to break the barrier of judgement to continue to be successful through high performances.

Theme 4: Stereotyping

According to Cundiff and Vescio (2016), gender stereotypes provide a viable explanation for why women are underrepresented and men are overrepresented in senior leadership positions. Cundiff and Vescio conducted a study of gender disparities to examine whether stereotypes influenced attributions to discrimination. As a phrase,

"angry Black woman" indicated that African American women were irate, irrational, hostile, and negative despite the circumstances that they faced. However, Lewis et al. (2013) defined the stereotype of the strong Black woman as a positive stereotype that showed strength, resilience, and perseverance; nevertheless, this stereotype could also be harmful enough to inordinate stress. From birth to death, barriers of stereotyping and oppression are consistent with African American women based on their genders and races (Lewis et al., 2013). Since slavery, society has used numerous stereotypes to describe the African American female to continue marginalization of the group. Having negative stereotypes assigned to a person's racial make-up is not only demoralizing but also damages the image of the African American women, as well as influences devastation on her psychological well-being.

The findings within this study were developed from the data collected of all 10 participants who indicated they encountered some form of stereotyping situations within their careers. During the interviewing process, participants stated that some continued verbal comments and remarks led to them feeling discriminated against. African American women were often perceived as the "caretakers" of the office. African American women were forced to contend with many negative racial stereotypes, which would lead to physical and psychological breakdown on their professional and personal lives. The findings of this study confirmed the extant research that negative stereotypes about African American women still existed and influenced negatively on them being promoted to senior leadership level. These 10 African American women who participated in this study stated during the interviewing process they did not allow the negative

stereotyping or the inequality of diversity deter them from doing what they were hired to do. They stated they were able to use their current positions as a platform to engage in mentoring to help educate those other African American women who were looking to elevate in their careers on ways to cope and overcome the nay-sayers of negative stereotyping.

Limitations of the Study

Simon and Goes (2013) defined limitations as factors that the researcher could not control, which showed weaknesses in a research project. This research involved the social research of human responses of selected interview questions requiring that individuals recounted experiences, wanted or unwanted. The limitations of this study included the following issues.

The first limitation of the study was the trustworthiness of the participants during their interviews and the elaborations of lived experiences. The analysis of the human experiences could present significant limitations because the experiences were not directly observable but depended on the recollection of the individual. This limitation, inherent in qualitative studies, was mitigated by using member checking; participants had the opportunity to review and provide feedback of the transcribed interview for accuracy.

Another limitation was that the results of this study could not be generalized or transferred due to the limited number of participants. Transcendental phenomenological research is not aimed at the generalizability of results but on gaining deeper insight into the lived experiences of participants. Therefore, when transferring the results of this study

to other studies, caution should be used and the future researcher should make the determination of relevance for his or her environment.

The interview question might have influenced participants' narratives by providing direction to their replies. However, I did not find any indications that the participants structured their replies to the interview question. I used further questions to clarify the participant's responses, which could mitigate the possibility of replies molded to suit the overarching question and research purpose.

The last limitation of the study related to researcher bias that could influence the findings of the study. Being an African American woman employed in a middle management position posed a real threat of researcher bias. Researcher bias occurs when systematic error is introduced into sampling or testing by selecting or encouraging one outcome or answer over another (Pannucci & Wilkins, 2010). To mitigate researcher bias, I used reflexivity, which included journaling my thoughts and feelings after each interview occurred. I used this process to remain unbiased and suspend judgement during transcribing and analyzing data.

Recommendations

Although there has been progression of African American women in senior level positions of corporate America, there remain many milestones to accomplish before they are viewed as having equal opportunities as their counterparts. For organizational leaders to compete globally, they must achieve diversity in their organizations. There must be opportunities presented for those marginalized groups to display abilities and competencies to focus on equality in performance management. During this study, the

participants strongly supported the BFT of the women having to work hard and outperform male and European American counterparts to achieve the same level of recognition (Sanchez-Hucles & Davis, 2010).

My recommendation to business executives or those of power is to take action in ensuring that all employees have received fair and equal opportunities toward advancement in their careers. The ability for African American women to attain and remain in senior level positions depend on cultural and social recognition within the leadership environment (John, 2013). The outcomes of this study showed that race and gender were barriers in achieving leadership positions for African American women. According to prior literature, because of the impasses of race and gender, women tended to give up on their dreams of career mobility. When they gave up on their career goals, they tended to settle for less desirable careers just to feel belonging and accomplishment. Ibarra and Petriglieri (2016) addressed the need for executives of organizations to support African American women in their pursuit of reaching their full potential by finding solutions to address race and gender bias in the workplace. The current results provided a somewhat different view as participants indicated they analyzed their work situations and decided which action to take to obtain and maintain senior management positions (Participants AAWSL01; AAWSL05) and that they remained in the organization despite meeting with disappointment (AAWSL05; AAWSL10).

To aid in further research, I recommend there be in-depth research regarding the ethical issues of employee integrity, diversity, lack of internal support mechanisms, and stereotyping based on race and gender. Participants observed inequalities based on race

and gender that caused work becoming an uphill battle (participant AAWSL10), being treated differently (participant AAWSL04; AAWSL07), not being allowed to take ownership of their ideas or programs (participant AAWSL05), and a need to remain apart from the group to maintain focus (participant AAWSL04). This process can be achieved by undertaking further qualitative studies followed by empirical studies to achieve generalizability due to larger and more representative samples. Bierema (2016) recommended researchers should extend beyond the factors of gender to focus on the leadership skills of those within the organization that could make effective changes. Researchers interested in policy can formulate mechanisms to implement mentoring of those African American women working in leadership positions. Organization managers can develop a strategic plan to mentor those who aspire to promote into higher positions by offering educational assistance to further their educations. Organizational programs that are set forth should be available as equal opportunities for all genders and races to promote the ability to advance. Researchers focused on personnel management can benefit organizations by undertaking research in expanding hiring practices to consider characteristics of skilled individuals beyond the norm of what a person should have in executive leadership positions.

Implications

In conducting this study, I aimed to determine the coping mechanisms that women used to obtain and maintain positions within senior leadership of their *Fortune 500* companies. Of the four major themes yielded by analyzing the data, two were indicative of coping mechanisms.

Positive Social Change

      Education. The participants identified the need to obtain formal education to both

obtain and maintain advancement to senior leadership positions. The participants all

graduated, with 70% having obtained masters' degrees. This finding corroborated the

human capital theory that people invested in themselves, thereby building their stock of

knowledge, experience, and skills over the years (Blau & Kahn, 2017). Formal education

positively influences the chances of women being promoted to senior-level positions and

earning more competitive salaries (Blau & Kahn, 2017; Sanchez-Hucles & Davis, 2010).

Although formal training can provide African American women with increased

opportunities for success in the workplace (Beckwith et al., 2016), Brückmuller et al.

(2014) found that organization managers were reluctant to appoint African American

women in executive leadership positions based on the uncertainty that they had the

needed skills and competencies. Positive social change could be achieved by increased

appointment of African American women in senior leadership positions of *Fortune 500*

companies based on their personal achievements and characteristics. Increasing the

number of studies that focus on African American women in leadership positions would

further the knowledge of upper management on the characteristics and abilities of African

American women, bringing with it an appreciation of what this group of women could

add to senior management. Altered views of African American women in general and in

senior management could serve to instill an appreciation for this group of employees who

might overcome the stereotypical views over time. In years to come, African American

women could be appointed on merit, instead of having to obtain increasingly more education to be considered for a leadership role.

Mentors. Much has been written about the benefit of mentors to employees in leadership positions. The findings of this study confirmed the value of being mentored by a more experienced employee. Murrell et al. (2008) asserted that formal mentoring was key to effective development of diverse leadership in organizations. However, Beckwith et al. (2016) argued in favor of value of informal mentoring to provide more opportunities to African American women to succeed in the workplace. Ramalho (2014) defined mentoring as a cost-effective way to transfer in-house knowledge to employees new to a particular job level. In this study, participants indicated that the ability to verbalize experiences and concerns within an accepting mentoring environment enabled them to maintain their work positions. Organization managers could achieve positive social change through not only offering formal mentoring programs but also endeavoring to institute mentors who would reflect the gender and race of the mentee. Such mentors could inspire African American women even more, seeing that they also underwent and overcame similar challenges: "Access to people who share the same race may be important for building trust, but access to people in leadership positions is equally important given the power dynamics of a mentoring relationship" (Murrell et al., 2008, p. 277). On a personal level, African American women should actively search for positive role models, also outside their organizations, who enable them to tap into the wisdom of their forerunners and receive encouragement to continue on their chosen leadership path (Murrell et al., 2008).

The participants of this study intimately understood the barriers to advance to

senior management positions. The African American women participants could translate

the painful experiences and their realizations of the stereotypical views of upper

management into practical actionable steps to overcome barriers. The actions described

by the participant AAWSL05 and AAWSL11 could serve to assist those in similar

situations to excel in their organizations to obtain desired promotions into leadership

roles.

Methodological Implications

In applying a transcendental phenomenological approach, the findings moved

beyond superficial barriers and coping mechanisms to identify microaggressions that

befell the participants daily (McCusker & Gunaydin, 2014). The last two themes were a

lack of diversity and stereotypes. The participants identified that despite the

representation of African American women in the lower ranks of their organizations, they

were some of the few who moved into senior management; this lack of diversity within

senior management left them feeling isolated.

Researchers posited that African American women faced disparity when striving

to occupy executive positions in the U.S. workforce (Chrobot-Mason & Aramovich,

2013; Cook & Glass, 2015; Killian et al., 2005). Moreover, some managers maintained

their stereotypes of African American women as being always angry, expecting them to

assume a supportive role and, in some cases, marginalizing them by presenting the

African American woman's suggestions as being their own. The stereotypes led to other

managers confirming the angry woman viewpoint and lack of team-playing abilities

whenever the participants became assertive about being treated unfairly, putting them in a lose-win situation. The implication for researchers and upper management of organizations is to challenge the stereotypical views of African American women (Cundiff & Vescio, 2016; Lewis et al., 2013).

The transcendental phenomenological method proved successful in uncovering microaggressions. Further research using similar methodology might uncover more areas of disparity and daily instances of microaggression that could be addressed within organizations and the public at large. Ultimately, the findings from different transcendental phenomenological studies could be used to develop a questionnaire that could be administered to a larger, more representational sample of African American women in senior management to produce findings that could be generalized to a larger population. Topics for future study to expand upon the findings include the role of employee integrity; evidence of diversity; lack of internal support mechanisms; and evidence of stereotyping.

Conclusions

This qualitative transcendental phenomenological study was designed to understand the lived experiences of the underrepresentation of African American women in senior level positions working in corporate America and the reasoning behind what made them stay in that position and in those working conditions. Women in senior level positions are often the minority; they have limited access to influential members of an organization to enhance and guide their development to advance to the next level of their careers. Gender-biased barriers, such as the glass ceiling or glass cliff that seem the plight

of African American women, indicate the expectation that women are destined to fail as leaders (Sabharwal, 2014). The 10 African American women who took part in this study demonstrated the abilities to find ways strategically to maintain their professionalism and integrity through peer mentoring programs, especially from other African American women in leadership positions. Most of the participants possessed advanced college degrees. However, the participants perceived the need to obtain further education to maintain their current position or to be considered for advancement. Seventy percent of the participants decided to return to school, and they successfully obtained an advanced degree that enabled them to become more marketable.

In leadership positions, African American women can influence changes in the existing legislation and policies to facilitate more awareness of gender inequality in the workplace (Sabharwal, 2014). The leaders of organizations can become change agents to implement cultural and diversity improvements to reduce gender and race bias while promoting the wellbeing of all women. The findings of this study may contribute to social change by assisting organizational leaders in policy changes to support the concerns of AAW in leadership roles around the lack of diversity and mentoring programs to increase retention and new recruitment.

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Appendix A: Interview Question

Barriers Encountered by African American Women Executives in Fortune 500
Companies

Barriers Encountered by African American Women Executives in Fortune 500
Companies

Interview Question:

What lived experiences, as an African American woman, in your career path helped you
to attain your current position and what made you stay?

Appendix B: Interview Protocol

Barriers Encountered by African American Women Executives in Fortune 500
Companies

The interview protocol includes the overall process for the participant recruitment and
data collection processes. I will use the interview protocol consistently to attain
maximum data integrity during the data collection process with each participant. This
includes the procedures for the role of the researcher, initial contact with the potential
participants and conducting the semistructured interviews.

Role of the Researcher

1. As the researcher, I am the data collection instrument. I will demonstrate integrity
   and stray away from bias in the interview process to attain maximum data
   integrity by consistently using the interview protocol for each participant
   involved.
2. At this time, as the researcher I have no personal or professional relationships
   with participants of the study. Participants are recruited through LinkedIn and a
   restricted Facebook social media account. The snowball sampling method will be
   invoked to socialize with other participants for this study.
3. In collecting data, I will use journaling to remain neutral as the researcher. I will
   suspend judgement and reframe from any preconceived bias and prior knowledge
   of my study. My preparation for this study will be thorough, rehearsed, and will
   follow the script in the interview protocol process.

Initial Contact

1. The posting of the Invitation to Participate (Appendix A) to members of LinkedIn
   social media as well as a closed private group on Facebook. Participants should
   meet the criteria outlined in Appendix B which a link is included in the Invitation
   to Participate that will direct those interested to Survey Monkey to complete the
   demographic questionnaire.
2. Those individuals who meet the criteria and are interested in participating will be
   emailed the informed consent form using the email addressed they provided
   through the criteria questionnaire. The informed consent form will be embedded
   in the body of the email instructing participants to reply with "I consent" as an
   electronic approval to participate in this study. At the time of receiving the
   electronic consent, each participant will be assigned a code for all communication
   and data collected that relates to the participant such as notes, recordings, and
   journaling that they may have agreed to me collecting.
3. A follow-up email will follow to schedule to the semistructured interview. The
   participants will be asked to provide at least three options from Monday to Friday

during business hours of 9:00 am to 5:00 pm within 14 days of receiving the follow-up email.

Semistructured Interviews

1. Scheduling the GoToMeeting video chat. As the researcher, I will place the video chat at the agreed upon date and time of the participant for the interview.
2. Starting the semistructured interview process, I will note the date, time, and location of both parties of the interview. I will introduce myself to establish a rapport with the participant. I will thank the participant for the completed informed consent to participate and providing the information of the criteria questionnaire. I will ask the participant to audio and video record the interview session. I will let the participant know that she can participate even if she does not want the audio or video recording. I will record the participants interview by note taken.
3. As the research, I will be conducting the interview by asking the open-ended interview questions. I will ask probing questions if I need more detail of depth in the participant's response to the questions. I will be journaling during the interviewing.
4. As the researcher, I will inform the participant of the scheduled duration of the interview. I will monitor the time of the interview, inform the participant at five minutes before the time limit, and ask if the participant will need extend time or schedule a follow-up to complete the interview. If the participant agrees to a follow-up interview, I will make the arrangements base on the participant's availability for the interview. I will note the date and time for the follow-up interview.
5. Closing the semistructured interview, I will encourage the participant to take part in the member checking process of the analysis and interpretation of the interview data for accuracy. Member checking is to attain maximum benefit for creditability and confirmability of the results. As the researcher, I will review and interpret the interview data. I will write each question followed by a synthesis of the interpretation in one to two pages. I will provide a saved copy of the syntheses to the participant by email for a response to me within 14 business days. I will ask the participant if the synthesis represents her answers or if there is additional information she can provide for the study. I will continue member checking process until there is no new data to collect. I will thank the participant for her time, participation, and referral of new participants if received for the study.
6. As the researcher, I will end the call with the participant ensuring the line is clear and the audio and video chat and ended recording.

Appendix C: Criteria Questionnaire

Barriers Encountered by African American Women Executives in Fortune 500
Companies

Participant:
Date:
Location:
Email address:

Please complete the following statement by placing an X by the appropriate response.

1. What is your gender?

    Male _____

    Female _____

2. What age range are you?

    20 – 30 _____

    31 – 40 _____

    41 – 50 _____

    51 – 60 _____

    61 and over _____

3. What is your current job title?

    _____

4. How many years do you have at your current job title?

    Less than a year _____

    1 – 5 years _____

    5 – 10 years _____

    More than 10 years _____

5. What Fortune 500 corporation are you employed?

_____