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African American Women's Perceptions about Double Jeopardy and Mentoring in the Federal Government

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2020

Abstract

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by

Fatimah D. Pierce

MSA, Trinity Washington University, 2006

BS, Howard University, 2004

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

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Abstract

Research shows that women's leadership development can be fostered through gender-based mentoring. However, even when involved in gender-based mentoring relationships, African American women face additional challenges due to the intersectionality of their race and gender, often known as "double jeopardy." The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore how this intersectionality shapes African American women leaders' perceptions about their gender-based mentoring experiences from the perspectives of both mentors and protégés. The theoretical framework for this study was Black feminist thought. One research question and two subquestions addressed the role of intersectionality, the benefits and challenges of gender-based mentoring, and strategies for success in the absence of mentoring relationships. Data were collected through two focus groups, conducted in Washington, DC with 10 African American women who held General Schedule 12 or higher positions in the federal government and who had experience with gender-based mentoring relationships. Group and individual level data were coded and categorized using micro-interlocutor analysis. Results centered on the (a) significance of intersectionality, (b) difficulty in finding and maintaining mentoring relationships, and (c) organizational barriers, such as the concrete wall. Two overarching themes described (a) the complexities embedded in the phenomenon and (b) the feelings of resignation about the challenges and complexities. There were four recommendations with implications for social change related to diversity and inclusion practices, leadership development, organizational development, and overall employee development for African American women and other minority populations.

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Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to the many African American women in federal service and public organizations across the United States. May you feel empowered and undeterred to overcome barriers and rise to great heights on your leadership journey. As Dr. Maya Angelou wrote, and Oprah Winfrey often quotes, "I come as one, but I stand as ten thousand." I undertook this endeavor with all of you standing by my side, on the shoulders of those who stood before me, and as a catalyst for those who will stand in the future.

Acknowledgments

To my relentlessly supportive husband and family, thank you for your unwavering commitment to helping me realize this achievement. I share this victory with all of you. With your love and encouragement, and with God, all things are possible.

My sincerest thanks and appreciation to Dr. Frances Goldman, my dissertation committee chair. I am grateful for your guidance, support, and advocacy, which fueled my energy for completing this journey. In addition, a huge thank you to my committee member, Dr. Miyoung Lee, and my University Research Reviewer, Dr. Victoria Landu-Adams. I could not have hoped for a better committee! Thanks again to the three of you and to the entire Walden University team.

My village is strong! To my family, friends, and colleagues who graced me with their patience, understanding, encouragement, and love to make it through, I express heartfelt thanks! I do not take this accomplishment lightly. It is truly amazing to be blessed with the vision, determination, and grit that is required to achieve this milestone. I am excited and honored to carry this title, and I will work boldly, yet humbly, every day to make a positive impact.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Introduction

The United States federal government is the world's largest employer, with nearly 2.1 million civilian workers and scores more seasonal, temporary, and contractor employees (Congressional Research Service, 2019). Federal government leaders have broadly embraced and led national efforts to promote diversity and inclusion in policy and practice, employing nearly double the percentage of African American women when compared to the national average for the overall civilian labor force (U.S. Office of Personnel Management, 2016; U.S. Office of Personnel Management, 2018). Yet, African American women in the federal government are overwhelmingly classified in lower graded positions and are underrepresented in leadership and professional positions (U.S. Office of Personnel Management, 2018).

Mentoring is widely regarded as a tool to leverage diversity and cultivate leaders within an organization. The federal government has maintained a significant investment in resources to develop and implement mentoring programs (U.S. Office of Personnel Management, 2008; U.S. Department of Energy, 2014). In addition, there have been targeted initiatives to better understand and support the needs of women in the public and private sectors, such as the passing of the Civil Rights Act of 1991 and the establishment of the Federal Glass Ceiling Commission (U.S. Department of Labor, 1995; McGee, 2018). Nonetheless, the federal government's mentoring programs vary widely from agency to agency, in terms of formality, duration, participation, and other factors.

The nature, structure, and outcomes of mentoring relationships have evolved over time. Traditionally, there was an emphasis on knowledge transfer and the development of a less experienced person by a more senior or experienced person, to enhance his or her career skills and opportunities (Early, 2017). Researchers now agree that mentoring is primarily intended to enhance career development and provide psychosocial support for protégés, but may include more mutually beneficial outcomes and are less hierarchical and more collaborative (Bailey, Voyles, Finkelstein, & Matarazzo, 2016; Hudson, 2016; Early, 2017). Furthermore, gender-based mentoring has emerged as a strategy for meeting the needs of women, who tend to benefit from greater psychosocial support in mentoring relationships (Blake-Beard, Bayne, Crosby, & Muller, 2011).

Women face societal and organizational barriers that hinder their upward mobility in the workplace, even when they are mentored (Wynen, op de Beeck, & Ruebens, 2015). African American women contend with additional barriers due to the unique characteristic of race and gender intersectionality, negative stereotypes, and systemic exclusion (Remedios, Snyder, & Lizza, 2016; Rosette, Koval, Ma, & Livingston, 2016; McGee, 2018). In addition, the underrepresentation of women, and particularly African American women, in higher-level positions creates a challenge for matching protégés with mentors of the same gender (Ortiz-Walters & Fullick, 2015).

This phenomenological study explored African American women's perceptions about the role of intersectionality in their gender-based mentoring relationships. There have been several research studies on this phenomenon. However, the studies' populations have been primarily post-secondary educators and students in academic

settings (Grant, 2012; Davis & Maldonado, 2015; Early, 2017; Rasheem, Alleman, Mushonga, Anderson, & Ofahengaue Vakalahi, 2018). The present study filled several research gaps by exploring this phenomenon in the federal government setting, as well as incorporating perspectives of both mentors and protégés, considering higher-level employees, and describing strategies for success when gender-based mentoring relationships are not available for African American women. The study results were used to formulate recommendations to the federal government and other public organizations. The results have implications for improvements in public policy and administration related to diversity and inclusion practices, leadership development, organizational development, and overall employee development for African American women and other minority populations. This chapter includes an overview of the study, including background information; purpose, significance, and nature of the study; theoretical framework and research questions; definitions of key terms; and the scope, delimitations, assumptions, and limitations.

Background

Due to cultural and societal gender norms that depict men and male traits as suitable for leadership, women continue to face challenges that prevent them from either climbing the organizational ladder or being successful in leadership positions once obtained (Rosette & Livingston, 2012). Women's progress toward obtaining leadership positions is impeded by "human capital barriers…; gender-based stereotypes; differences in communication styles; exclusion from informal networks; limited management support for work/life programs; lack of mentors and role models; occupational sex-segregation;

and attitudinal and organizational biases" (Sabharwal, 2015, pp. 400-401). Across many organizational settings, mentoring has prevailed as a leading mechanism to support women's career development and psychosocial well-being (Ismail, Khian Jui, & Shah, 2011; Helms, Arfken, & Bellar, 2016). Block and Tietjen-Smith (2016) discussed the need for gender-based guidance and positive mentoring relationships to support women's leadership development, as women benefit from the perspectives of other women because there is an empathetic understanding of experiences. Nonetheless, research on gender-based or gender-matched mentoring is inconsistent and largely theoretical, with little empirical evidence to more precisely define the differences, if any, between men and women in mentoring relationships (Blake-Beard, Bayne, Crosby, & Muller, 2011; Welsh & Diehn, 2018).

The federal government has implemented and continues to implement a range of laws, policies, programs, and initiatives to protect and promote career development for women and minorities. However, African American women, who are affected by having both gender and racial disadvantages, are not prototypical of either subordinate group, as those labels primarily refer to members having only one marginalized identity (Mugge & Erzeel, 2016). Women, for example, most often denotes Caucasian women, and African Americans usually encompasses African American men. African American women cannot wholly fit into either group, which presents complexities in society and in the workplace for this population. This leads to greater marginalization and further difficulty in obtaining leadership positions and navigating organizational culture. This dilemma can be explained as a form of social invisibility for African American women (Remedios,

Snyder, & Lizza, 2016). While workplace discrimination laws protect against violations based on race and gender, they do not account for the compounded effect of double jeopardy.

Gender-based mentoring refers to a mentor-protégé relationship in which both participants are women, and it considers one aspect of the demographic disadvantage that African American women face. With race and gender intersectionality, the two identities must be considered as one unit (Collins, 2009). The present study explored the role of this intersectionality in the perceptions of gender-based mentoring relationships for African American women. The study, which filled the gap of exploring this phenomenon in the federal government, has been prominently examined in the field of education. There is a need to explore this phenomenon to allow African American women to describe their experiences in their own words, to gain an understanding of this phenomenon in a public organization that is typically labeled as diverse, and to inform policies and practices related to mentoring and leadership development.

Problem Statement

African American women face additional challenges as employees and leaders due to the intersectionality of their race and gender. The underrepresentation of women and minorities in leadership presents a challenge to fostering meaningful gender-based mentoring relationships. In addition, McGlowan-Fellows and Thomas (2004) explained how African American women are systemically excluded in the workplace, which creates a disconnect in the transfer of the knowledge and power that is exchanged through mentoring. Furthermore, mentoring relationships for African American women may be

less beneficial for protégés if they are not paired with mentors with "professional identities that encompass racial and gender considerations" (Kelch-Oliver et al., 2013, p. 31).

Grant (2012) and Davis and Maldonado (2015) explained the need for African American women to be given the opportunity to share their stories and experiences, in order to dispel inaccuracies and myths that have been created by external groups. As Rosette and Livingston (2012) pointed out, gender leadership studies often compare Caucasian women to Caucasian men, and race leadership studies compare Caucasian men to African American men and fail to include an analysis of how African American women fit into the comparison. Studying African American women requires the use of appropriate theories and frameworks that address the intersectionality of race and gender, or what is known as *double oppression* or *double jeopardy* for this population (Grant, 2012; Davis & Maldonado, 2015; Rosette, Koval, Ma, & Livingston, 2016).

Research on the experiences of African American women as leaders and their leadership experiences is largely conducted within the field of K-12 or higher education (Grant, 2012; Davis & Maldonado, 2015; Heppner, 2017). In addition, gender-based mentoring studies tend to include all women or focus only on the protégé's outcomes of the mentoring relationship (Block & Tietjen-Smith, 2016; Brue & Brue, 2016). There is a gap in the literature on how the intersectionality of race and gender shapes African American women leaders' gender-based mentoring experiences within the federal government setting, from the perspective of participants who are, or have been, mentors and/or protégés.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this phenomenological research study was to explore how the intersectionality of race and gender shapes perceptions about gender-based mentoring experiences for African American women leaders in the federal government. The gender-based mentoring relationships were formal or informal, and the perceptions were captured from the perspectives of both mentors and protégés. Participants were expected to provide in-depth information about their experiences in order to yield thick description of this phenomenon.

Research Questions

To explore the perceptions of African American women leaders within the federal government about their gender-based mentoring experiences, one central research question was addressed:

- How does the intersectionality of race and gender shape African American women leaders' perceptions about their experiences with gender-based mentoring relationships?

There were two subquestions:

- How would African American women leaders describe the benefits and challenges of gender-based mentoring?

- What strategies do African American women leaders employ to succeed if gender-based mentoring relationships cannot be obtained?

Theoretical Framework for the Study

The theoretical framework for this study was Black feminist thought. The main

tenet is that African American women face additional challenges in leadership positions

due to the intersectionality of race and gender or double oppression. Grant (2012) and

Davis and Maldonado (2015) explained the need for this population to be given the

opportunity to share their stories and experiences, in order to dispel inaccuracies and

myths that have been created by external groups. This theory was relevant to the

underlying cultural aspect that contributes to the problem. The theory provided a

foundation for exploring the phenomenon of gender-based mentoring for African

American women through the lens of intersectionality; it aligned with the research

question, which focused on the role of intersectionality. This theory was also appropriate

for the phenomenological approach because it is rooted in the essence of the lived

experiences for this population. A detailed description of the theoretical framework is

included in Chapter 2.

Nature of the Study

This phenomenological study sought to understand participants' lived experiences

beyond the superficial layer of description. This aligned with the study's goal of

describing how the intersectionality of race and gender shapes African American women

leaders' perceptions about their experiences with gender-based mentoring relationships

within the federal government. In addition, the phenomenological approach provided a

framework for investigating the phenomenon from the perspective of the individual

participant, without the need to simply categorize or generate collective meaning of shared experiences.

The lived experiences of African American women are unique due to the double jeopardy of their minority race and gender. This study aimed to describe how this worldview shapes perceptions about gender-based mentoring for leaders within the federal government. In addition, the benefits and challenges of gender-based mentoring and strategies for success in the absence of gender-based mentoring relationships were explored.

The study participants were employees of the federal government in the Washington, DC, metropolitan area, who currently or previously held a permanent position as a General Schedule (GS) 12 (or equivalent) and above. Former employees were required to have worked for the federal government within the past 5 years, and to hold a GS-12 or above position at the time of separation. The participants needed to currently be in a gender-based mentoring relationship or to have been in such a relationship within the past 5 years. The participants' roles in the mentoring relationships could have been either a mentor, protégé, or both.

Data were collected through two focus groups. Each group consisted of a homogenous sample of participants, identified through LinkedIn. The purpose of the focus groups was to develop understanding, themes, and ideas about the phenomenon. Focus groups were conducted in person. As aligned with the common procedures for conducting focus groups, the interactions were audio recorded and transcribed. Participants were assigned a code to protect confidentiality.

The data collected through the focus groups was transcribed and coded. The focus group data were coded through micro-interlocutor analysis (Onwuegbuzie, Dickinson, Leech, & Zoran, 2009). Using this method allowed for group and individual analysis. Field notes, level of consensus, and demographic data were analyzed, in addition to the transcript data, to move beyond overall thematic or pattern coding. Further description of the study's method is included in Chapter 3.

Definitions

The following terms were used consistently throughout this phenomenological study. These commons words and phrases may have been operationalized or applied differently in this context. Therefore, definitions are included to clarify meaning.

African American or *Black*: The terms African American and Black are used interchangeably to refer to any person having origins in any of the Black racial groups of Africa, and it may also encompass more specific groups, such as Haitian and Jamaican (U.S. Census Bureau, 2011).

Double Jeopardy or *Dual Subordinate Identities* or *Gendered Racism*: The dilemma of being both African American and female, and faced with the unique societal and organizational challenges that this race and gender intersectionality presents (Rosette & Livingston, 2012; Remedios, Snyder, & Lizza, 2016; Lewis, Williams, Peppers, & Gadson, 2017).

Gender-based Mentoring or *Gender-matched Mentoring*: A type of mentoring relationship in which both parties are the same gender. This study primarily considered

gender-based mentoring relationships that involve only women (Tran, 2014; Zambrana et al., 2015).

General Schedule (GS): The official pay and classification system that covers the vast majority of federal government employees. The General Schedule ranges from the lowest grade of GS-1 to the highest grade of GS-15. Participants of this study were on the higher end of the GS scale at GS-12 and above (U.S. Office of Personnel Management, n.d.).

Leader: Participants in this study may be referred to as "leaders," regardless of their official position titles. As GS-12 and above employees, participants, by default, are in mid- to high-level positions within their organizations. This also aligns with the idea that anyone can lead within the organization by contributing to systems, tasks, activities, etc. that drive the organization forward (Dean, 2004).

Mentor: One of two or more parties in a mentoring relationship. This person is usually senior to or more experienced than the protégé(s) and is responsible for building the skills, knowledge, cultural and psychosocial competencies of the protégé(s). Mentors may also be peers or supervisors of the protégé(s) (Early, 2017).

Mentor-protégé Relationship or *Mentoring Relationship*: A characterization of the formal or informal interactions between mentors and protégés (Ortiz-Walters & Fullick, 2015).

Protégé: One of two or more parties in a mentoring relationship. This person is usually junior to or less experienced than the mentor and is primarily seeking development of their skills, knowledge, cultural and psychosocial competencies

(Early, 2017).

Race-based Mentoring or *Race-matched Mentoring*: A type of mentoring relationship in which both parties are the same race. (Tran, 2014; Welsh & Diehn, 2018).

Assumptions

There were several assumptions in this study. Most importantly, it was assumed that African American women are aware of and understand their race and gender intersectionality, and the unique worldview that stems from having these two subordinate identities. It was also assumed that the participants saw their intersectionality as significant in the context of gender-based mentoring, thereby providing keen insight on the role, if any, that intersectionality played in their experiences. Considering the study's method, there was an assumption that focus groups were the most appropriate way to collect rich data, and they were conducted in a way that was inclusive, yet structured enough to glean relevant and accurate information. The focus group method also included the assumption that participants would be open, honest, and forthcoming about their experiences. Furthermore, there was an assumption that the results of this study would be applicable to other African American women in the federal government and public organizations. Lastly, it was assumed that the results of this study would have implications for positive social change within the field of public policy and administration, such as contributing to recommendations to the federal government and other public organizations, and improving diversity and inclusion practices, leadership development, organizational development, and overall employee development for African American women and other minority populations.

Scope and Delimitations

This phenomenological study on the role of intersectionality in the perceptions of gender-based mentoring included African American women; it did not explore the experiences of other groups with dual subordinate identities, such as Asian American women. Perceptions were captured from African American women who were in, or who had held, mid- to high-level federal government positions, according the General Schedule. The study excluded African American women who may have been in lower graded positions or Senior Executive Service positions, and women who were not permanent federal employees, such as contractors, term or temporary employees, or students.

Data were collected through two in-person focus groups that were held in the Washington, DC, metropolitan area. Mentoring relationship status was self-reported by the participants; confirmation of their engagement in such relationships could not be obtained. Focus group participants may have been from any federal agency, and were recruited using group characteristics sampling through LinkedIn.

Limitations

There were several limitations of this phenomenological study. Although generalizability is not a requirement of the phenomenological approach, this study may be limited in its transferability to other groups. The participants were African American women from various federal government agencies. The study did not consider other populations impacted by race and gender intersectionality, such as Asian American women or Hispanic women. Also, the study population was limited to participants who

were current and former General Schedule employees at level 12 or higher. Perceptions

from African American women in lower grades, or those who were in the Senior

Executive Service, were not explored. In addition, this study considered the role of race

and gender intersectionality, and did not account for other factors that may have

contributed to participants' perceptions about the phenomenon.

The focus group data collection method also presented limitations. Anonymity

could not be obtained since participants were face-to-face with the ability to hear and

attribute each other's responses. In this open setting, participants could have been

reluctant to provide honest and complete information about their experiences. This

limitation was mitigated by building rapport with participants, moderating effectively to

prevent participants from dominating or shying away from the conversation, and

supplementing the interview questions with indirect or hypothetical prompts to promote

rich responses (Krefting, 1991). For example, if participants were hesitant to provide a

response, they may have been asked to consider the experiences of an African American

woman colleague or share their perceptions based on ideals versus reality. Lastly, this

study included perceptions from participants across various federal government agencies.

In-depth information related to specific agencies' policies, practices, programs, or

employees was not gained.

Significance

This research may contribute to the conversation on the unique challenges faced

by African American women, and enhance understanding of this phenomenon within the

federal government setting. As the world's largest employer, the federal government has

an obligation to foster the growth and development of all employees, and one way to foster that growth is through gender-based mentoring. Studying this phenomenon yielded recommendations to the federal government and other public organizations regarding diversity and inclusion practices, leadership development, organizational development, and overall employee development for African American women and other minority populations.

This research has the potential to empower, rather than victimize, the study's population and is aligned with Callahan et al.'s (2012) explanation of providing a voice to participants/populations through advocacy. Discovering the unique challenges of this population, and learning about their needs directly from them through qualitative inquiry, could help organizational leaders become more aware and inclusive. It may also prompt African American women to use their own voices by sharing experiences and knowledge through gender-based mentoring, and serving in advisory or change-making roles within their organizations.

Summary

This phenomenological research study was designed to explore African American women's perceptions about their gender-based mentoring experiences in the federal government. The role of intersectionality was considered as a way to better understand the lived experiences of this population, which faces unique challenges due to race and gender. This study filled gaps in the literature by exploring this phenomenon within the federal government setting and allowing the perspectives of both mentors and protégés in higher level positions.

Participants were recruited through purposive sampling methods via LinkedIn. The study population included African American women who were currently or previously in GS-12 and above civilian positions within the federal government within the past 5 years, and had participated in a gender-based mentoring relationship also within the past 5 years. Data were collected through two in-person focus groups. The data were analyzed at the group and individual levels and coded to reveal patterns and themes using NVivo software. The research results have implications for policies and programs related to mentoring and leadership development for (a) women and minorities, (b) diversity and inclusion practices, (c) employee engagement, and (d) organizational development.

A detailed description of the theoretical framework, the literature search strategy, and a comprehensive literature review can be found in Chapter 2. Chapter 3 includes a comprehensive description of the research design and methodology. A comprehensive description of the study implementation and results is found in Chapter 4. Chapter 5 provides information on the study's findings, as well as limitations, recommendations, and implications.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore how the intersectionality of race and gender shape perceptions about gender-based mentoring experiences for African American women leaders in the federal government. The gender-based mentoring relationships were formal or informal, and perceptions were captured from the perspectives of both mentors and protégés.

Research on the experiences of African American women as leaders and their leadership experiences has largely been conducted in the field of K-12 or higher education (Grant, 2012; Davis & Maldonado, 2015). In addition, gender-based mentoring studies tend to include all women or to focus only on the protégé's outcomes of the mentoring relationship (Block & Tietjen-Smith, 2016; Brue & Brue, 2016). There is a gap in the literature on how the intersectionality of race and gender shapes African American women leaders' gender-based mentoring experiences within the federal government setting, from the perspective of participants who are, or have been, mentors and/or protégés. This chapter includes a description of the literature search strategy and theoretical foundation, and a literature review of the research related to perceptions of women in society and in leadership, unique challenges for African American women, diversity and inclusion in the federal government, mentoring relationships, gender-based mentoring, organizational impact, and leadership capacity.

Literature Search Strategy

This literature review was developed from scholarly sources obtained through the following databases: Google Scholar, Thoreau Multi-Database, ProQuest Central, and ProQuest Dissertations and Theses Global. Key search terms included: *Black feminism, gender-based mentoring, race-based mentoring, African American women and mentoring, women mentoring women, women in leadership, women in federal government, African American women in federal government, African American women and leadership, mixed gender mentoring, men mentoring women, mentoring and leadership, race and leadership, and leadership identity.* Statistical data and demographic information were obtained through the official websites of federal agencies, such as the U.S. Office of Personnel Management and the U.S. Department of Labor.

Theoretical Foundation: Black Feminist Thought

The theoretical foundation for this phenomenological study on African American women's gender-based mentoring experiences is Black feminist thought, which provides a framework for understanding the unique challenges of African American women through the lens of intersectionality. This theory also incorporates the importance of qualitatively studying this population in order to provide truer information about African American women's lived experiences, using their own words and perceptions.

Collins (2009) developed the foundation for Black feminist thought with the first version of her book on this phenomenon in the early 1990s. The premise of Black feminist thought is that African American women in the United States comprise an oppressed group, which is complicated by intersecting characteristics of race and gender.

This idea of double oppression due to race and gender creates unique challenges for African American women, and it is exacerbated by attributes such as sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, and religion. Rooted in this concept of intersecting oppressions is a spirit of activism and resistance. Black feminist thought celebrates this unique worldview, and aligns with Grant's (2012) and Davis and Maldonado's (2015) explanation of the need for African American women to be given the opportunity to share their stories and experiences, in order to dispel inaccuracies and myths that have been created for them by external groups.

According to Collins (2009), there are six distinct elements of Black feminist thought. First, Black feminist thought is considered a critical social theory aimed at resisting oppression and achieving social justice through African American women's empowerment. Yet, empowerment is a fleeting goal, as long as the oppression persists, creating a cyclical dilemma. Second, although African American women are treated as a collective group with similar lived experiences, the individual experiences of these women are not identical, and there may be disagreements on the meaning and importance of these experiences amongst members of the group. Nonetheless, the varying responses to diverse experiences constitute collective knowledge of the group.

Furthermore, Black feminist thought is distinguished by the relationship between perceptions, experiences, empowerment, and activism. Black feminist thought emerged from historical and ongoing societal perceptions of African American women, resulting in unique experiences, which spark the oppressed group to reject the existing perceptions and create their own standpoint (Collins, 2009). In addition, Black feminist thought

necessitates that intellectual African American women contribute to the Black feminist body of knowledge by investigating a wide range of issues and phenomena that affect African American women across the spectrum of intersecting oppressions. Black feminist thought is further distinguished by its fluidity as a critical social theory, a model for developing knowledge, and a mechanism for perpetuating activism and resistance, simultaneously. The sixth and last distinct feature of Black feminist thought is its connection to broader social justice issues, as the oppression and subsequent quest for empowerment faced by African American women relates to greater human rights concerns.

Researchers have used Black feminist thought as a framework to qualitatively and quantitatively study African American women's experiences with leadership and mentoring. Grant (2012), in her qualitative study on African American women professors and mentoring, used Black feminist thought to describe the marginalization of this population. Grant explained that African American women, particularly in academia, are susceptible to being treated as outsiders within, with no sense or expectation of belonging in relation to the dominant group. Rasheem, Alleman, Mushonga, Anderson, and Ofahengaue Vakalahi (2018) conceptualized their qualitative study on mentoring relationships of Black women doctoral students using Black feminist thought to frame the importance of providing this population with a voice to define their own perceptions, translating those individual perceptions into group knowledge. Rosette and Livingston (2012), in their quantitative study of leader perceptions, provided Black feminist thought as a framework to conclude that leaders with the dual subordinate identities of being

African American and women were subjected to more negative perceptions than leaders with single subordinate identities.

Black feminist thought is an appropriate theory for exploring African American women's perceptions about their experiences with mentoring in the federal government. This theory creates a foundation for understanding and integrating the unique challenges and perspectives of African American women that have been developed due to the double oppression of race and gender intersectionality. In addition, the phenomenological design of the present study aligns with one of the distinct features of Black feminist thought, which is to provide a voice for African American women by allowing them to self-explain and self-validate their experiences, thereby shaping their own narratives. Furthermore, this theory allows for the participants' individual sharing and interpretation of their experiences, while generating collective knowledge.

The research questions for the present study are centered on the role double oppression plays in shaping African American women's perceptions about gender-based mentoring, as well as successes and challenges related to mentoring and leadership. These questions have been designed to not only give the participants individual and shared voices, but also gain knowledge about how they overcome the issues related to intersectionality and oppression, in order to become successful as leaders. Additionally, participants' responses to the research questions may contribute to the Black feminist thought body of knowledge, particularly in the areas of resistance and activism, by defining strategies that African American women may employ to thrive in settings controlled by the dominant group.

Literature Review

When exploring African American women's perceptions about their gender-based mentoring experiences, it is important to review and understand scholarly literature on gender and race, leadership, and mentoring. The following synthesis includes information to help frame the study, such as how gender norms impact views of women in the workplace, the unique challenge of intersectionality for African American women, the benefits and challenges of gender-based mentoring, and diversity and mentoring in the federal government.

Perceptions of Women in Society and in Leadership Roles

Researchers suggest that widely-accepted gender norms influence how women are perceived in the workplace and in leadership roles. These societal norms have contributed to the narrative that women are less powerful and influential than men in organizational settings. The cultural stereotypes that portray women as more congenial and kinder than men may not appear to be negative, but this labeling translates into a belief that women are too soft to be effective and assertive in leadership positions (Wynen, op de Beeck, & Ruebens, 2015). McGee (2018) expanded on this concept, citing the challenges created by social norms when they are incongruent with job requirements and expectations. The author explained how men are associated with having such inherit traits as decisiveness, authoritativeness, and competitiveness, while women are intrinsically nurturing, creative, and docile. The male traits are traditionally aligned with leadership traits, which creates an expectation of success for men who hold leadership positions. Contrarily, since the

female traits are not those that are perceived as leadership traits, there is an expectation of failure for women who occupy leadership positions (McGee, 2018).

Rosette, Koval, Ma, and Livingston (2016) described this phenomenon of gender norms-leadership trait incongruity in terms of agentic deficiencies and agentic penalties. Agentic deficiency refers to women's perceived lack of leadership potential, due to the aforementioned characteristics that portray them as less capable of effectively functioning in leadership roles. Yet, women may display more male-oriented traits to obtain or when serving in leadership positions. As a result of the leadership behavior that contrasts with perceived traits, women are often faced with backlash, which is considered the agentic penalty for their actions.

This misalignment of societal expectations with women's positions as leaders in the workplace presents fundamental challenges to success and development for women across a variety of organizational fields. In addition, societal expectations have not only created challenges for women in leadership positions, but also for women at all levels within organizations. Issues of organizational diversity remain prevalent. This includes gender inequality, which is evidenced by significant pay gaps between men and women, disproportionate access to career advancement opportunities, underrepresentation in leadership positions, and overall workplace discrimination (Wynen, op de Beeck, & Ruebens, 2015). Furthermore, women are also disadvantaged by "human capital barriers (lack of education, resources, and experience), differences in communication styles, exclusion from informal networks, lack of mentors and role-models, and limited

management support for work/life programs" (Wynen, op de Beeck, & Ruebens, 2015, p.

378).

Despite the well-documented issues with incongruent social norms and leadership

traits, gender inequality, and organizational challenges, emerging research indicates that

the distinct line between traditional male-female characteristics and leadership roles is

blurring. The conventional male leadership traits primarily align with the transactional

leadership style, neglecting the valuable contribution of female-linked characteristics,

which when combined, create a more desirable transformational leadership model that is

fundamentally collaborative, motivational, and assertive (McGee, 2018).

The Glass Ceiling

In conjunction with overcoming societal perceptions, women also contend with

the glass ceiling as a barrier to obtaining leadership roles. The term, glass ceiling,

emerged in the late 1970s and refers to the metaphorical impediment faced by women

and minorities in the workplace, where they can see opportunities for advancement, but

have difficulty obtaining upward mobility due to systemic disadvantages beyond their

control (McGee, 2018). Nonetheless, it is possible for women to acquire leadership roles

within organizations. Although, once those leadership roles are obtained, the difficulties

for women persist, leading to failure, among other consequences.

Glass and Cook (2016) explained how women who advance through the glass

ceiling usually do so by accepting high-risk or unfavorable leadership positions, which

often include leading an organization that is in crisis. However, women leaders, even

when placed in difficult leadership positions, are not typically afforded the same level of

authority and autonomy as men in similar roles (Sabharwal, 2015). In addition, women in leadership positions suffer negative career impacts and social emotional consequences, such as minimal peer or leader support, limited access to strong organizational networks, increased stress and depression, and lower job satisfaction (Glass & Cook, 2016). Sabharwal (2015) likened this rise and subsequent potential failure to a glass cliff that women leaders figuratively fall over after breaking through the glass ceiling.

Faced with mostly grim prospective results, women are still likely to choose, or be chosen for, the less favorable leadership positions, as their options for obtaining these roles are already limited. Generally, men have more leadership options, and are therefore more selective about which positions they accept (Glass & Cook, 2016). Nevertheless, even without great competition from men for these high-risk leadership positions, women encounter less leadership opportunities, and accept the precarious roles in an effort to prove themselves or out of fear of not having additional chances for something more desirable (Sabharwal, 2015; Glass & Cook, 2015).

Additional Challenges for African American Women

In addition to the stigma of societal gender norms and problems with organizational advancement that affect all women, African American women's challenges are compounded by issues such as double jeopardy, negative stereotypes, and systemic exclusion. The literature points to a connection between these factors and mentoring relationships for this population. Therefore, these influences cannot be omitted from the discussion on mentoring relationships and leader identity for African American women.

Double jeopardy. Research shows that the intersection of race and gender creates a unique challenge for African American women. This population belongs to two distinctly marginalized groups, African Americans and women. African Americans as a disenfranchised population contend with racism, and women as a minority population experience sexism. Yet, African American women face both racism and sexism simultaneously, creating a dilemma of double jeopardy or gendered racism that leads to cumulative consequences (Remedios, Snyder, & Lizza, 2016; Lewis, Williams, Peppers, & Gadson, 2017).

Mugge and Erzeel (2016) explained that African American women are not prototypical of either subordinate group, as those labels primarily refer to members having one marginalized identity. Women, for example, most often denotes Caucasian women, and African Americans usually encompasses African American men. African American women cannot wholly fit into either group, which presents complexities in society and in the workplace for this population. This leads to greater marginalization and further difficulty in obtaining leadership positions and navigating organizational culture.

Remedios, Snyder, and Lizza (2016) framed this phenomenon as a form of social invisibility for African American women. While workplace discrimination laws protect against violations based on race and gender, they do not account for the compounded effect of double jeopardy. The authors explained that it may be extremely difficult for African American women to prove workplace discrimination based on race or gender if Caucasian women, African American men, or other minorities with one subordinate identity are provided with similar opportunities or promotions. Mugge and Erzeel (2016)

also found that attempts to promote diversity and inclusion fall short for African American women, as these types of programs benefit the prototypical minorities— gender-inclusive strategies are more beneficial to Caucasian women, and racially-inclusive initiatives primarily benefit African American men.

Negative stereotypes. Because African American women are not neatly aligned with all women or all African Americans, they are plagued by negative perceptions and stereotypes that are unique to the other groups. In their quantitative study on agentic bias, Rosette, Koval, Ma, and Livingston (2016) identified being angry, including loud and boisterous, as the highest-ranking stereotype for African American women. By contrast, Asian American women and Caucasian women were identified as having positive intellect and being communal, respectively, as their top characteristics. Furthermore, the angry stereotype for African American women was followed by being strong and dominant, consecutively. These negative attributes that are assigned to African American women exacerbate the societal perceptions, such as lacking leadership qualities, that affect all women.

It is difficult for African American women to prove discrimination based on stereotypes and gendered racism. Additionally, when African American women make claims of discrimination, they are further alienated and negatively labeled. When exploring the perceptions of women of color who claimed workplace discrimination, Remedios, Snyder, and Lizza (2016) found that these women were considered troublemakers and were perceived to lack credibility to substantiate their complaints. One argument for the culture of invisibility experienced by African American women is that it

may shield them from being subjected to discriminatory practices; although, their invisibility also prevents their contributions and accomplishments from being recognized (Rosette, Koval, Ma, & Livingston, 2016).

      Systemic exclusion. African American women also contend with inadequate opportunities for advancement due to systemic exclusion in the workplace. While all women encounter some level of exclusion due to incongruity and the glass ceiling, African American women's experiences are exceedingly different from women of other groups. McGee (2018) pointed out that African American women have less access to the formal and informal professional networks that are vital to building their careers. This compounds the problem of African American women and other minority women overwhelmingly occupying lower level positions without a clear or immediate path to advance to senior positions (Sy, Tram-Quon, & Leung, 2017; McGee, 2018). Caucasian women, as members of the dominant group, have more options to succeed, and Asian American women's typically positive stereotypes shield them from being deliberately excluded in the way that African American women are excluded. As a consequence of this exclusion and disadvantage, African American women may lack preparation for leadership roles if obtained, which provides more opportunity for failure.

      The concrete wall. Beyond the glass ceiling, researchers characterized African American women's quandary as a concrete wall. The concrete wall is a colloquial description of the totality of systemic exclusion, lack of resources, gendered racism, negative stereotypes, stressors, and other barriers that African American women face (Linnabery, Stuhlmacher, & Towler, 2014; McGee, 2018). Linnabery, Stuhlmacher, and

Towler (2014) pointed to the demand-control theory as another contributor to the concrete wall for African American women. The authors explained how this population experiences greater psychological stress due to the demands of their positions coupled with organizational and societal hurdles, including lack of control over their job situation. As a result, African American women need and seek more social support than their counterparts. Yet, the limited access to professional networks, underrepresentation, and fewer resources, such as mentoring, supervisor support, and formal programs, make this necessary social support more difficult to obtain. Unlike the glass ceiling, where opportunities are transparent with a clearer path of how to move upward despite barriers, the concrete wall implies that that higher levels of success are completely closed off and detached from African American women. This may lead to psychological distress and depression, low job or career satisfaction, and high turnover for these women more so than for Caucasian women or African American men (Linnabery, Stuhlmacher, & Towler, 2014; Glass & Cook, 2016).

Coping strategies. Despite negative stereotypes, the concrete wall, and other barriers, African American women may utilize several coping strategies to gain upward mobility and achieve success. Dickens, Womack, and Dimes (2018) conceptualized the use of identity shifting as a way to mitigate the effects of negative perceptions and discrimination. The authors described how African American women who obtain promotions or hold leadership positions employ the strategic process of portraying qualities that counteract the existing stereotypes, such as being mild-mannered and agreeable. Dickens et al. suggested that African American women could feel pressured to

identity switch due to the hypervisibility that arises from being one of few or none in high-level positions within the organization.

Lewis, Williams, Peppers, and Gadson (2017), in their quantitative study on gendered racism, concluded that African American women suffered from negative mental and physical health outcomes. Although, the authors noted the lack of a valid instrument to measure intersectionality during the study. Nonetheless, Lewis et al. concluded that African American women also cope through active engagement strategies, as well as through avoidance or disengagement strategies in addition to social support and spirituality to manage the effects of gendered racism. Sy, Tram-Quon, and Leung (2017) added several other success factors for minority women, particularly, engaging in culturally-ambiguous interpersonal communication, projecting a positive self-brand, and understanding the informal organizational rules and norms.

Women and Diversity in the Federal Government

According to the most recent Federal Equal Opportunity Recruitment Program (FEORP) Report to Congress, there were 843,358 women in the permanent federal workforce, which represents 43.2% of the total employee population (U.S. Office of Personnel Management, 2018). Caucasian women make up 24.6% of the total employee population, with African American women comprising 10.8%. When compared to the overall civilian labor force in the U.S., the federal government employs a slightly less percentage of Caucasian women, but nearly double the percentage of African American women. Combined, African American men and women represent 18.4% of the federal workforce, which is higher than the U.S. labor force rate of 10.5%.

While African Americans, including African American women, are employed by the federal government at a significantly higher rate than the national average, African Americans hold primarily lower or less responsible positions. Nearly 74% of African American federal government workers are classified as having clerical, technical, or administrative white-collar positions, with less than 12% holding professional white-collar positions (U.S. Office of Personnel Management, 2018). Just over 18% hold blue collar positions. African Americans also represent 11% of the Senior Executive Service (SES) population, which is counted separately from the general federal employee population. Of the cabinet-level agencies in the Executive Branch, the departments of Education and Housing and Urban Development have the highest percentage of African American employees (nearly 38%), and the Department of Interior has the lowest percentage (5.6%).

The Federal Glass Ceiling Commission

The U.S. federal government, which is the setting for this phenomenological study, has historically led and undertaken efforts to improve organizational diversity, such as implementing equal opportunities policies for hiring and executing strategic initiatives and programs. The Federal Glass Ceiling Commission was formed in the early 1990s as a result of the Civil Rights Act of 1991 (U.S. Department of Labor, 1995; McGee, 2018). Although, the term "glass ceiling" had been widely used in decades prior to refer to the figurative impediments faced by women and minorities in the workplace (McGee, 2018). The 21-member bipartisan committee was charged with further identifying and examining societal and organizational barriers that impeded minorities'

and women's career advancement, primarily in the private/corporate sector. Though the Commission was fairly short-lived, they published substantial recommendations in their final report, published in 1995.

The Commission developed eight recommendations for implementation by businesses in the private sector, as well as four recommendations for improving opportunities for women and minorities in the federal government (U.S. Department of Labor, 1995). For businesses, the Commission's recommendations centered on leadership commitment, inclusive policies, strategic planning, recruitment and retention, and training—changing the organizational culture to foster diversity and inclusion to eliminate barriers. The Commission cautioned, "Organizations cannot make members of society blind to differences in color, culture or gender, but they can demand and enforce merit-based practice and behavior internally" (U.S. Department of Labor, 1995, p. 14). Yet, formal training for employees and leaders on cultural differences and challenges faced by women and minorities may improve culture and behavior.

Although the original intent of the Commission was to examine challenges and practices in the private sector, the report included recommendations for how the federal government could contribute to eliminating or diminishing the effects of the glass ceiling. The primary implication was for federal agencies to take ownership of and lead efforts to dismantle federal and non-federal barriers by improving its own policies and practices, with the expectation of creating an exemplary model for other entities to follow. Moreover, the recommendations included strengthening and enforcing federal anti-discrimination laws, and improving information collection and sharing in order to

increase transparency and make data-driven decisions. There have been no subsequent reports to outline how businesses have implemented the recommendations or whether any progress toward eliminating the barriers has been as a direct result of the Commission's work.

Diversity and Inclusion

Although the Federal Glass Ceiling Commission disbanded, and there has not been a formal follow up to its final report in 1995, the federal government has continued its efforts to be an exemplary diverse and inclusive employer. Stemming from a presidential executive order, the U.S. Office of Personnel Management (OPM) created a Governmentwide Inclusive Diversity Strategic Plan in 2011, and issued an updated Plan in 2016. The Plan includes the following definitions of diversity and inclusion (U.S. Office of Personnel Management, 2016):

- *Workforce diversity:* A collection of individual attributes that together help agencies pursue organizational objectives efficiently and effectively.

- *Inclusion:* A set of behaviors (culture) that encourages employees to feel valued for their unique qualities and experience a sense of belonging.

- *Inclusive diversity:* A set of behaviors that promote collaboration amongst a diverse group.

The Plan's three goals include improving diversity through leadership engagement, fostering an inclusive and engaged organizational culture, and leveraging data-driven approaches in alignment with the FEORP. While the Plan was developed and issued by

OPM, which is the federal government's human capital authority for the Executive Branch, each agency has autonomy with implementing the goals of the Plan.

Under the third goal of utilizing data-driven approaches to develop diversity and inclusion programs and policies, there are three priorities that include enriching the workforce through career development, recruitment and hiring, and enhancement opportunities for employees. There is no specific mention of mentoring as a strategy, and the Plan does not provide detailed recommendations on how agencies should work to accomplish these goals.

Wynen, op de Beeck, and Ruebens (2015) discussed diversity and inclusion in terms of horizontal segregation and vertical segregation. The authors explained how horizontal segregation refers to the representation of men and women across occupations. For example, women are highly represented and dominant in the nursing field; whereas, men are more dominant as lawyers and doctors. Vertical segregation is used to describe disparities between men and women in terms of rank and status. Men not only dominate high ranking positions in occupations where they are dominant, but they also have greater opportunities for promotions and leadership positions in occupations that are dominated by women. Contrary to the glass ceiling that all women face, and the concrete wall that African American women contend with, men's experiences with upward career mobility are compared to a glass escalator, as they have a more direct and less complicated journey to success (Wynen, op de Beeck, & Ruebens, 2015).

Within the federal government, despite strategic efforts, issues with diversity persist. While women are prevalent at over 43% of the federal employee population, they

overwhelmingly occupy lower level positions. On the General Schedule (GS) pay scale, with GS-1 being the lowest and GS-15 being the highest, women are overrepresented in positions that are at or below the GS-11 level, and underrepresented in higher graded and executive positions (Wynen, op de Beeck, & Ruebens, 2015). Although, the authors noted that having the GS structure reduces pay disparities between men and women who are performing the same jobs at the same levels.

Moon (2016) surmised that the body of diversity research is lacking in several areas. This includes the need to examine the complexities within the realm of diversity, and better understand the effects of diversity on public management and organizational outcomes. The author also pointed to a dearth in the practice of inclusion, explaining that while diversity may exist within organizations, employees could still be subjected to exclusion since they are not treated as members or insiders in relation to the dominant groups.

Mentoring Relationships

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore how the intersectionality of race and gender shaped perceptions about gender-based mentoring experiences for African American women leaders in the federal government. It is important to understand how issues such as gender and societal norms, double jeopardy, and organizational barriers influence mentoring relationships for African American women. For this population, these factors affect accessibility to mentors, gender-based mentoring relationships, and the acquisition of knowledge and power. There are also

additional implications for how African American women may be supported outside of mentoring relationships.

Mentoring Characteristics and Outcomes

Eby, Rhodes, and Allen (2007) pointed to the multiple definitions of mentoring that exist across various fields and industries. Yet, whether referring to mentoring in the context of public administration or youth programs, the underlying premise is that mentoring is an exchange or transfer of knowledge that occurs within a relationship between a more experienced person to a lesser experienced person (Eby, Rhodes, & Allen, 2007; Early, 2017). Hudson (2016) differentiated between mentoring and supervision in the workplace, noting that mentoring primarily constitutes a fluid and mutually-beneficial partnership; whereas supervision is a hierarchical and mostly unidirectional relationship. However, some researchers argued that mentoring and supervision are similar or synonymous. Holt, Markova, Dhaenens, Marler, and Heilmann (2016) compared supervisor mentoring to informal mentoring that could be measured on the leader-member exchange spectrum, where high-quality relationships are transformational and built on mutual trust and respect, and the low-quality relationships are somewhat obligatory or transactional. Lapointe and Vandenberghe (2017) also pointed to the value of supervisor mentoring, noting that supervisors have keen insight into the organizations that they represent and could offer pertinent knowledge to protégés about the organizational culture. The authors also explained how supervisor mentoring yields more positive and sustainable outcomes than other types of mentoring, despite the supervisor's role as a mentor being collateral or external to their primary duties. In

addition to supervisor mentoring, there are numerous factors that may impact the quality of relationships for mentors and protégés.

Mentor and protégé benefits. Researchers agree that there are two main goals or benefits of mentoring for protégés: career development and psychosocial support (Blake-Beard, Bayne, Crosby, & Muller, 2011; Bailey, Voyles, Finkelstein, & Matarazzo, 2016; Hudson, 2016; Early, 2017). Career development involves mentors enhancing protégés' professional growth through coaching, networking, skill development, and goal-setting. Protégés may receive psychosocial support from mentors who serve as counselors and role models or act with empathy and friendliness. Despite the somewhat reciprocal nature of mentoring relationships, the primary focus is on the protégés' career development outcomes and satisfaction (Eby, Rhodes, & Allen, 2007; Bailey, Voyles, Finkelstein, & Matarazzo, 2016). Mentors, however, reap more of the psychosocial benefits, such as feeling rewarded or validated through their efforts to advise and assist protégés achieve success (Grima, Paillé, Mejia, & Prud'homme, 2014). Although, Hernandez, Estrada, Woodcock, and Schultz (2017) contended that the quality of the mentoring relationship is the sum of mentor support and protégé satisfaction.

Protégés may greatly benefit from successful mentoring relationships. Typically, as individuals who are seeking career development or transitioning in their careers, newer to the organization, or otherwise the less experienced partner in the mentoring relationship, the protégé usually has the most to gain or lose from the mentoring experience. Because of this dynamic, the protégé's perspectives about their mentor's qualities, and expectations of the mentoring experience, could significantly steer the

relationship. Bailey, Voyles, Finkelstein, and Matarazzo (2016) conducted their quantitative study on mentor prototypes using the Ideal Mentor Scale with input from protégés. The researchers found that protégés specifically defined characteristics they wanted to see in their mentors, ranging from the mentors' dress and personal appearance, to their age, sense of humor, and job titles. In addition, protégés expressed preferences for their mentor's gender, with female protégés preferring female mentors, and male protégés preferring male mentors. Similarly, the majority of protégés who participated in the study indicated their preference for mentors who were of the same race. Further implications for gender-matched and race-matched mentoring are discussed in following sections.

Whether or not protégés are matched with their ideal mentors, the mentoring relationship may yield significant benefits. For federal government mentoring programs, OPM published a best practices guide, which detailed the benefits and expectations for protégés. Although the document was issued more than a decade ago with no recent updates, it offered information consistent with current research. For example, when participating in their agency's mentoring programs, protégés would be expected to experience professional and career development, increase their networks, unlock their strengths and potential, and gain a better understanding of how to navigate the organization (U.S. Office of Personnel Management, 2008; U.S. Department of Energy, 2014). These outcomes are aligned with the major goals of mentoring and mentoring relationships—career development and psychosocial support. Heppner (2017) added that mentoring may also result in the promotion of social justice, and protégés could acquire cultural competencies through the mentoring relationship.

Mentors also gain career development and psychosocial support through their roles in mentoring relationships. Although, the benefits for mentors are usually more psychosocial than professional. Grima, Paillé, Mejia, and Prud'homme (2014) explained how mentors may feel rewarded for being recognized for their knowledge and expertise and welcome the opportunity to coach and share advice with protégés. The authors noted the need for mentors to experience positive outcomes in order for them to develop and maintain a vested interest in the protégé and the mentoring relationship. Kao, Rogers, Spitzmueller, Lin, and Lin (2014) added that mentors, particularly supervisor mentors, benefit from the opportunity to develop the organization's talent by building resilience in protégés and serving as representatives of and role models within the organization.

Picariello and Waller (2016) expanded on the role mentors play as coaches and sponsors within the mentoring relationship. The authors defined coaching as providing protégés with specific skills and strategies to advance in their careers. Sponsorship was described as the endorsement or promotion of the protégé by the mentor. For instance, mentors may recommend protégés to other managers or hiring officials, increasing the likelihood that the protégé would be selected for career development opportunities. The mentor also benefits from sponsorship, as it increases their credibility and position within the organization.

Formal and informal mentoring programs. Mentoring relationships and mentoring programs may be formal or informal. Formal mentoring programs usually contain guidelines and goals for the participants, to be achieved within a specified timeframe. Within the federal government, OPM suggested that formal programs contain

key components, such as a needs assessment, a detailed plan, leader buy-in, a dedicated

program manager, and a communications strategy (U.S. Office of Personnel

Management, 2008). Informal mentoring may occur at any time, with less structure than

formal programs, but with similar or greater outcomes than formal mentoring. Other

types of mentoring, particularly in the federal government, may include group, peer,

reverse, or flash (U.S. Office of Personnel Management, 2008).

Desimone et al. (2014) described several distinctions between informal and

formal mentoring relationships, ranging from their inception to outcomes. The authors

defined formal mentoring as being assigned or dictated by the organization, even if there

is no associated, structured program. Yet, with informal relationships, the goals and

expectations are created by the mentor and protégé. The primary difference between the

types of mentoring is how the relationships are formed. Yet, in many cases, formal and

informal mentoring relationships may be complementary (Desimone et al., 2014).

Furthermore, when considering outcomes, formal mentoring relationships tend to

primarily address the protégé's career development needs, while informal relationships

are more likely to cater to the protégé's psychosocial support needs.

Gender-Matched and Race-Matched Mentoring

As discussed in previous sections, the formation of mentoring relationships may

be based on the participants' similarity-attraction, which includes demographics such as

gender and race. Mentors who are the same race, same gender, or both as the protégé,

represent a prototype and serve as role models for their protégés (Blake-Beard, Bayne,

Crosby, & Muller, 2011). Yet, due to the underrepresentation of women and minorities in

leadership positions, particularly African American women, protégés are less likely to find mentors who share their demographic characteristics. Ortiz-Walters and Fullick (2015) explained how this dilemma of underrepresentation leads to the formation of mentoring relationships that are based on other factors, such as trust, comfort level, or communication. Furthermore, because women face societal and workplace barriers, they are less likely to find mentors, regardless of race, and they usually receive less mentoring than men (Welsh & Diehn, 2018). Nonetheless, research on gender-based or gender-matched mentoring is inconsistent and largely theoretical, with little empirical evidence to more precisely define the differences, if any, between men and women in mentoring relationships (Blake-Beard, Bayne, Crosby, & Muller, 2011; Welsh & Diehn, 2018).

Welsh and Diehn (2018) expanded upon the disconnect between theoretical and empirical research on gender and mentoring. The authors concluded that, theoretically, women are less likely to find a mentor or receive mentoring due to the barriers that they face in the workplace. Empirically, the research would suggest that women and men have similar mentoring access and experiences. The authors provided several probable reasons for the incongruence between the theoretical and empirical literature including, the possibility that perceived barriers that women face may not exist, or barriers may exist, which forces mentors and protégés to work harder to develop relationships, and that men and women actually receive different types of mentoring. When studied, women protégés reported that they felt more supported and inspired by women mentors (Blake-Beard, Bayne, Crosby, & Muller, 2011). Yet, it is unclear whether women actually receive less mentoring than men.

Tran (2014), in her qualitative study on mentoring women of color in academia, further cited underrepresentation in leadership as a challenge, and explained that minorities face discrimination and other barriers not only in predominately Caucasian institutions, but also in minority institutions, such as historically black colleges and universities. To fill the gap of not having enough available mentors to gender- and/or race-match with protégés, researchers suggest moving away from the leader-follower type of mentor relationships by employing peer or group partnerships to provide support for minorities (Tran, 2014; Zambrana et al., 2015). This type of linear versus hierarchical mentoring may foster greater collaboration, and it allows for multiple, simultaneous mentoring relationships (Tran, 2014). Zambrana et al. (2015) found that the faculty participants in their studied engaged in three or more mentoring relationships, and participants indicated that even when mentoring relationships were unavailable, they were connected to and inspired by seeing people of color in higher positions.

For African American women, intersectionality adds complexity to the establishment of gender- and race-matched mentoring relationships. Zambrana et al. (2015) explained how the fluidity of being both female and Black lends itself to a less rigid approach than simply matching by race or by gender. Also, because men are more likely to hold leadership positions and women are underrepresented, it is less feasible for this population to have demographically-matched mentors, and African American women may benefit from cross-demographic mentoring relationships, as well informal partnerships, peer collaboration, and group mentoring (Tran, 2014; Welsh & Diehn, 2018). Yet, non-Caucasian protégés indicated that they were less satisfied with

alternative forms of mentoring interactions, and noted less opportunities to collaborate, which could be attributed to their diminished social networks in the workplace (Zambrana et al., 2015). In addition, cross-demographic mentoring relationships may perpetuate cultural mistrust, discomfort, and miscommunication (Ortiz-Walters & Fullick, 2015).

Mentoring for African American Women

African American women, contending with issues stemming from race and gender intersectionality, have unique considerations when involved in mentoring relationships. Johnson-Bailey, Lasker-Scott, and Sealey-Ruiz (2015) described the exchange of knowledge and information between African American women in mentoring relationships as a type of literacy that is unique to this population. The results of the authors' qualitative study on mentoring for African American women in academia yielded four themes: "1) trusting culturally grounded lessons; 2) navigating the hostile environment and the unsafe spaces of the academy; 3) giving back to the community; and 4) surviving and persisting by relying on unspoken understanding and support." (Johnson-Bailey, Lasker-Scott, & Sealey-Ruiz, 2015, p. 3). These themes encapsulate several concepts found in the literature, including that African American women's uniqueness from other groups creates an understanding or bond between them, and that sense of community compels them to overcome challenges in society and in the workplace.

Wiley, Bustamante, and Ballenger (2017) discovered similar results in their phenomenological study of African American women superintendents in Texas. Using

Black feminist thought as a framework, the authors identified three themes: "a) the

participants' desire to impact others at various levels, b) the participants' sources of

personal strength, and c) external support systems" (Wiley, Bustamante, & Ballenger,

2017, p. 20). The participants indicated that they were well-aware of the challenges they

faced because of their race and gender, yet they were compelled to achieve higher

positions. In addition, despite a lack of formal preparation for leadership roles and the

damper of negative workplace experiences, participants identified mentoring

relationships and personal support as positive factors in their career development.

Furthermore, the authors recommended mentoring and leadership programs to support

African American women achieve greater career success and support.

Grant and Ghee (2015) contributed a unique perspective in their narrative

autoethnography about their mentor-protégé relationship while being a professor and

doctoral student, respectively, at a predominately Caucasian university. The researchers

employed Black feminist thought as a framework for the epistemological context of

African American women, and pointed to their shared cultural background and interests

as pillars of their mentoring relationship. Grant and Ghee posited that the career

development and psychosocial support elements of mentoring, as well as the emphasis on

same- or cross-gender/race matching, represent a more modern approach to mentoring.

Unlike the more traditional roles in mentoring relationships that were mostly

characterized by the transfer of knowledge from a more experienced to person to a lesser

experienced person, modern mentoring partnerships are centered on mutual benefit for

both the mentor and protégé. As African American women facing underrepresentation

and other organizational barriers, the researchers highlighted how their mentoring relationship was born out of the lack of guidance and support from colleagues within the organization to achieve their respective goals. This shared need led to greater trust and made the mentoring relationship more effective. Yet, Grant and Ghee contended that cross-race and gender partnerships may also be effective. Although, they noted the absence of a blueprint for successful implementation and evaluation of outcomes for mentoring relationships of African American women.

Summary and Conclusions

To explore African American women's perceptions about their gender-based mentoring experiences within the federal government, this phenomenological study was based on the theoretical foundation of Black feminist thought. While all women contend with societal perceptions and systemic barriers that create challenges for them in workplace, African American women experience greater impediments and hold a unique worldview, due to their race and gender intersectionality. Therefore, it is important for this population to be given the opportunity to define their own perceptions, and reshape the narratives that have been created for them by other groups.

There is a considerable amount of literature on the glass ceiling phenomenon. However, some researchers have likened African American women's challenges in the workplace to a concrete wall, as this population experiences greater struggles on the path to leadership positions, such as double jeopardy, negative stereotypes, and systemic exclusion. Other barriers, such as incongruent societal-leadership roles, discrimination, and lack of powerful networks, were frequently studied and discussed. Yet, less is known

about how women and African American women overcome these barriers, specifically what strategies they employ to achieve career success.

The underrepresentation of women and African American women in leadership positions, across a variety of settings, is also well-documented. However, the federal government workforce is considerably more diverse when compared to the national averages for other types of organizations. Nonetheless, the higher representation of women and minorities exists within the lower ranks of federal agencies, and is limited to administrative, clerical, and technical specialties. African American women are far scarcer in professional and senior roles, and although government has emphasized diversity, it is unclear whether or not federal initiatives support the growth of minorities in leadership positions.

Mentoring and mentor-protégé relationships have been cited as tools to support African American women in the federal government and other workplaces through career development and psychosocial support. Though the primary emphasis is on protégé outcomes, mentoring relationships may serve as mutually-beneficial partnerships can be formal or informal, and may include supervisory, peer, and group formats. Both formal and informal mentoring relationships may yield positive outcomes for mentors and protégés, but an important contributing factor to that success is the demographic characteristics of the participants.

Gender-matched and/or race-matched mentoring relationships have been found to benefit women and minorities, including African American women, particularly in the area of psychosocial support. Researchers suggested that demographic similarity among

mentor-protégé pairs creates greater trust and empathy, which promotes satisfaction with the mentoring relationship. Although, underrepresentation makes it challenging for African American women to secure demographically-matched mentoring relationships, and there is no definitive research that shows that gender-based mentoring is overall more beneficial to women. Other researchers supported the idea of cross-demographic mentoring as a suitable and helpful to African American women.

Research on mentoring for African American women has been largely conducted within the field of K-12 and postsecondary education. There is a gap in the literature on mentoring and gender-based mentoring for African American women in the federal government or public administration setting. In addition, while some research considers the role of intersectionality, it is mainly to frame the epistemological worldview of this population, and does not capture the role of race and gender intersectionality on the perceptions and outcomes of the mentoring relationships. Furthermore, some studies include either race or gender as variables, grouping or comparing all African Americans or all women. There were also research gaps in understanding the perceptions or perspectives from both the mentor and the protégé within the same studies. For example, the qualitative and quantitative studies cited in this literature review contained only one point of view, versus addressing the perceptions of participants who were serving, or had served, as both mentors and protégés. Moreover, the literature lacked information about the perceptions of mentors and protégés who were in mid-level and leadership positions, rather focusing on leader-follower or experienced-novice types of mentoring relationships.

The present study on African American women leaders' perceptions about their gender-based mentoring relationships attempted to fill several research gaps. The study occurred within the federal government setting, and it included perceptions from participants who have served as both mentors and protégés and shared information about each of those roles. Additionally, participants were federal employees who are GS-12 and above, which indicates that they are in a mid- to senior-level position.

In order to appropriately explore this phenomenon and answer the proposed research questions, the current study was qualitative with a phenomenological approach. This research design aligned with the exploratory nature of the study, and it allowed the essence of the participants' perceptions and experiences to be captured. It also provided the African American women participants with an opportunity to share their individual and collective stories in their own words, which is a feature of Black feminist thought. Furthermore, results gleaned from this study generated insight on, and filled additional literature gaps related to, the benefits and challenges of gender-based mentoring for African American women, and the strategies that contribute to success for African American women when gender-based mentoring relationships are not available.

A detailed description of the current study's method is included in Chapter 3.

Chapter 3: Research Method

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to describe how the intersectionality of race and gender shaped perceptions about gender-based mentoring experiences for African American women leaders in the federal government. The gender-based mentoring relationships were formal or informal, and perceptions from the perspectives of both mentors and protégés were captured. Data were collected through two focus groups. The data were analyzed using micro-interlocutor analysis and other appropriate methods. This chapter contains comprehensive information on the study's research methods, including the research design, role of the researcher, participant selection logic, data collection and analysis, and issues of trustworthiness.

Research Design and Rationale

To explore the perceptions of African American women leaders within the federal government about their gender-based mentoring experiences, one central research question was addressed:

- How does the intersectionality of race and gender shape African American women leaders' perceptions about their experiences with gender-based mentoring relationships?

There were two subquestions:

- How would African American women leaders describe the benefits and challenges of gender-based mentoring?

- What strategies do African American women leaders employ to succeed if gender-based mentoring relationships cannot be obtained?

The primary goal of this study was to describe the role of intersectionality in gender-based mentoring for African American women leaders in the federal government. This exploratory study was executed using qualitative methods, specifically phenomenology. Qualitative research is intended to generate meaning and understanding by capturing the essence of human experience about a phenomenon (Laureate Education, 2010). The phenomenological approach is designed to yield an understanding of participants' lived experiences beyond the layer of description. According to Rudestam and Newton (2015), "phenomenology attempts to get beneath how people describe their experience to the structures that underlie consciousness, that is, to the essential nature of ideas" (p. 43). Discovering and describing the lived experiences of African American women is also a tenet of Black feminist thought.

The research questions were designed with an emphasis on the human experience (intersectionality of race and gender) as related to gender-based mentoring relationships. This is also evidenced by the focus on perceptions; description of benefits, challenges, and experiences; and description of success strategies. The research questions were posed in a way that warranted qualitative inquiry. "How" and "what" research questions usually require descriptive responses, which cannot be obtained through the statistical methods of quantitative research. Furthermore, the qualitative approach supported the knowledge and understanding regarding perceptions, benefits and challenges, and success strategies. In addition, this approach allowed for the generation of themes and recommendations about

the shared experiences of this population without generalization. Rudestam and Newton (2015) specified that in phenomenology, there is no need or effort to generalize results.

Role of the Researcher

To implement this phenomenological study, the researcher served as an observer-participant to facilitate the focus groups and execute the data collection process. In addition, there was direct contact with participants from the time of recruitment through data collection and follow up, and direct engagement in all aspects of the study, including transcribing, coding, analyzing, and interpreting data. To ensure that the study was implemented according to requirements, the mandatory CITI Human Subjects Protection course was completed, and IRB approval was granted prior to engaging in any participant recruitment efforts, as required by Walden University. The IRB approval number for this study was 08-28-19-0266277.

Also, as an African American woman in a federal government leadership position, sharing the same characteristics and experiences as the study participants, it was imperative for the researcher to minimize bias. No participants were included if they were employed by the same agency as the researcher, and no participants with whom the researcher knew personally were included, regardless of whether or not they had been engaged in a supervisor-employee relationship. However, since participants were recruited through LinkedIn, there was a possibility that there was familiarity with some of the participants. Informed consent was obtained from participants, and focus group interview questions were formed from the literature and posed in a way that was not leading or presumptuous. In alignment with the exploratory nature of this study, the focus

group protocol contained broad questions to yield responses that were amendable to inductive analysis. In addition, credibility and trustworthiness were established through member checks (Krefting, 1991).

Methodology

Participant Selection Logic

The core of the study was the challenge of intersectionality of race and gender. Therefore, the population was African American women who contend with this unique concept of double jeopardy. The participants were current or former employees of the federal government who held a permanent position as a General Schedule 12 (or equivalent) and above. Also, the participants needed to currently be in a gender-based mentoring relationship or have been in such a relationship within the past 5 years. The participants' roles in the mentoring relationships may have been either a mentor, protégé, or both.

Qualitative research participants are selected through purposive sampling methods. The participants for this study were identified using group characteristics sampling and utilization-focused sampling, the latter of which employs purposeful sampling strategies, but also "adds a requirement that cases selected for study will have credibility, relevance, and utility for primary intended users" (Patton, 2015, p. 295). It was imperative to select information-rich cases in order to obtain the depth of information necessary to generate thick, rich description and uncover the essence of lived experiences. These sampling strategies allowed for broad outreach to the target population, while avoiding contact with those who may have been interested but did not

fit the sample population criteria. To find suitable cases, volunteers were solicited

through LinkedIn. The study invitation was posted on my personal LinkedIn account,

with the sharing featured enabled so that those in my network could expand it to their

networks. Participants needed to self-identify that they met the eligibility criteria.

The invitation included instructions for interested participants to follow up by

email. The goal was to generate a pool of 25 participants that met the criteria, and 6-8

participants were to be included in each focus group. Participants were added to the focus

groups on a first-come first-served basis, by the order in which they signed up to

participate for the study. Onwuegbuzie, Dickinson, Leech, and Zoran (2009) emphasized

that focus group size is a balancing act, and enough participants are needed for diverse

discussion, "yet [focus groups] should not include too many participants because large

groups can create an environment where participants do not feel comfortable sharing their

thoughts, opinions, beliefs, and experiences" (p. 3). The authors also pointed to the lack

of guidance and difficulty in determining saturation when using focus groups. To achieve

data saturation, the emphasis should be on the analytical procedures versus sample size.

This study followed the authors' approach to achieving data saturation by analyzing

group data and analyzing individual data. More than one focus group was conducted in

order to implement further analysis and achieve saturation, such as coding data by group

or location.

Instrumentation

Data were collected through two, in-person focus groups. The focus group

questions were developed from relevant research studies and were designed to directly

answer the research question and subquestions (Sherman, Muñoz, Pankake, 2008; Reddick, 2011; DeCastro, Sambucco, Ubel, Stewart, & Jagsi, 2013; Copeland & Calhoun, 2014). There were 14 open-ended questions that addressed intersectionality, mentoring experiences, benefits and challenges of mentoring relationships, and success strategies. Demographic information, including grade level, age range, and supervisory status, was also collected. Both focus groups were administered using the same questions and protocol. The complete focus group interview protocol is included at Appendix A. Additionally, participants' level of consensus was captured through observation of nonverbal cues, such as head nods, or expressed verbally with affirmation or disagreement with responses, using the matrix included at Appendix B.

Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection

There was one researcher-developed data collection instrument for this study. The questions included in the focus group interview protocol were designed to answer the research question and subquestions by promoting rich discussion on the role of intersectionality in gender-based mentoring, benefits and challenges of mentoring, and strategies for success when mentoring relationships are not available. Recruitment and data collection began once Walden University IRB approval was obtained.

Data Collection Methods. After Walden IRB approval was obtained, participants were recruited through LinkedIn. The announcement was posted to my personal LinkedIn page, and interested parties were invited to send an email or direct message with any questions or concerns. Once a potential participant expressed interest, they were sent the required consent form for their review, and they were instructed to respond via email

with "I Consent," if they were willing and able to participate in the study. Volunteers were also asked to indicate their date preference for the focus group they wished to join, out of the two choices that were provided. Once the consent and date preference were received, participants were sent an email that included the exact logistics for the focus group that they had been assigned.

The focus groups were held one day apart at public libraries in Washington, DC. Real-time interaction with participants was important, as it allowed for observation of nonverbal cues, adjustment of questions, and the creation of appropriate follow up questions based on the participants' responses. The focus groups were scheduled to last two hours, with sufficient breaks, and they occurred over the weekend to minimize interference with participants' work schedules. Participants were asked to arrive 15 minutes early to check in and enjoy light refreshments. Participants also completed a short form to provide nonattributable demographic data, including their length of time as a federal government employee, current or most recent grade level, mentoring status, supervisory status, and age range. The demographic questions are included in the Focus Group Interview Protocol (Appendix A).

After providing a welcome message, background information, and instructions, the focus group audio recording was initiated. The researcher sat at the table with participants while moderating, using a notepad to take notes and capturing consensus levels using the Focus Group Data Collection Matrix Template (Appendix B). After concluding the focus groups and thanking participants, participants were reminded of confidentiality, how the information would be used, and provided information on data

analysis. All participants were given the opportunity to review their focus group transcript to provide member checks.

Data analysis plan. Starks and Trinidad (2007) reiterated the purpose of phenomenology, describing how important it is for researchers to more deeply analyze lived experiences to move beyond assumptions and well-known ideas about the phenomenon. Despite the common use of focus groups in qualitative research, there is limited information on data analysis techniques specifically designed for this data collection method, compared to interview data (Onwuegbuzie, Dickinson, Leech, & Zoran, 2009). However, researchers provided a framework for analyzing individual and collective focus group data to uncover deeper meaning and achieve saturation (Onwuegbuzie, Dickinson, Leech, & Zoran, 2009; Hancock, Amankwaa, Revell, & Mueller, 2016).

From the audio recording of the focus groups, full transcripts of each session were created and analyzed in conjunction with the handwritten notes and consensus matrices. The transcripts were emailed to participants individually for review. The transcripts were uploaded into the NVivo software to sort and arrange data, identify relationships, perform queries, identify patterns, and produce data visualizations. In alignment with Onwuegbuzie, Dickinson, Leech, and Zoran's (2009) micro-interlocular analysis technique, data were analyzed at the group and individual units, and the level of participants' consensus was also analyzed using the matrix template. This type of group and individual analysis is aligned with the Black feminist thought framework, and it

allowed for nonconforming ideas and opinions to be considered (Hancock, Amankwaa, Revell, & Mueller, 2016).

Issues of Trustworthiness

Krefting (1991) provided several strategies for increasing trustworthiness in qualitative research. The author noted that qualitative researchers are inherently embedded into their studies as participant-observers, and they should practice reflexivity to manage their opinions and biases. To enhance credibility, a field journal detailing logistical information about the study, daily notes about scheduling and interacting with participants, and reflections about my thoughts, feelings, frustrations, and other personal ideas was maintained. This strategy was also useful in maintaining an audit trail. In addition, there were efforts to build rapport and maximize contact with participants by structuring sufficient time for focus groups, and asking probing questions, including hypothetical or scenario-based questions to warrant in-depth responses and allow for thick description of the phenomenon. Furthermore, the group and individual level analyses promoted themes and ensured saturation, and focus group participants served as member-checkers.

Although phenomenology does not require generalizability of results, it was important to establish transferability. Participants were not limited to one federal agency, contributing to a broader understanding of the phenomenon across the federal government. In addition, there was diversity in the participants' ages, length of service, supervisory status, and roles as mentors and protégés. Moreover, providing thick description of not only the response data, but also the background data, nonverbal cues,

setting, and nonconforming ideas increased applicability and transferability. To establish

dependability and confirmability, several strategies were implemented. First, the code-

recode procedure was performed by initially coding data, then waiting at least one week

to recode the same data, and comparing the results (Krefting, 1991). Second, procedures

have been properly and thoroughly described, in order to foster replication. Third, there is

a comprehensive audit trail of records, including audio recordings, field notes, raw data,

and journal notes. Intracoder reliability was achieved through the use of NVivo.

Ethical Procedures

As required by Walden University's IRB, the human subjects research training

was completed, and approval to complete the study was obtained, prior to recruiting

participants and collecting data. Once participants were recruited, they provided informed

consent and any and all concerns were addressed prior to data collection. The study was

not specific to one agency, and there was no need to seek or be granted permission from

the federal government to solicit participants or collect data. The focus groups were held

public libraries, and there was no requirement to enter into an agreement to use the space.

Focus group participants were not be able to remain anonymous, but all

participants were asked to maintain confidentiality to protect any sensitive information.

Participants were assigned a number while in the focus groups to help track consensus or

non-consensus engagement on the data collection matrix.

While it was appreciated and expected that participants were open and honest,

there was the possibility that they would disclose information that could have been

inappropriate or could have been detrimental to their professional careers, if shared

outside of the focus groups. For example, participants could have discussed issues of discrimination or exclusion related to race and gender intersectionality. To help prevent accidental or intentional disclosure of harmful information, participants were given detailed instructions, such as the following language:

> Do not include any personally identifiable or attributional information. For example, instead of stating, "my mentor, Lisa, is the Human Resources Director at the State Department," it is more appropriate to answer, "my mentor is a senior executive at a large federal agency."

Although these instructions did not automatically prevent harmful information from being shared, they prompted participants to be mindful of how they articulated their experiences. In addition, any identifiable information, such as names, was removed from the transcripts before sharing for member-checking. During the focus group interviews, there was a deliberate effort to remain neutral while listening, instead of affirming, confirming, or challenging any of the responses based on my own knowledge and experiences. Also, conducting member checks ensured that the participants' words, thoughts, and perceptions were accurately captured and not influenced by the researcher's understanding.

Also, as required by Walden University's IRB, data and other materials have been protected and maintained. The informed consent emails have been consolidated into one password-protected PDF file, as have the demographic data that was collected from each participant (supervisory status, length of service, age range, etc.). The audio recordings were uploaded into computer files that were then password-protected. The reflexive

journal notebook has been kept in a locked file cabinet along with the notes and consensus matrices. All of the password-protected files will be maintained on a flash drive and stored in the locked file cabinet. Any and all paper and electronic data will be shredded or deleted after 5 years.

Summary

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to describe the role of intersectionality in African American women's perceptions about their gender-based mentoring experiences in the federal government. One research question and two subquestions addressed how intersectionality shaped perceptions, benefits and challenges of gender-based mentoring, and strategies for success in the absence of mentoring relationships. The research questions and study design were consistent and aligned with qualitative methodology.

All data collection activities began after Walden University's IRB approval. Purposive sampling methods were used to recruit and select participants for the study, which was announced through LinkedIn. Data were collected through two focus group interviews, after obtaining informed consent. All data collection activities took place in-person in Washington, DC. The researcher-developed data collection instrument was compiled from the literature, and designed to yield in-depth responses to fully answer the research questions.

With the support of NVivo software, group and individual level data were sorted, arranged, classified, and analyzed to uncover themes, as well as insight about consensus to responses given by focus group participants. Strategies such as the code-recode

technique and member checks were performed to establish trustworthiness. Participants

were asked and expected to maintain confidentiality. All demographic information,

audio/visual, paper, and electronic data have been securely maintained and will destroyed

at the appropriate time. A comprehensive description of the study implementation and

results is found in Chapter 4.

Chapter 4: Results

Introduction

The purpose of this phenomenological research study was to explore how the intersectionality of race and gender shaped African American women's perceptions about their gender-based mentoring experiences within the federal government. Through two focus groups, participants provided insight on their lived experiences, which generated knowledge and understanding about the phenomenon. One central research question was addressed: How does the intersectionality of race and gender shape African American women leaders' perceptions about their experiences with gender-based mentoring relationships? In addition, there were two subquestions:

1. How would African American women leaders describe the benefits and challenges of gender-based mentoring?

2. What strategies do African American women leaders employ to succeed if gender-based mentoring relationships cannot be obtained?

This chapter contains an overview of the study, including the research setting, demographic details, and data collection and analysis methods. The majority of the chapter includes a discussion of the study results, developed from the qualitative data obtained through two focus group interviews. The discussion is organized to directly address the research questions and to describe major themes generated through data analysis. There are also details on trustworthiness, which incorporate the strategies employed to ensure the reliability and accuracy of the data and results.

Research Setting

The study participants were current and former federal government employees. During the implementation of this study, there were no known personal or organizational conditions that would have adversely influenced participants' contributions or the interpretation of the study results. To collect data on the perceptions of gender-based mentoring through the lens of intersectionality, participants were asked to join focus groups to share their thoughts and ideas. Two focus group interviews were held at public libraries in Washington, DC.

Demographics

The core of this study was the role of race and gender intersectionality in African American women's perceptions about their gender-based mentoring experiences. In order to be accepted for the study, participants were required to be African American women and current or former employees of the federal government who held a permanent position as a GS-12 (or equivalent) and above within the last 5 years. The GS scale ranges from 1 (lowest) to 15 (highest). Participants at the GS-12 and above levels were considered leaders for the purposes of this study. Also, the participants needed to currently be in a gender-based mentoring relationship or have been in such a relationship within the past 5 years. The participants' roles in the mentoring relationships may have been either a mentor, protégé, or both.

A total of 10 participants contributed to the study, and each of the two focus groups included 5 participants. Only one participant was a former federal employee. Considering the participants' GS levels, five were ranked as GS-12. There was one GS-

13, three GS-14s, and one GS-15. All but two participants held nonsupervisory positions.

Four participants identified themselves as currently serving as both a mentor and protégé.

Three participants indicated that they were presently serving as only protégés, and three

participants were neither serving as a mentor nor protégé at the time of the study. The

demographic questions are included in the Focus Group Interview Protocol (Appendix

B). Tables 1 and 2 show complete demographic details by focus group. The participant

codes do not directly correspond to any individual participant, as the demographic

information was collected without attribution.

Table 1

Focus Group 1 Demographics

Participant code	Federal employee status	Pay grade (GS level)	Length of service (Years)	Supervisory status	Mentor or protégé status	Age range (Years)
1	Current	14	11 +	Yes	Protégé	36-45
2	Current	12	0-5	No	Protégé	26-35
3	Current	15	6-10	Yes	Both	36-45
4	Current	13	6-10	No	Both	46-55
5	Current	14	11 +	No	Both	55 +

Table 2

Focus Group 2 Demographics

Participant code	Federal employee status	Pay grade (GS level)	Length of service (Years)	Supervisory status	Mentor or protégé status	Age range (Years)
1	Current	14	11 +	No	Both	36-45
2	Former	12	6-10	No	Neither	26-35
3	Current	12	11 +	No	Neither	55 +
4	Current	12	6-10	No	Neither	26-35
5	Current	12	6-10	No	Both	36-45

Data Collection

All data collection activities began after receiving Walden IRB approval. Each of the two in-person focus groups included five participants, which resulted in a total of 10 study participants overall. As outlined in Chapter 3, the study invitation was posted on LinkedIn, and the recruitment goal was to create a pool of 25 volunteers, with 6-8 participants being assigned to each focus group. Despite significant interaction with the post on LinkedIn—16 shares and more than 650 views—only two participants were recruited from the posted invitation. Two additional volunteers expressed interest, but were rejected from the study because they did not meet the requirement for participating in a gender-based mentoring relationship within the last 5 years.

To generate additional participants, the snowball sampling method was used, beginning with the two initial volunteers. After obtaining consent, six participants were assigned to Focus Group 1, and seven participants were assigned to Focus Group 2. However, on the dates that the focus groups were held, five participants per group attended. There were no attempts to follow up with the missing participants or schedule a third focus group, as this data collection method, unlike individual interviews, is less about the number of participants and more focused on the richness of the discussion. Onwuegbuzie, Dickinson, Leech, and Zoran (2009) emphasized that as few as three or four participants are appropriate for focus groups when those participants have specialized knowledge or experiences, such as the intersectionality of race and gender that is the core of this study. In addition, Hancock, Amankwaa, Revell, and Mueller (2016) noted that other aspects that are applicable to this study, such as having more than

one focus group for comparison and the ability to capture group and individual data, support strong data collection without the need for a larger number of participants per focus group.

The focus groups were held one day apart in reserved meeting rooms at two different public libraries in Washington, DC. Both focus groups lasted the full allotted two hours. This included delayed starting times due to tardy participants. Upon arrival, participants were given the demographic questions sheet to complete and an identifying number for use when tracking consensus. Once all participants arrived, the focus groups began with the researcher introduction, overview of the study, and a review of the consent form and confidentiality expectations. Next, the demographic sheets were collected. Then, the audio recorder was turned on, and each of 14 interview questions were presented for discussion. While the participants engaged in discussion, I took handwritten notes and indicated consensus on the matrices. Upon completion of the discussion, the audio recorder was turned off, and there was a review of next steps.

Although the focus groups were implemented according to the protocol, with no deviations, there were two noteworthy circumstances encountered during data collection. First, at least two participants in each group were unable to secure childcare, and opted to bring their children with them to the discussions. The presence of young children created a distraction at times, and there were a few places in the audio recordings where participants' comments were inaudible due to the children's noise. Second, the level of consensus matrix was difficult to use. The template is designed for the researcher to capture one instance of consensus per question, per participant, per response. However,

the discussion was fluid, and participants may have given multiple responses to the same question, or indicated agreement with one response and disagreed with another, all during the same question.

Data Analysis

For each focus group, four main data sources were analyzed: the audio recordings, transcripts, handwritten notes, and consensus matrices. The demographic data were also analyzed and used to contextualize the results by focus group for comparison. The audio recordings were electronically transcribed through Temi.com. I then listened to the audio recordings while comparing them to the transcripts to correct any errors and improve the overall quality of the documents before uploading them into NVivo. While reviewing the transcripts, I also highlighted key words, phrases, and statements, and made additional handwritten notes. Furthermore, I used the consensus matrices to assess the degree to which ideas were confirmed or rejected by other members of the focus groups and provided this context in the description of results.

Although there are significant resources for researchers to use when coding qualitative data, there are fewer guides with specific steps or approaches that are designed for focus group data analysis. However, there is consistent emphasis on the need to analyze focus group data at the individual and group levels (Stewart, Shamdasani, & Rook, 2007; Onwuegbuzie, Dickinson, Leech, & Zoran, 2009; Hancock, Amankwaa, Revell, & Mueller, 2016). The overarching data analysis approach was the micro-interlocutor method, which requires analysis of multiple data sources to yield individual and group level results (Onwuegbuzie, Dickinson, Leech, & Zoran, 2009).

Capturing frequencies was one of the initial coding techniques employed to analyze the transcript data. Namey, Guest, Thairu, and Johnson (2008) explained that counting the frequency of words or phrases provides a foundation for understanding the content and developing themes, and "can allow a quick comparison of the words used by different subpopulations within an analysis" (p. 141). The purpose for analyzing frequencies was to gain an understanding about the overall context of the discussion and extract individual level data. Table 3 includes word frequencies identified in the focus group transcripts.

Table 3

Frequencies by Focus Group

Focus group	Word (Frequency)
1	goal/goals (16), help (16), trust (15), opportunity/ties (10), expectations (9), reward/award (5), authentic/authenticity (5), promote/promotion (5), network (4), leadership (4)
2	help (31), promote/promotion (28), opportunity/ties (10), lead/leader/leadership (10), trust (7), expectations (6), reward/award (3), goal/goals (1), network (1)

While participants in both groups used similar words, there were variances in frequency and meaning. For example, the participants in Focus Group 1, which included representation from all GS levels, spoke about *goals* and *trust* more than twice as much as the other group. Yet, they provided parallel thoughts. The discussions around goals in both groups centered on accountability and formality for mentoring relationships and organization. One participant in the first group questioned, "do you have clear goals? Are you meeting those goals" when articulating what contributed to mentoring effectiveness

and organizational change. On the same topic, a participant in the second group agreed, declaring that "the goal needs to be said." Participants in both groups shared similar sentiments around the issue of trust in the foundation and maintenance of mentoring relationships. A participant in the first group stated, "if I don't trust you, you can't be a mentor to me." Another participant from the second group declared, "it's a trust issue for me. I'm the kind of person—I need to be able to trust you with what I say."

Participants from Focus Group 2, comprised of all but one GS-12, emphasized *help* and *promote/promotion* twice as much as the first group. There was a notable difference in how the two groups contextualized these words. A participant in the first group provided perspectives as a mentor related to help: "I'm open to sharing, you know, my experiences to help other people." In the second group, a participant offered the protégé's perspective: "we're looking to [the mentor] for guidance to help us get our information in alignment." In terms of promotion, both groups alluded to the concrete ceiling or gendered racism by stating that their organizations are "really not promoting from within, especially black women" (Focus Group 1), but if and when they do, "[Caucasian employees] have been promoted out of that level...that administrative position" (Focus Group 2), which left participants feeling like "you have to leave in order to get promoted" (Focus Group 2).

After coding and analyzing word frequencies to discover context and make comparisons, the transcripts and handwritten notes were analyzed using the scissor-and-sort method. In Stewart, Shamdasani, and Rook's (2007) scissor-and-sort method, relevant phrases and passages are selected from the text and organized or sorted into

categories that directly correspond to the research question and subquestions. Unlike the

original method that involved actually cutting the paper documents and pasting each

extracted data point into a category on a board or wall, the electronic data were copied

and pasted into nodes using NVivo software. There were five top-level nodes or

categories that were created from the research question and subquestions. Each of the

broad categories included subcategories, as shown in Table 4. In total, 304 items were

coded from the transcripts and handwritten notes. The overarching concept of

intersectionality, which is aligned with the Black feminist thought framework, contained

several items that were applicable to multiple categories and were used to answer one or

more of the research questions. For example, items coded in subcategories under

intersectionality or *perceptions of mentoring* were used to answer the research questions

about benefits and challenges of mentoring. No discrepant cases were noted. Although,

the participants' levels of consensus or dissent with their peers' responses, captured using

the matrices, is included in the analysis found in the Results section of this chapter.

Table 4

Categories and Subcategories Based on Research Questions

Categories	Subcategories (Items coded)
Intersectionality	few options (5), glass ceiling or concrete wall (19), exclusion or isolation (14), racism and sexism (17), o rewards (10), not all African American are in the same category (7), on our own (12), stereotypes (11), work twice as hard (8), recommendations for African American women (11)

Perceptions of mentoring	African American women are less accessible/desirable (6), African American women have less or no power (9), authenticity matters (12), formal structured relationships (9), gender versus race (11), informal or friendly relationships (16), mentor perspective (8), multiple relationships (8), political or organizational considerations (10), protégé perspective (18), sponsorship (4), trust is paramount (4)
Benefits and challenges of mentoring	benefits (9), challenges (8), competition (7)
Success strategies	success strategies (21), coping strategies (13)
Recommendations for government	recommendations (17)

After analyzing the data using the scissor-and-sort technique to respond to the research question and subquestions, themes were generated using Saldaña's (2009) themeing the data approach. The author explained how developing latent level themes provide meaning and interpretation to the underlying phenomenon and pull together the coded and analyzed data. When considering participants' perceptions about gender-based mentoring, there were two themes that captured the essence of the data: (1) it's complicated, and (2) it is what it is. These two themes embody the complexities of mentoring perceptions and feelings of indifference about certain issues related to the phenomenon.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

To ensure trustworthiness, several of Krefting's (1991) strategies were implemented throughout the data collection and analysis processes. In order to enhance credibility and manage opinions and bias as a participant-observer, I utilized a reflexive

journal with detailed information about interacting with participants, scheduling and logistics, and personal notes, including my thoughts, feelings, and other ideas. This strategy also contributed to maintaining an audit trail. In addition, I built rapport with participants by contacting them individually and directly throughout the consent and confirmation stages, and I allotted time at the beginning of each focus group to introduce myself to each participant, prior to administering the protocol. This created a more relaxed environment where participants were able to share in-depth responses to promote thick description of the phenomenon. Furthermore, the individual and group level analyses yielded themes and ensured saturation, and the focus group participants were given the opportunity to provide member checks. Each participant was emailed the full transcript for their respective focus group and given one week to provide feedback. One participant responded with general comments about her experience, but no substantive feedback was received.

Although phenomenology does not require generalizability of results, it was important to establish transferability. Participants were not limited to one federal agency or grade level, contributing to a broader understanding of the phenomenon across the federal government and at different career stages. In addition, there was diversity in the participants' ages, length of service, supervisory status, and roles as mentors and protégés. Moreover, providing thick description of not only the response data, but also the background data, nonverbal cues, setting, and nonconforming ideas increased applicability and transferability. To establish dependability and confirmability, several strategies were implemented. First, the code-recode procedure was performed by initially

coding data, then waiting at least one week to recode the same data, and comparing the results (Krefting, 1991). I initially coded the transcripts, correcting errors and identify key words and phrases. Then, I sent the transcripts to the participants for member checks, allowing them one week to provide responses. During this time, I did not review the transcripts, and waited until member checking was completed before recoding the same data. Second, procedures have been properly and thoroughly described, in order to foster replication. Third, there is a comprehensive audit trail of records, including audio recordings, field notes, demographic data, and journal notes. Intracoder reliability was achieved through the use of NVivo.

Study Results

The study results were achieved by moving inductively through the focus group data, from identifying frequencies, to establishing codes and categories organized by the research question and subquestions, and developing themes to provide meaning to the responses, using the data analysis processes discussed previously in this chapter. Results are presented at the individual, focus group, and overall study levels, which aligns with the micro-interlocutor analysis method for focus group data.

Intersectionality and Perceptions about Mentoring

There was one central research question for this phenomenological study: How does the intersectionality of race and gender shape African American women leaders' perceptions about their experiences with gender-based mentoring relationships? There were three interview questions that specifically addressed intersectionality. Although, responses related to this aspect were embedded into all areas of the discussion. The

participants articulated how race and gender intersectionality played a significant role in shaping their perceptions and on their overall experiences within the federal government.

Double jeopardy. Participants in both focus groups intensely discussed and confirmed how the double jeopardy of having dual subordinate identities significantly contributed to their perceptions about themselves, their colleagues, and their mentoring experiences. When asked about the role race and gender played on their workplace experiences and challenges of intersectionality, several participants noted the influence of stereotypes and negative perceptions, with one participant in Focus Group 1 declaring, "You're always faced with the stereotype of the 'black girl' that may have come before you, or they don't understand the black girl period." Part of this was attributed to the lack of representation of African American women in higher positions, which may cause others to simply be unfamiliar with or ignorant to the unique perspectives for this population. As a participant described, "I think my race has definitely played a role and I would say my gender too, which is, it's not a lot of black women anywhere in any agencies that I know." Because of these stereotypes, another participant in the second focus group explained that her supervisor and others "didn't always have high expectations," and a different participant added that some of her peers and leaders held "the expectation that [she] will act out of character or unprofessional," even though there was no evidence to suggest that she would perform unbefittingly. Other participants indicated consensus with these statements, confirming that intersectionality factored into their workplace experiences. Yet, while some participants resigned to accept these experiences as an inevitable part of their careers, a participant in the first group explained

the need to dispel traditional perceptions by adding, "I think my biggest challenge has been I walk in with assumptions that I think other people have of me. So, I walked in [to the federal government] feeling like I had to eliminate whatever assumption you already have put on me because I'm the only black person."

While participants agreed that all African American women contend with double jeopardy, they expressed some of the additional complexities that occur within or among the population, particularly in the federal government, such as age, family status, education level, length of service, and grade level that contribute to perceptions about mentoring relationships. Much of the data around this idea of sub-intersectional traits were coded in the categories of *not all African American women are in the same category*, *gender versus race*, *and on our own*. This information was also presented when asked about the challenges of gender-based mentoring relationships. For example, younger focus group participants expressed how older African American women tended to act motherly and superior, no matter the grade level or how much education or experience the younger participants had, which was "in some ways it's like that finger pointing," said one study participant. During the discussions, this age disconnect was not only attributed to generational differences, but also the concrete wall dilemma, which for older women, may have created a lack of understanding of issues faced by African American women in higher grades, and also resentment toward younger women for achieving higher statuses while they remained stagnant. Participants noted, "As far as the numbers are concerned, we have large numbers of black women but they're all at lower levels," and "[older African American women] have been there over 20 years and they're

still at a GS-7 and a GS-9." Furthermore, related to intersectionality and the concrete

ceiling, "whites have come in at an administrative level, they have shown that they can

do more and they have been promoted out of that level...that administrative position,"

while African American women have not been promoted.

Educational attainment was cited as another dimension to intersectionality, when

asked about mentoring as a tool to support African American women in federal

government, a participant in Focus Group 2 suggested how these additional layers add to

the complexity:

> People with higher education tend to group together and they tend to leave the
>
> other ones that are not degreed behind. Just because they don't have degrees
>
> doesn't mean they're not able to learn. They've been doing these jobs sometimes
>
> 15, 20 years. Then just because they don't have a degree doesn't mean they can't
>
> move up.

Other participants did not provide consensus with these perceptions, and seemed to align

this argument with the age and older-worker resentment disconnect. Yet, participants did

allude to the idea that higher educational attainment was not actually an advantage, as the

stereotypes and negative perceptions often outweighed their qualifications and having

advanced degrees did not necessarily help them get ahead.

Participants also explained how, throughout their careers, their experiences with

intersectionality and mentoring relationships changed, based on family status. In both

focus groups, when answering questions about the role that intersectionality played on

their gender-based mentoring experiences, the discussion leaned toward gender becoming

the prevailing trait when they got married, became mothers, or generally wanted more work-life balance. One participant explained, and others agreed, "the gender part is more important than the race for me where I am at now. But with the race part becomes-- because of the experience--a black woman can understand." It was apparent, however, that participants understood that their race and gender traits could not be considered singularly. Rather, they could be viewed as two ends of a spectrum in which the participants would move depending on their life stages and their career and mentoring situations.

Mentoring relationships. Seven of the interview questions were focused on perceptions about mentoring and gender-based mentoring relationships, including the benefits and challenges and factors that promote or inhibit successful mentor-protégé partnerships. Participants engaged in a dynamic conversation, which centered on key areas such as trust, authenticity, formality, and desirability, and factored in issues of intersectionality. There were notable differences in the perspectives provided by each group, as Focus Group 1 provided greater insight on experiences as both mentors and protégés, and Focus Group 2 tended to emphasize experiences as protégés. This distinction was understandable, given the demographic composition of each group, whereas the first group included participants from all grade levels that were eligible for the study, and the second group was comprised of mostly GS-12 employees, which was the lowest grade for the study.

When asked the interview question, What are your thoughts on mentoring as a tool to support African American women in the federal government, both groups

responded with a collective "it depends," and articulated a range of factors that contributed to their indecisiveness. Most participants agreed that formal or structured mentoring that was fostered by their organizations may warrant it being a good tool. However, there were overwhelming expressions of defeat and skepticism about whether or not mentoring was beneficial or impactful enough to overcome the other barriers that African American women face.

For participants in both groups, their perceptions hinged on expectations and intentions. One participant noted that mentoring is "a great tool if the mentor and the mentee can come to an understanding of what exactly the relationship should look like." Others added, "mentorship of course it could be valuable, it means something, but I think there needs to be an understanding between the mentor as to what the mentee is to get from this. What, are you looking for in this mentorship?" These statements were met with consensus, and participants added that the intentions of the mentor were also crucial to effectiveness, noting that they did not want to deal with lip-service or self-serving agendas from mentors.

When discussing gender-based mentoring, in response to the question on the importance of having a mentoring relationship with another woman, participants shared that having a mentoring relationship with another woman was important in terms of the trust and authenticity that stemmed from having similar or shared experiences. In Focus Group 1, a participant explained, "I think the commonality between the mentor and protégé, when you have things in common, it kind of eliminates some barriers a little bit. It makes it more relatable. You're more comfortable, trusting." These perceptions were

amplified when discussing the question about the importance of gender-based mentoring relationships specifically with other African American women. A participant in Focus Group 2 surmised,

> Well, I think when you work with another woman, you, especially another black woman, there is just that comfort level. You know, I think when we go out and we're the black woman in the white workforce, you'd have to operate with that mindset of "I'm the minority black woman in this majority white workforce." But when you're just around other black women, you can drop all of that. You don't have to factor that into your conversation.

In the first focus group, a participant shared, "my mentor is a black woman that I have a lot of respect for, just because of her genuineness, and I could see and feel her desire to be a good mentor and to help me to get to where I need to be." Other participants adamantly agreed with these perspectives, and attributed the need for this alliance between African American women, due to the exclusion and isolation and effects of the concrete wall that they face in the federal government.

Participants were asked to describe the benefits of mentoring relationships, in which they further explained how these gender-matched-race-matched mentoring relationships were overwhelmingly valuable for social emotional support or when conducted informally, akin to a sisterhood. For career progression, however, many of the comments fell into the category of *African American women have less or no power* because they did not feel that other African American women were able to help protégés or help themselves get ahead since they were all facing the same challenges. For

example, participants stated, "none of the black women who've mentored me have given me actionable advice on getting promoted." One participant noted how this perspective simultaneously fueled her desire to mentor others, but also made her feel like she was not always meeting the expectations of her protégés:

> I've had other people come to me before, but I've been the one that's too busy. But when she came to me. I took it on because I wanted, like I said, I was the one who was wanting a mentor who looked like me, who maybe have had my experiences. So, I make time for her, even though, it's very limited and I feel like I'm poor at it sometimes. But I was excited about that because I saw an opportunity to open the door for somebody who looked like me and can share my experiences because there weren't very many of us in my career field.

In the second group, a participant expressed similar feelings when asked about the benefits and challenges of mentoring, "as a mentor I struggle with that. I hate that. I hate not being able to help my folks get to where they want to be, not realize where, what they desire to achieve."

Because gender- or- race-matched mentoring often falls short of fulfilling the needs of participants, many introduced the idea of having multiple mentors to gain a more comprehensive experience. A participant in Focus Group 2 likened this to having a personal "advisory board" to lead you through complex career obstacles. Still, there was a sense of loyalty or obligation to maintaining relationships with other African American women, as explained by a participant in the first group:

I think there's a relationship that can only be kind of sometimes brought forward

if you are with another black woman because we understand one another. But

then I think overall if you're looking for, if you want to have multiple mentors

then it's just finding the right person that kind of you can, you can be yourself and

be free with and be able to speak to. So maybe just like some of the other, just like

you said, multiple mentors. But then I would say one of them need to be a black

woman. Should be a black woman.

Yet, some participants dissented, offering opinions such as, "I do not necessarily desire

an African American woman mentor unless she's in a high position," because

nonetheless, as another participant added, "we know that a lot of times black women are

not in positions to do what the white female or male can do." One participant in the

second group bluntly stated, if "you know you're never going to get a promotion--and not

saying never--but if you kind of expect that you hit a wall…what is the purpose of the

mentoring?"

In response to questions about factors that contributed to success and

development aside from mentoring, both groups cited sponsorship as a potentially more

favorable alternative. In trying to move through the ranks, the key was "really being

intentional about finding and hopefully aligning with those sponsors, like those folks who

are actually trying to help you to advance your career. And that could be, that could be

anybody," said one participant. Most participants agreed and recalled their experiences

with sponsorship, which usually involved professional relationships with male

supervisors or colleagues. Although, it was unclear if they actually achieved more progress toward their career goals with these sponsors versus with mentors.

Benefits and Challenges of Mentoring

In addition to the central research question, there were two subquestions. The first subquestion was how would African American women leaders describe the benefits and challenges of gender-based mentoring? There were two interview questions that primarily addressed this research question: (1) What are the benefits of gender-based/matched mentoring relationships, and (2) What are the challenges of gender-based/matched mentoring relationships? Participants in both groups prefaced the conversation by lamenting the biggest challenge was finding and maintaining mentoring relationships. They attributed this to several barriers including, no or lack of formal mentoring programs, unwillingness by potential mentors, unwillingness or discomfort with becoming a mentor, and personal preferences. Although there were a few broad statements about mentoring, in general, the perceptions often steered to their experiences with other African American women. One participant attributed her perceptions to preference stating, "I don't think I would want a white woman as a mentor just because I don't think she could relate to my struggles, nor do I think that my biases—I don't think what worked for her would necessarily work for me." However, having the desire did little to actually foster these relationships, and participants spoke about stigma and competition as contributing factors. A participant in Focus Group 2 offered:

> I think for some folks you recognize that there can be some stigma to, I hate to
> say it—to associating with another black person. That is when they think 'why are

getting together?' So there, there is the potential for that, the stigmatization of the relationship.

Others acknowledged that this challenge may be deeply rooted by adding, "when we talk about history and you know, where our people have come from, there's always been that separation." And while this feeling or construct may be externally-driven,

You start to internalize that, too. And start feeling like, you know, like you say you don't trust people and things like that. So, I just feel like that's one of the cultural things that, that we have to recognize. And that's probably one of the things that makes, can make or break the mentor-mentee relationship when you're in, you know with the African American female.

On the topic of competition, a Focus Group 1 participant stated, "I think that there is so much competition and people being concerned about what they look like, that their ability or desire even to mentor towards something positive is stymied." Conversely, another participant in the same group declared, "I feel like I have figured out how to change the dynamic a little bit, which is why I started being a mentor because I feel like there aren't a lot of people who have figured it out without compromising themselves, without losing their authenticity."

When participants were able to overcome some of these challenges and enter into mentoring relationships, they still noted difficulty in maintaining them. Many pointed to poor communication, lack of interest, lack of support, time constraints, incompatibility, and lack of other resources, which made the relationships challenging or impossible to sustain. In addition, many blamed their respective agencies for not fostering healthy

mentoring relationships. Several participants called out a double standard when talking

about their agencies: "I haven't found that my agency has a mentoring program. They talk

about mentorship, but is there a specific program for that?" Furthermore, a participant

added,

> You say you want to build talent and you say you want to retain talent, but there is
>
> no formalized mentorship program at my agency and that would probably cost
>
> you little to nothing when we, when you talk about human capital and retaining
>
> the talent pool.

Further, participants held little hope that there would be any systemic changes,

noting organizational culture and a negative political climate as barriers to improvements.

In Focus Group 1, many participants agreed with the statement, "I don't think that this

political climate is the right opportunity for this type of policy legislation." Rather, the

participants expressed doubt that any changes would take place for many years, if at all.

Despite the myriad challenges with mentoring relationships, participants noted

several benefits, which were primarily centered on social emotional and soft skills

support versus career progression, as a direct result of the mentoring experiences. The

most important and most agreed upon benefit was having a trusted partner to simply

share their ideas and frustrations with, while navigating their careers. Participants

stressed the joy of having their voices heard and receiving validation of their experiences

with gendered racism. A participant in Focus Group 2 shared how, at times, "you just

need somebody to kind of talk to who is not your supervisor—someone to kind of get

their experiences and see how they would go about doing certain things." Another

participant in the same group added, "it could be just from being a sounding board to talk about whatever things that you're going through with work and sometimes…on a personal level." This feeling of having someone to talk to in confidence was equated to feeling safe and not judged: "You need that safe space. You need that space where you can go and say, this is confusing to me." Furthermore, participants analogized their mentoring experiences with having a coach or guide to:

> Affirm the experiences. You know, help you brush your knees off and get you back up on, on the right path with whatever that path is, but they're listening, you know, listening and taking what they're hearing from you and able to put it into your organizational context and be able to guide you safely.

Additional benefits of gender-based mentoring relationships included making connections and networking, and having access to resources, such as training or leadership development, if offered by their organizations. Moreover, from the mentor's perspective, participants cited the satisfaction of helping others, even if they are unable to effectively ensure the protégé's career progress as a benefit to mentoring relationships. Lastly, because the relationships are often more informal and supportive, participants described how the mentor-protégé lines may be blurred, and the relationships function more as mutually-beneficial partnerships that those in Focus Group 1 referred to as "women who want to see women win."

Success Strategies in the Absence of Mentoring

The second research subquestion was what strategies do African American women leaders employ to succeed if gender-based mentoring relationships cannot be

obtained? There were two interview questions that addressed the strategies and factors

that contributed to success and development, aside from mentoring. Participants had

already articulated several barriers to forming mentoring relationships, as well as many

challenges to maintaining them, if and when formed. And while the participants outlined

what they referred to as success strategies, much of the conversation in both groups was

geared toward coping strategies, as the general feeling among participants was that they

had not necessarily thought of themselves as successful. A participant in Focus Group 1

insisted that succeeding or coping was about "self-determination, like being dedicated

and committed to working hard in spite of challenges that might come your way."

Nonetheless, when asked about strategies they employ to succeed, participants

described how they sought or leveraged formal training opportunities to hone their

technical skills. In addition, they referred to professional coaching and networking as

tools or strategies to help them move forward in the absence of mentoring relationships.

Also, participants discussed how volunteering for special projects or temporary job

assignments often increased their visibility within the organization, which sometimes led

to successful outcomes. Participants in the first focus group were more resigned to push

harder, while many in the second group seemed less engaged with the organization, and

instead focused on self-care. For example, a participant in Focus Group 1 talked about

"playing the game," meaning, "be a chameleon, and then when it's time for you to get in

there like, get in there and know what you're talking about and make connections." This

alluded to sentiments of dispelling stereotypes that stemmed from race and gender

intersectionality, in order to be more appealing to or accepted by colleagues and leaders within the organization.

By contrast, when asked about how they succeed or professionally develop in the absence of mentoring, participants in the second group emphasized somewhat defeated feelings, with such statements as, "I'll go to another agency or go somewhere else to go get my higher level." Also, "What you have to do is leave because they're, they're really not promoting from within, especially black women." To avoid being bogged down by the stress of trying to work through complex organizational systems, one participant said, "I take a paycheck and go home." Another turned to self-care stating, "I definitely made sure that I get one wellness activity in a week. If it's yoga, if it's spin, if it's us at the park, journaling." Other participants agreed, and also pointed to spending time with friends, or having a "sister circle" to help them cope or achieve success.

Overarching Themes

The review and analysis of data related to the research question and subquestions led to two latent level themes emerged, which provide more description and meaning to the results and phenomenon.

It's complicated. A colloquial way to describe African American women's perceptions about their gender-based mentoring experiences is, *it's complicated*. From race and gender intersectionality, to organizational barriers and other challenges, participants expressed complex and somewhat competing responses about the phenomenon. For example, participants frequently described wanting mentoring relationships with other African American women, but found that there was often little to

no benefit to those relationships in terms of career advancement. They brought up inherent issues of sub-intersectionality and competition that further warranted steering clear of African American women in mentoring relationships. Yet, they overwhelmingly agreed that there was no better population to turn to for the social emotional aspect, as no other group would keenly understand these complexities like African American women.

Participants also shared how they wanted more formal mentoring programs from their organizations, but feared that they could be forced into incompatible mentoring relationships, or the organizations would simply be providing disingenuous activities, with no intention of truly supporting African American women separate from other women or minorities. More importantly, participants also discussed how deeply rooted barriers, such as the concrete wall, had the potential to outweigh any positive effects of gender-based mentoring relationships.

It is what it is. With these seemingly insurmountable complexities, participants also explained feelings of contentment or resignation with how things are, leading to another theme, *it is what it is*. Given the bureaucratic structure of the federal government, and even individual government subagencies, participants argued that any change would be long-awaited, if anything changed at all. Knowing this, their perceptions leaned towards acceptance of their current situations. Participants mentioned being glad to have the stability and flexibility of their jobs, and were reluctant to leave government altogether because of the possible fear of things being worse elsewhere. Although mentoring relationships or even sponsorships were not guaranteed to enhance their career progress, participants showed a level of satisfaction or gratitude with having informal

partnerships to help make their experiences more bearable or sustainable.

Summary

The purpose of this phenomenological research study was to explore how the intersectionality of race and gender shaped African American women's perceptions about their gender-based mentoring experiences within the federal government. Through two focus groups, 10 participants provided insight on their lived experiences, in order to answer one research question and two subquestions about the phenomenon. Between the two focus groups, there were participants from all grade level eligible for the study. In addition, there was diverse representation in terms of age range and length of service among the participants. Focus group data were analyzed using micro-interlocutor methods to capture individual and group level results. First, frequencies were analyzed to provide context. Then, the scissor-and-sort technique was used to align data with each research question and subquestion. In addition, latent level themes were created to provide meaning to the responses. To ensure trustworthiness, several strategies were implemented throughout the data collection and analysis processes, such as reflexive journaling, the code-recode technique, and member checking.

Participants provided in-depth responses to the central research question, offering their perceptions about gender-based mentoring relationships through the lens of race and gender intersectionality. Participants in both groups agreed that intersectionality played a significant role, pointing to negative stereotypes and the concrete wall as major barriers to finding and maintaining mentoring relationships. However, if participants were engaged in mentoring relationships, either as a mentor or protégé, they strongly agreed

that these relationships were informal and catered to social emotional support instead of career progression.

One of the major challenges of gender-based mentoring relationships was finding suitable matches and facing lack of resources provided by the organization. Participants also pointed to difficulty in maintaining relationships due to time constraints, lack of interest, and lack of support. Although, they did favor having a sounding board to help them maneuver through challenges and validate their experiences. When gender-based mentoring relationships were absent, participants said they turned to strategies like training, networking, and volunteering for extra assignments to support their success. Yet, many of the participants described how they often found the need to combat stress and cope with challenges by turning to activities such as yoga, journaling, or taking time away from the office.

There were two overarching themes that provided additional meaning to the responses and tie major ideas together. The first theme, *it's complicated*, described the complexities embedded into the phenomenon. For example, participants, described wanting a more formal mentoring structure, but explained how they benefitted more from information relationships. Participants also discussed the great influence of the effects of intersectionality, and doubts about being able to overcome them with gender-based mentoring. The second theme, *it is what it is*, pulled together perceptions about feeling resigned to the challenges and complexities. Participants mostly described the need to enjoy the stability, flexibility, and other perks of their government positions, turning to self-care practices for coping, rather than expecting major changes. Chapter 5 provides

further information on the study's findings, as well as limitations, recommendations, and implications.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Introduction

Research shows that women face societal and organizational barriers that hinder their upward mobility in the workplace, even when they are mentored (Wynen, op de Beeck, & Ruebens, 2015). African American women contend with additional barriers due to the unique characteristic of race and gender intersectionality, negative stereotypes, and systemic exclusion (Remedios, Snyder, & Lizza, 2016; Rosette, Koval, Ma, & Livingston, 2016; McGee, 2018). In addition, the underrepresentation of women, and particularly African American women, in higher-level positions creates a challenge for matching protégés with mentors of the same gender (Ortiz-Walters & Fullick, 2015).

The purpose of this phenomenological research study was to explore how the intersectionality of race and gender shaped perceptions about gender-based mentoring experiences for African American women leaders in the federal government. The lived experiences of African American women are distinct from other groups, due to this double jeopardy. The study aimed to describe how this worldview shapes perceptions about gender-based mentoring for this population. In addition, the benefits and challenges of gender-based mentoring, and strategies for success in the absence of gender-based mentoring relationships were explored.

Black feminist thought provided a framework for understanding intersectionality, and the theory also incorporated the importance of qualitatively studying this population in order to provide truer information about African American women's lived experiences, using their own words and perceptions. This study attempted to fill several research gaps,

such as using the federal government as the setting, including both mentor and protégé

perspectives, and including participants who were in mid- to senior-level positions.

Participants were current or former employees of the federal government who held a

permanent position as a General Schedule 12 (or equivalent) and above. Also, the

participants needed to be in a gender-based mentoring relationship at the time of the

study, or have been in such a relationship within the past 5 years. Data were collected

through two focus groups. Focus group data were analyzed using micro-interlocutor

analysis to describe individual and group level results.

The study results were achieved by moving inductively through the focus group

data, from identifying frequencies, to establishing codes and categories organized by the

research question and subquestions, and developing themes to provide meaning to the

responses. An analysis of the results yielded five key findings:

- Intersectionality, and the implications related to it, play a significant role on African American women's perceptions about gender-based mentoring.

- Intersectionality can be likened to a spectrum, where African American women move between race and gender, and their gender-based mentoring needs may change over time, depending on where they fall at any point during their careers.

- Gender-based mentoring relationships are difficult to find and maintain, and federal government organizations most often do not have programs that foster such relationships.

- If and when gender-based mentoring relationships are developed, they are most likely to be informal, catering to the social emotional aspect of mentoring versus fostering career progression.

- Multiple mentoring relationships, as well as sponsorship, may be more beneficial to African American women, particularly for career advancement, than gender-based mentoring relationships alone.

This chapter includes an interpretation of the findings, limitations of the study, recommendations, and social change implications.

Interpretation of the Findings

In comparison to the peer-reviewed research and theoretical framework discussed in Chapter 2, these findings confirmed, disconfirmed, and extended the existing literature in several ways.

Intersectionality

Many of the previously-presented ideas around intersectionality were confirmed. For example, participants repeatedly described the feelings and effects of gendered racism (double jeopardy) that resulted in social invisibility in the workplace, which incorporated systemic exclusion and negative stereotypes (Rosette & Livingston, 2012; Remedios, Snyder, & Lizza, 2016; Lewis, Williams, Peppers, & Gadson, 2017). Participants also confirmed their experiences with the concrete wall, explaining how most African American women in their organizations are classified at lower levels, with little to no path for advancement (Linnabery, Stuhlmacher, & Towler, 2014; McGee, 2018). And while they were technically in higher-level positions, participants reiterated that their

titles did not insulate them from the challenges that African American women in lower-level positions face (Glass & Cook, 2016). Furthermore, participants expressed frustration with not being able to successfully validate their gendered racism experiences because policies and practices aligned African American women with other protected groups, and therefore, their complaints were often met with dismissal (Remedios, Snyder, & Lizza, 2016). Because of these ongoing challenges and frustrations related to intersectionality, participants also confirmed the need for more psychosocial support in their mentoring relationships (McGee, 2018).

In this study, Collins' (2009) Black feminist thought provided a framework for understanding the unique challenges of race and gender intersectionality for African American women. Findings related to intersectionality confirmed many of the tenets of Black feminist thought, which included the resistance-empowerment dilemma, group knowledge contributions through individual experiences, and authenticity of sharing perceptions through the population's own words. In alignment with the theoretical framework, it was clear that the individuals' experiences were not identical, but similar, and contributed to group knowledge. This may have been attributed to the additional layers of intersectionality, such as age and education level, that are also presented within the theory. In addition, participants were admittedly excited to share their stories and perceptions, which gave them a "voice" when they felt otherwise unheard (Collins, 2009; Rasheem, Alleman, Mushonga, Anderson, & Ofahengaue Vakalahi, 2018).

In other ways, participants' perceptions were not neatly aligned with the theoretical framework. For example, participants indicated that they felt a bond with

other African American women. Yet, they also lamented that it was difficult, and not always welcoming to work with or be in mentoring relationships with other African American women. This concept of sisterhood seemed to be largely theoretical, falling short in practice. Furthermore, participants minimally conveyed feelings of empowerment or resistance. Rather, they were inclined to be less active in rejecting stereotypes. These perceptions were most likely not a disconfirmation of the theory, but a consequence of the study setting. The bureaucratic structure and intricacies of creating or changing policies within government organizations seemed to discourage participants from resistance and activism.

Mentoring

Another key finding of the study centered on the challenge of entering and maintaining gender-based or any kind of mentoring relationships. The reasons cited by participants, consisting of exclusion from networks, lack of support, and limited opportunities, are in congruence with Wynen, op de Beeck, and Ruebens (2015) and Welsh and Diehn (2018). Participants' perceptions about organizational barriers and the absence of formal mentoring programs within their agencies were in stark contrast to the policies, guides, and reports offered by the federal government to demonstrate how it fosters mentoring. Instead, all participants described how they felt alone in their quests to find mentoring relationships, which was not supported by federal programs, or even the culture within their agencies.

When gender-based mentoring relationships were formed, they were primarily informal with a focus on social emotional support (Desimone et al., 2014). Because

participants defined the need for strong psychosocial support to better cope with the

challenges of intersectionality, it is possible that they may subconsciously gravitate

toward informal relationships, instead of seeking more formal partnerships. And, despite

being in higher level positions, participants overwhelmingly shared their experiences as

protégés. Also, when the mentor perspective was offered, the discussion was geared

toward hesitancy or reluctance to mentor others because participants had enough

difficulty in trying to navigate their own careers. This disputed Kao, Rogers,

Spitzmueller, Lin, and Lin's (2014) findings that mentors benefit from working with

protégés by not only lending their expertise and feeling validated, but also by

contributing to organizational development.

Because the issues are complex and dynamic, the solutions are not as

straightforward as having one-to-one gender-based mentoring relationships. Researchers

and participants suggested having multiple, strategic mentoring relationships and

sponsorships to help protégés meet their goals. Participants' perceptions paralleled

Zambrana's et al. (2015) position that the fluidity of being African American and female

needs to be compensated for, and this population may benefit from three or more

mentoring relationships at one time. Although participants discussed wanting more

formality in mentoring relationships, they also articulated appreciation for mutually-

beneficial, collaborative partnerships (Tran, 2014). However, these partnerships would

still need to have measurable outcomes in order to be satisfactory to African American

women. Yet, Grant and Ghee (2015) cautioned, and participants confirmed, that there is

no blueprint for successful gender-based mentoring relationships for African American women.

Limitations of the Study

As outlined in Chapter 1, there were four limitations that arose from the execution of this study:

- *Transferability*. The participants were African American women from various federal government agencies, and the study does not consider other populations impacted by race and gender intersectionality, such as Asian American women or Hispanic women. Therefore, findings may be limited in their transferability to other groups.

- *Career level*. The study population was limited to participants who were current and former General Schedule employees at level 12 or higher. Perceptions from African American women in lower grades, or those who are in the Senior Executive Service, were not explored.

- *Contributing factors*. This study only considered the role of race and gender intersectionality, and did not account for other factors that may have contributed to participants' perceptions about the phenomenon.

- *Anonymity*. Due to the use of focus groups in data collection, anonymity could not be obtained since participants were face-to-face with the ability to hear and attribute each other's responses. In this open setting, participants could have been reluctant to provide honest and complete information about their experiences.

- *Breadth*. This study included perceptions from participants across various

    federal government agencies. In depth information related to specific

    agencies' policies, practices, programs, or employees was not gained.

Recommendations

Based on the strengths and limitations of the current study, there are four

recommendations for future research. First, the issues of intersectionality for African

American women are well-documented, but researchers may need to dig deeper into the

non-intersectional complexities that hinder the formation and sustainability of gender-

based mentoring relationships, in order to provide recommendations for improving

outcomes. Second, there are opportunities to explore the phenomenon with participants

from different grade levels. For example, since African American women are mostly

concentrated in lower positions within the federal government, a future study may

explore perceptions from women who occupy those positions. Third, qualitative

researchers may benefit from using semi-structured interviews instead of focus groups to

collect data. The focus groups did not allow for anonymity, and participants may be more

open to share their experiences and perceptions directly with the researcher versus a

larger group. Fourth, there is an opportunity to narrow the study setting. Participants in

this study were from various agencies in the Washington, DC area, making results

broadly representative of the federal government as a whole. Future researchers could

perform a case study or limit the setting to a specific government agency or subagency.

Implications for Positive Social Change

This study has implications for positive social change among African American women who represent the study population, and more importantly, within the field of public policy and administration. For African American women, empowerment can be attained through honest storytelling, which confirms the importance of having not only a voice, as previously discussed, but also to correct distorted narratives that have been created by research that does not consider the complexities of this population. Within the field of public policy and administration particularly, there is a legitimate reason and need to further dissect definitions or classifications of minority groups, in order to provide targeted and effective solutions to challenges faced by those who do not wholly fit into the broader categories. In addition, once this deeper information is obtained, there is an opportunity for the federal government to modernize its approach to mentoring for employees, and especially those in higher-level positions.

The federal government and other public organizations may benefit by improving diversity and inclusion practices, leadership development, organizational development, and overall employee development for African American women and other minority populations. Based on the study's findings, there are three primary recommendations to improve practice:

- *Listen*. Conduct non-scientific focus groups, interviews, or surveys with African American women to allow them to express their challenges with current approaches and contribute to the design and implementation of new or updated programs and policies.

- *Evaluate*. Measure the effectiveness of formal and informal mentoring programs, and publish results at the agency level, with trend analyses, disaggregated by minority groups and subgroups. In addition, include participation in mentoring programs, as mentors or protégés, in the performance plans of employees and leaders at all levels, and hold participants accountable.

- *Commit*. Maintain deliberate efforts to foster meaningful mentoring relationships, particularly for African American women, as it has been confirmed that they are excluded from networks and systems, and the additional resources to support this population are warranted.

Conclusion

When participants explained their perceptions, one of the recurring ideas was adaptability. They articulated how the lack of gender-based mentoring, rigid systems, negative stereotypes, and other challenges left them feeling like there was no other choice but to adapt and do their best to overcome. However, this commitment to adaptation should not solely reside on the shoulders of African American women. The federal government, the world's largest employer and the pinnacle of public administration, must also adapt to the needs of its extremely diverse workforce, and focus its efforts on inclusion and equity. The playing field is not level for African American women, and the solutions should overcompensate for the deficit. It commendable that the federal government hires more African American women when compared to the overall civilian labor force. Yet, the concentration of these women in lower grades, with no clear pipeline

for advancement, and limited support for those who are in leadership positions, outweighs the positive aspect of having high numbers of African American women.

The complexities of race and gender intersectionality for African American women are real, and assertions of gendered racism should be validated. For African American women, there is no "race card" or "gender card" because the two traits are intertwined. Examining this unique perspective and accommodating African American women's needs should not be viewed as preferential treatment, but necessary to the growth and development of the workforce. It is understandable that it may take a significant investment of resources to accommodate the needs of African American women by developing more targeted mentoring and leadership development programs, but the ripple effects of the deliberate modernization of programs and policies may improve employee development and organizational culture. As one participant stated, "If the agency gets it and understands why mentorships are important, not just talking the talk, but really walking the walk and supports the mentorship in a real meaningful way, then I think it's a wonderful thing."

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Appendix A: Focus Group Interview Protocol

Arrival: As participants enter, moderator will hand them a tent card with a pseudonym/number, and give them the demographic questions.

Welcome: Moderator introduces herself and provides an overview of the study.

Consent: Review consent form with the entire group (electronic copies were previously provided via email). Explain confidentiality and audio recording.

Demographics: Moderator asks participants to complete the demographic questions, then collects the forms. This form includes six questions:

- Employee Status: Current or Former. If former, indicate how long you have been separated.
  _____ Years _____ Months
- Length of federal service. 0-5 years, 6-10 years, 11 years or more
- Current or most recent pay grade. GS _____
- Supervisor or manager? Yes or No
- Currently a mentor, protégé, or both?
- Age range? Under 25, 26-35, 36-45, 46-55, 55 or older

Expectations: Discuss expectations and answer questions.

Discussion: Turn on audio recorder, and begin interview questions. Take breaks every 45 minutes, or as needed.

Questions:

1. What role, if any, does your race and gender play in your workplace experiences?
2. Have you experienced challenges in the workplace because of your race and gender? (Explain or provide examples)
3. What are your thoughts on mentoring as a tool to support African American women in the federal government?
4. Describe how important it is to you to have a mentoring relationship with another woman? How about with another African American woman?
5. Describe your experiences with gender-based/matched mentoring relationships as a mentor? Protégé? Both?

6. What role, if any, does/did your race and gender play in your gender-based/matched mentoring experiences?
7. What are the benefits of gender-based/matched mentoring relationships?
8. What are the challenges of gender-based/matched mentoring relationships?
9. What factors do you feel promote successful gender-based/matched mentoring relationships?
10. What factors do you feel inhibit successful gender-based/matched mentoring relationships?
11. Aside from mentoring, what other factors contribute to your success/development?
12. Aside from mentoring, what strategies do you employ to succeed?
13. What advice would you provide to other African American women in the federal government?
14. What can the federal government do to better support African American women?

Conclusion: End recording and thank participants. Explain member checking and next steps. Answer questions.

Appendix B: Focus Group Data Collection Matrix Template

Matrix for Assessing Level of Consensus in Focus Group

Focus Group Question	Member 1	Member 2	Member 3	Member 4	Member 5	Member 6	Member 7
1							
2							
3							
4							
5							
6							
7							
8							
9							
10							
11							
12							
13							
14							

A = Indicated agreement (i.e., verbal or nonverbal)
D = Indicated dissent (i.e., verbal or nonverbal)
SE = Provided significant statement or example suggesting agreement
SD = Provided significant statement or example suggesting dissent
NR = Did not indicate agreement or dissent (i.e., nonresponse)

Note. From "A qualitative framework for collecting and analyzing data in focus group research" by A. J. Onwuegbuzie, W. B. Dickinson, N. L. Leech, and A. G. Zoran, 2009, *International Journal of Qualitative Methods, 8* (3), p. 8. Adapted with permission of the author.