

A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF UNDERREPRESENTATION OF SENIOR
LEVEL AFRICAN AMERICAN WOMEN IN CORPORATIONS

by

LaShonda M. Jackson-Dean

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A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Management in Organizational Leadership

University of Phoenix

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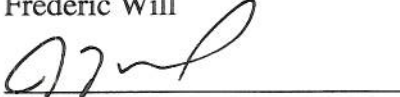
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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to examine the phenomena of underrepresentation of African American women in corporate America. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 20 African American women with current or previous experience working in corporate America in senior-level roles, who acknowledged that racism and sexism exists in corporate America, and were willing to share their experiences. A phenomenological methodology was used to explore the lived experiences of these women. Results of the analysis uncovered five themes that described experiences of practices leading to inequality, diversity, leadership journeys, leadership practices and racial perceptions. Participants employed several strategies to cope with experiences of racism and sexism in the workplace. Theoretical and leadership implications, limitations, recommendations, as well as suggestions for future research were discussed.

Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated in the honor and loving memory of my father, Mr. Gene Ray Jackson (1945-2001). Through his love and care, I am the woman I am today! From a child to a grown woman, he instilled in me his “break your plate philosophy”. His philosophy entailed me getting my education, and my living for myself so, if I found myself in an unsavory position, I could leave without hesitation. He would say “you can eat your food, “break your plate” and move on to your next destination.” In short, he taught me to know my worth and not settle. I still subscribe to this philosophy today.

This study is also dedicated to the memories of my other heavenly angels:

Mr. Aaron Williams, Sr. and Mrs. Beatrice Williams (Maternal Grandparents)

Mr. Walter and Mrs. Katie Mays (Maternal Great-grandparents)

Mr. James Williams and Mrs. Lucian Brazile-Williams (Maternal Great-Grandparents)

Mr. John H. Adams and Mrs. Ida Jewel Adams (Paternal Grandparents)

Mr. Wade House and Mrs. Fannie House (Paternal Grandparents)

Mrs. Ida B. Williams McNairy (Aunt)

Rest in Love and Peace.

Acknowledgments

I dedicate this dissertation to my husband, friend and confidant, Paul M. Dean, Jr., whose fervent prayers, belief, patience, support, and unconditional love sustained me through this academic achievement. I am forever indebted to and thankful for you. You took care of the children, the house and me. Love you Big Daddy!

To my children, Langston “Flipper” and Paul III., “Thumper”, I am grateful for your encouragement and love. I strive daily to be the best role model and mother that I can be to the both of you. The gratitude I feel for your understanding, and enthusiasm for my doctoral journey cannot be put into words. Now, I ask that the both of you do the same and continue your educational journeys.

I would like to acknowledge and express my sincere gratitude to my parents Florine Jackson-House and James House, thank you for convincing me to pursue my Doctorate after my MBA. I appreciate the extra push you have given me throughout my life. I will never forget my mother’s “subtle push” at my MBA graduation, while the candidates were being hooded for their Doctorate she stood up and pointed at them. This was code for “You’re not finished until you get that Doctor’s hat and stole.”

To my uncle/brother Terry Williams, Sr., thank you for being the best brother in the world. Thank you for your support and love during this process. I could always depend on you to give me a call when you knew I needed it most.

To my best friend for over twenty years, Barbara Goodall-Hinton, thank you for your FIA “Foot in Ass” Strategy, that kept me going when I wanted to give up.

To my colleague and friend Dr. Eva Lundahl-Philpot, my dissertation navigator. Our relationship started from cohorts on our Doctoral journey leading to a beautiful sisterhood. Thank you for your guidance, love and support.

To my uncle Isiah Davis (Uncle Jr.), thank you for the calls of encouragement, your love and support. To my aunt Dicie Tobar (Aunt Dicie), thank you for the prayers, love and support you have given me all of my life.

To my dear friend Patricia White, I truly thank you for your elegant demeanor, professionalism and your words of wisdom that you have poured into me over the years. Thank you for your love, support and your friendship.

Thank you to my soror sisters, The Delta Diamonds of Pi Eta Delta, professional women leaders and scholar practitioners focused on supporting and recognizing women who achieve the highest level of academics, a terminal degree.

I would also like to make sure I give an acknowledgement to my friends and family from my childhood neighborhood of Shondaville in Forrest City, AR.

To the FCAAOWDS (Forrest City Arkansas African American Women Doctor Society), Drs. Brenda Bradley, Tonya Doby-Broughton, Tekeda Freeman-Ferguson, Sophia Parchman-Williams, Tiffany Perkins-Munn, Yolanda Pickett-Olivera and now, LaShonda M. Jackson-Dean, you are truly an inspiration to me.

Thank you to my employees of my businesses, Jackson-Dean Investments, LLC, Elegant Expressions1.com and Maid to Shine 1. I appreciate you for continuing to perform even when I could not be present.

I would also like to acknowledge and thank my esteemed Dissertation chair and committee, Drs. Nancy Arduengo, Frederic Will and Gerald Petersen-Incorvaia.

To the women who agreed to participate in this study, the courage and perseverance you have shown through your professional career as senior-level African American women in corporate America has inspired me to strive for more. Thank you so much. I hope my study will bring more awareness to and understanding of professional Black women's experiences in the workplace.

I would also like to thank all of my aunts, uncles, cousins, in-laws, nieces, nephews, friends, and frenemies who have offered their support and encouragement during this long process. The pride on your faces and joy in your hearts are what helped me endure when the light at end of the tunnel seemed dim. I stand daily on word of God that says, "*I can do all things through Christ that strengthens me*" Phil. 4:13. Because of all of you and through the grace of God, I have earned something that has only been accomplished by a small percentage of the population.

For that, I say, THANK YOU, and I LOVE YOU ALL.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Women of color have revolutionized the country's economy by penetrating the U.S. workforce previously dominated by white men, beginning in the late 1960s and early 1970s (Winborne, 2007). Seventy-six percent of companies have continued to become more racially and ethnically diverse since the 1980's, with the exception of top-level management positions (BOLS, 2010). African American women in particular continue to constitute a minority group in management across American corporations. Although an increasing number of African American women have entered the middle to senior level positions in corporate America, a differential still exists between African American and other women in regard to status in corporate America; regarding how many African American women have successfully attained this status in corporate America (Freeman, 2012).

According to Parker (2005), idealized images of senior-level managers are stereotypically of upper middle class white men. African American women have suggested that access to career advancement is more limited for them than for White men and their White female counterparts (Hite, 2004). African American women working in American corporations believe different organizational standards exist between them and their White counterparts (Parker, 2005). White men still dominate the top positions in most companies, representing 73.5 % of chief executives and 52.1% of all officials and managers in the workforce (U. S. Census Bureau, 2012). Exploring the leadership success of African American women in senior level corporate positions is necessary

because all African American women need the opportunity to use their formal education and talents equally and alongside those of other ethnic groups.

Chapter 1 contains the background of the problem, problem statement, purpose of the study, significance of the study, significance of the study to leadership, nature of the study, research questions, and theoretical framework. The chapter concludes with the assumptions, scope, limitations, and delimitations of the study.

Background of the Problem

Men hold the advantage over equivalently qualified women as candidates for both the jobs customarily held by men and the more gender blended jobs (Brinson, 2006). Similarly, male leaders receive much more positive appraisals than tantamount female leaders, especially in roles usually occupied by men (Brinson, 2006). Oswell (2005) suggested the advancement of Black men occurs under the guise of male privilege, even when those males are Black. The perceptions of society about African American males attaining leadership positions have been negative (Oswell, 2005). This may explain why African American males have not achieved as many leadership roles in their professional lives as other males have in the U.S. (Oswell, 2005).

The United States workforce is among the most gender and ethnically diverse in the world. This diversity exhibits both challenges and opportunities as organizations compete for dominance in a global marketplace. Jackson (2004) points out that the senior level appointments of women have gone primarily to White women; thus African American women continue to lag significantly behind White women in holding senior level positions. Race and gender clusters in the workplace impact African American women seeking to climb the corporate ladder (Freeman, 2012). One of the most critical

barriers to diversity in the workforce involves eradication of barriers to entry and attainment of senior level positions for those who are not both White and male, also known as the phenomenon of breaking the glass ceiling (Stewart, Wells, & Ross, 2011). The stigma placed on African American women as being unable to lead and unqualified for the positions available to them, made possible by affirmative action; undermines the potential talent and knowledge, thought to contribute to developing African American women's leadership abilities (Combs, 2003).

According to Beal (2008) and Parker (2004), African American women experience even more difficulty than African American males acquiring senior-level positions and have been underrepresented in corporate America. African American women leaders suffer underrepresentation in most corporate American businesses and governmental organizations (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). Only 3.2% of senior executive positions at the chief executive officer (CEO) level are held by African American women (Freeman, 2012).

The male dominated society does not fully understand the perspective of the African American woman (Brinson, 2006, p. 8). Black women have suggested that access to career advancement is more limited for them than compared to the access to career advancement of their White female counterparts (Hite, 2004). According to Gillman (2007), attempts to conduct research exploring both race and gender have resulted in models offering perspectives to demonstrate how women of color experience double jeopardy and triple-oppression. However, research on the case of the African American woman corporate leader might shed new light on this phenomenon. The results of this qualitative phenomenological study provided preliminary evidence of the

greater obstacles African American women face, in successfully obtaining and retaining senior level corporate positions; and offered recommendations for future corporate leaders who are African American women.

Problem Statement

Workplaces are racially diverse in the 21st century, but striking disparities continue within corporate culture (Bouie, 2011). The general problem facing this qualitative phenomenological study is African American women are underrepresented at the senior executive level of Corporate America in large U.S. corporations headquartered in Houston, TX, of the United States (Freeman, 2012; Stewart, Wells, & Ross, 2011). The available literature concerning attributes of successful African American women holding senior level positions in corporations is scanty; additional research would be beneficial to researchers and leaders, alike (Freeman, 2012). The number of African American women holding these positions is not representative of the African American population (Freeman, 2012; U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). Each ethnicity contributes to cultural capital. This capital assumes many forms. Some groups, for example, African American women, contribute non-financial social assets, promoting social progression, which cannot be measured by economic means such as education, intellect, style of speech, dress, and even physical appearance. The absence of African American women in positions of leadership has been shown to limit America's cultural capital and might cause society to limit its possibilities of evolving (Chesterman and Ross-Smith, 2006). Restricting or even eliminating African American women from these positions results in missed opportunities: diverse intellect, education and leadership.

Most African Americans, both male and female, have had pragmatic experiences in corporations (i.e., military, governmental, and organizational) that may be appropriate for leading a variety of organizations, but African American women may not have had the opportunity to demonstrate their managerial and leadership acumen. If the endowments of African American women (e.g., managerial and leadership skills) are not used, the professional experiences may not be validated and enhanced. African American women face negative stereotyping based on both ethnicity and gender, sometimes referred to as *double jeopardy* (Harley, 2008).

Another way to look at the specific problem is previous studies suggested ways in which more African American women can be recruited for top-level corporate positions (Crawford and Smith, 2007). This study provided additional leadership insights from which they could hope to improve their level of representation. The African American women population is still severely underrepresented at the senior level of management in Corporate America (Freeman, 2012; Stewart, Wells, & Ross, 2011). As a result of underrepresentation, many organizations remain under the administration of white males; risking the organization's ability to use a more diverse style of leadership that may prove to be an asset when encountering certain situations in this complex society (Stewart, Wells, & Ross, 2011).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the qualitative, phenomenological study was to provide understanding and additional insights concerning the problem of underrepresentation by exploring the lived experiences and perceptions of African American women holding senior level positions within large U.S. corporations headquartered in Houston, TX, of

the United States. One subsidiary purpose of exploring the different types of leadership involved relating to more than one type of leadership knowledge and mentorship as such applies to senior level position attainment. The second subsidiary purpose was to collect a deeper understanding of the impact leadership, and mentorship has on the successes of the African American women in senior level corporate positions.

Phenomenology is a philosophy of human experience (Bernard, 2013). The aim of phenomenology as a strategy for conducting qualitative research is to explore lived experiences revealing the nature of the human condition (Vaivada & Blinstrubas, 2011). Phenomenology uses the knowledge provided by participants or informants about their obtained experiences and their constructions of meaning, the content of consciousness (Vaivada & Blinstrubas, 2011).

The sample for this study consisted of 20 African American women holding middle level to senior level positions within large U.S. corporations in Houston, TX. Those who have currently or formerly held in positions of chief finance officer (CFO), chief operating officer (COO), chief information officer (CIO), and chief executive officer or equivalent and maintained their positions for a minimum of two years were sought for participation. Houston, Texas was the geographical area in the study. Data were collected through face to face interviews.

Significance of the Study

The study provided understanding and insights on how leadership and mentorship impact the success of African American women who have attained senior level corporate positions. Findings resulted in strategies for recruiting and retaining more African American women in senior level corporate positions for corporate leaders of all races,

educators, and to society at large. The perspectives of female African Americans currently employed in senior-level management positions may lead to a greater understanding of leadership effectiveness, and mentorship in overcoming both sexism and racism in organizations. Sexism and racism are major contributors to the underrepresentation of African American women; in many cases the disparity between the way African American women and other employees are treated is of two kinds. These women face a sense of disadvantage: being female and African American. The findings may lead to more opportunities for developing leadership roles for African American women and for strengthening the entire U.S. society. The results of the study may inspire businesses and corporations not only to understand diversity initiatives but also to institute more innovative initiatives for ending the racial stereotypes known to be obstacles for African American women in their companies (Dickerson, 2006; Browne, 2000).

Significance of the Study to Leadership

The present study may be significant to leadership by offering the opportunity to show how companies can benefit from African American women's leadership, especially due to the importance African American women role models play in their own community (Oswell, 2005). The results of this study may contribute to the advancement of African American women within corporate America. The study may add to the body of knowledge about leadership and contribute a platform on research for evolving current theories about leadership as such apply to African American women. The results of the study may also aid in understanding the large imbalance of successful African American women in the middle to senior level corporate positions. Finally, the results of the

research may add to leadership literature by addressing the contemporary experiences of senior level African American women.

Nature of the Study

A qualitative study assists in understanding an event or a situation as it relates to the meaning other people derive from the experience or situation (Vivar, 2007). In qualitative studies, the purpose is open-ended and exploratory. Qualitative inquiry allows the researcher to explore the comprehensiveness of an issue, which can only be done by providing participants opportunities to tell their stories. In contrast, the quantitative method tests theories, predicts results, and measures differences among two or more groups (Creswell, 2012). Because the purpose of the study was exploratory and focused on the lived experiences of participants, a qualitative design was appropriate.

Phenomenology is the study of lived experiences (Bernard, 2013) and focuses on the meaning as experienced by individuals (Vaivada, Blinstrubas, & Mockevičienė, 2011). This approach was appropriate for the study because the participants had the opportunity to share their contemporary and past personal and professional experiences, their leadership attainment struggles and successes, as well as their leadership styles. Phenomenological research allows the researcher to ask different types of questions such as open ended (unstructured) or close ended (structured) (Cooper & Schindler, 2006). Open-ended questions allow participants to create the options or construct meaning for responding to a question (Cooper & Schindler, 2006). But contrast, close-ended questions force participants to choose from a fixed set of choices and for providing information to support concepts in the literature (Cooper & Schindler, 2006). Survey items employing close-ended questions with analysis through quantitative techniques

would not have contributed to a deeper understanding of these African American women leaders. A phenomenological research method helped the researcher explore elements of race, leadership, and aspects of developing leaders through the motivation to succeed, persistence, and mentorship.

Interviews were conducted 20 African American women holding senior level corporate positions in large U.S. corporations, who have currently or formerly held positions of chief finance officer (CFO), chief operating officer (COO), chief information officer (CIO), and chief executive officer or equivalent and maintained their positions for a minimum of two years. Houston, Texas is the geographical area in the study. Semi-structured interviews were used to collect data from the African American women regarding their struggles and successes with organizational leadership. Interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed verbatim. Informed consent forms were administered online in advance of the interviews. The consent forms were signed in ink and returned via scanner, email or fax, prior to scheduling of face-to-face interviews.

The interview and open-ended questionnaire were tested in a pilot study to determine if they were appropriate and clear. A pilot study is a pre-study conducted to ensure that the goals of the study can be achieved through the selected data collection method (Lancaster, Dodd, Williamson, 2004). Pilot study interviews followed a semi-structured in-depth interview guide of an initial 24 questions for the participants (Moustakas, 1994). The pilot study resulted in the revision of several interview questions based on feedback from pilot participants.

Pilot interviews included probing questions to allow participants to submit their personal opinions and experiences with underrepresentation of African American women

in corporate America from a senior-level perspective. The final set of interview questions explored the existence, the nature of leadership development and mentorship programs; and to learn the participants' paths to their positions and their struggles and successes within organizational leadership (Appendix A). The purposive sample of 20 African American women was drawn from the population of fewer than 60 senior level African American women leaders in the Houston, TX area. Those holding equivalent senior level positions in large U.S. corporations, who have currently or formerly held positions chief finance officer (CFO), chief operating officer (COO), chief information officer (CIO), and chief executive officer or equivalent and maintained their positions for a minimum of two years, were sought for participation. The exact sample size of 20 was determined from data saturation (Creswell, 2012).

Research Question

The present qualitative phenomenological study explored lived experiences and perceptions of African American women holding senior level positions in large U.S. Corporations. This purpose was achieved by answering the following research question:

RQ1. *What are the lived experiences or perceptions that influenced the current styles of leadership of African American women in senior level positions?*

Theoretical Framework

Leadership has been defined as having the ability to influence someone else to follow one's lead (Kouzes, 2003). According to Northouse (2007) leadership is not dependent on the position, title or privilege, but is instead associated with the capacity to influence others by creating a vision and inspiring by advocacy. Clawson (2006) believed that many elements work together in the function of leadership and that ultimately;

leadership is about having the ability to manage self before managing others. Leaders are people who decide what needs to be done within an organization, and make it happen (Kouzes, 2003). Global managers who are leaders understand this and look for the underlying meaning of leadership in various locations. For this study, Fiedler's Contingency Theory and an Organizational Diversity Model that includes the Colorblind Theory versus Multiculturalism were used to help guide the study and understand the lived experiences of the African American women working in senior level positions.

Fiedler Contingency Theory

Contingency theory requires leaders to match their different leadership styles to their environments in order to operate effectively and experience success as being "contingent" on situations. The environment within an organization results in choosing different resolutions for a variety of issues (Clawson, 2006). Contingency theory formulates worst case to optimum scenarios and develops plans associated with each scenario to achieve one's goal (Scharmer, 2009).

The Fiedler contingency model is applied by reviewing a collection of data, and employees' scores act as indicators of their performance (Clawson, 2006). In contingency leadership theory, there is no one way best to be a leader, and even though one leadership behavior may work well in one situation, it may not work well in another. Leaders only become successful if they are able to adopt different leadership styles to match the circumstances or contingencies they face with employees and followers (Scharmer, 2009). Contingency theory has been presented as being more logical due to its requirement that the leader use data for decision making and behavior choices (Clawson, 2006). A lack of contingency planning may be the underlying reason why

there are not as many African-American women leaders (Caver & Livers, 2002). This study could add to the body of leadership knowledge by helping leaders in corporate America identify the leadership styles of African American women senior-level executives.

Organizational Diversity Model

An Organizational Diversity Model implements best practices with the goal of optimizing strategic approaches to diversity (Stevens and Sanchez-Burks, 2008). This Organizational Diversity Model encompasses the Colorblind Theory and Multiculturalism. Multiculturalism emphasizes diversity strength in individual or collective human capital to ensure that all contributions are valued (Stevens et al., 2008). The utilization of human capital makes the best use of talents or skills possessed, individually or collectively. Multiculturalism focuses on the race of an individual or the importance of group participation (Brown and Hewstone, 2005). Demonstration an appreciation for race, ethnicity and background of individuals and groups could effectively create an atmosphere conducive to cultural awareness. Multiculturalism benefits organizations by encouraging respect and appreciation of all individuals and groups. Comprehension of the culture of African American individuals, as well as, African American groups, is beneficial to the increasing multicultural cohesiveness within organizations.

In contrast, Colorblind theory disregards ethnic and racial background to ensure that inclusive treatment of these individuals and groups is discouraged (Brown and Hewstone, 2005). Recent studies show the Colorblind theory is effective by decreasing diverse regard to specific groups, discouraging opportunities for individual and group

discrimination (Brown and Hewstone, 2005). By not seeing color, everyone receives the same treatment without regard to race or ethnicity. There is an effort to ensure similar treatment is the organizational culture. Although many organizational leaders may agree that being colorblind to ethnic and racial background is fair; the Colorblind approach may actually create missed opportunities for cultural awareness. In the case of multiculturalism, disregarding the presence of cultures lessens the ability for increased knowledge and available skills. Both theories offer a different perspective to the approach of diversity. To sustain diversity, it is understandably necessary to commit to strategy, communication, and concrete changes in organizational structure and processes.

Assumptions

Assumptions in research can yield both unclear and unpredictable accounts about the study (Clark, 2005). Acknowledging and sharing assumptions is essential to situate the study in a research context from a clear starting point and serves as a foundation for data collection and analysis. The present study was based on six assumptions: a) participants would voluntarily participate in the study, b) participants would answer questions honestly and completely, c) participants were proficient in the English language, d) participants' lived experiences were different from the experiences of women and men of other races in equivalent positions, e) participants' perspectives and experiences would recount the phenomena with descriptions of experiences varying in depth and understanding, and f) participants had an email address.

Moustakas (1994) acknowledged that human perceptions, recollection, and interpretation of events influence individual responses. The previously mentioned assumptions were discovered to be accurate which by demonstrates the value and

relevance of this study. Participants were informed that their participation was voluntary and that they could withdraw from the study at any time without repercussions (Simon, 2011). No participants chose to withdraw, however. Transcripts from interviews were coded to remove interview participants' names and organizational affiliation. Honesty of each participant was highly encouraged, the identities of participants were concealed and confidentiality preserved. Each participant was proficient in the English language and answered accordingly in the English language. As African American women, the phenomena of their lived experiences differed from women of other races in equivalent positions and varied in understanding. The participants provided an email address for contact purposes.

Scope and Limitations

The scope of the research involved collecting qualitative data gained through the phenomenal design, using in-depth and semi-structured interviews including leadership questions pertaining to African American women's lived experiences in corporate America. According to Leedy and Ormrod (2005), the findings of qualitative studies are potentially specific to a particular perspective and not transferable to other contexts.

The scope of this study involved African American women in senior level positions in large U.S. corporations with headquarters in Houston, Texas. Those who have currently or formerly held positions of chief finance officer (CFO), chief operating officer (COO), chief information officer (CIO), and chief executive officer or equivalent and maintained their positions for a minimum of two years, who agreed to participate voluntarily and confidentially. "All research studies have limitations, and the sincere investigator recognizes that readers need aid in judging the study's validity" (Cooper &

Schindler, 2006, p. 534). The limitations of a study help identify any areas of potential weakness (Creswell, 2009), and reflect study conditions beyond the researcher's control (Simon, 2011). Significant limitations of the present study included the honesty of participants during their interviews, as well as, how liberal they were in information elaboration. The limitation included time constraints by the participants. The time constraints involved the number of participants with time available to participate in the study. The small sample from the population may pose a significant limitation in terms of the ability to generalize the findings to not only the study population but also the population in general (Leedy & Ormrod, 2010).

Delimitations

Creswell (2009) defined delimitations as identifying factors that narrow the scope of the research and define research boundaries. Delimitations thus identify what is not included or intended in the study (Leedy & Ormrod, 2010). As opposed to limitations, delimitations are within the researcher's scope of control (Simon, 2011). Delimitation of this study included not reaching out to individual corporations for potential participants. This decision was made in order to preserve quality research time, which would be better served during data analysis. There were several populations, which were considered for the current study. The considered populations included white men and white women in senior-level positions. These additional populations were dismissed to ensure the select phenomena of African American women in senior-level positions were captured.

The final delimitation involved elimination of possible other methodology. The other possible methodology was Quantitative. Quantitative proved to not be the most effective type of methodology due to the inability to properly explain the basis of the

participant's experiences in statistical measurements or size. Quantitative research is effectively the collecting of raw data, whilst Qualitative research is the interpretation and analysis of this data in order to find underlying meaning. The purpose of the research was to explore the phenomenon of women's experiences of leadership development in an in-depth way rather than establish a statistically significant argument about how or why the phenomenon occurred. Qualitative methodology was chosen and was the most effective methodology for this study because it involves focusing on understanding the social phenomenon from the perspective of the involved participants of the study.

Summary

Chapter 1 described the underrepresentation of African American women at the senior executive level of Corporate America. Despite having proven leadership experience within corporations (i.e., military, governmental, and organizational), African American women may not have had the opportunity to demonstrate their managerial and leadership acumen. The inability of African American women to use obtained skills (e.g., managerial and leadership skills) may result in their professional experiences not being validated and enhanced.

There is some disagreement over the numbers of African American women, who have successfully risen to the status in Corporate American. The goal of the study is to detect underlying meanings of the African American women's experiences through the application of self-inquiry and dialogue. The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to understand and explore the lived experiences of African American women in senior level corporate positions. The study concentrated on the

fundamental character of leadership, programs that provide for development, and opportunities for mentorship, as experienced by participants.

This study may help reduce the gap in literature about African American women in leadership, and increase the senior level leadership opportunities for this population. The literature review in Chapter 2 identifies historical and current literature addressing African American women; to include the underrepresentation of African American women in senior-level positions and the need for leadership inclusion. Leadership representation is necessary in every organization and any group. Representations of different minority groups (i.e., women, African American, Hispanic/Latino) are important aspects of belonging. Being able to identify with leadership in some way encourages growth and sustainability. Without like representation, unlike groups may suffer alienation and career stagnation.

The theoretical framework for this study consisted of Fiedler's contingency theory, and organizational diversity models. African American women in senior-level corporate American positions deserve the opportunity for inclusion in upper level echelons of organizations. The leadership inclusion of African American women may lead to essential strategies for penetrating the current white male dominated culture of organizations.

Chapter 2

Review of Literature

Chapter 1 provided a substantive overview of this qualitative phenomenological research study addressing the challenges and underrepresentation of African American women holding senior-level positions within corporations. The problem is that African American women is the least represented ethnic group holding senior-level positions within corporations (Corporate Diversity, 2010). The number of African American women holding these positions is not representative of the African American population (Freeman, 2012; U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). Jackson (2004) pointed out that the senior level appointments of women have gone primarily to White women; thus African American women continue to lag significantly behind White women in holding senior level positions. African American women hold fewer than 2% of the senior level positions in corporate America (Corporate Diversity, 2010).

The study's purpose was to identify and examine the obstacles of underrepresentation; to explore the different types of leadership and mentorship through the lived experiences of African American women holding senior level positions within large U.S. corporations headquartered in Houston, TX, of the United States. Acquiring senior-level leadership positions within corporate America is challenging. The challenge is even greater for African American women who have the stress of having to work hard to prove themselves, as well as, having to work doubly hard compared to their White female counterparts (Harley, 2008). African American women have even more difficulty than African American males acquiring senior-level positions and have been underrepresented in corporate America (Beal, 2008; Parker, 2005). African American

women are and should be treated as potential intellectual equals; this should be understood in a male-dominated society (Brinson, 2006).

Chapter 2 includes a literature review related to historical and present literature concerning the challenges experienced by African American women. A literature review is the most significant phase in the research process because it provides substantiation for the rest of the research study (Galvan, 2006). Researchers need to gather information (evidence) from knowledgeable sources in order to conduct a valid study (Barnett, 2003). Furthermore, the literature review informs the researcher of how much and what kind of research studies have been conducted in the topic area by other researchers.

Introduction

Chapter 2 contains historical findings and current finding related to the underrepresentation of African American women in corporate America. This chapter includes summaries of peer-reviewed articles on the variables of the study. Each variable has a separate sub-section discussing research articles relevant to the study. The underrepresentation of African American women in corporate America is reflected in the literature and deals with race, hiring practices, and the foundation of laws against discrimination concerning historical findings. Also, included in the literature are current findings in representation among the Top 500 Corporate Boards in America, diversity experiences of affirmative action, individual diversity and workplace diversity agenda; and corporate salary gap, leadership theories and mentorship.

Title Searches, Articles, Research Documents, and Journals

The present literature review incorporates topical coverage to ensure scope, prevalence, and significance of the topics related to African American women in

leadership. The present literature review included references from 95 sources. Of the 95 sources, 79 were from peer-reviewed journals and books. 84 percent of the research originated from scholarly resources. Twelve other non-peer reviewed sources were statistical databases, providing information and examples for a thorough analysis of the phenomenon, and the remaining four were from dissertations.

Part of the literature review conducted through University of Phoenix's Electronic library included database searches in ProQuest, EBSCOhost, and Thomson Gale PowerSearch. Dissertations on similar topics emerged using the ProQuest Dissertations and Theses access. Specialized electronic databases, such as Business and Company Resource Center expanded the possibility of scholarly and professional article searches. Electronic sources outside the University of Phoenix Library system added breadth to the search for scholarly publications. Outside sources included Google Scholar, and local university libraries, Professional and government databases from the Bureau of Labor Statistics, and the U.S. Census Bureau contributed statistical information assessing business trends and patterns (see Table 1).

Keywords for the search consisted of African American women, African American women leaders, African American women managers, Black women leaders, Black females, duality of women of color, discrimination, organizational leadership, transformational leadership, servant leadership, African American women leadership, qualitative, qualitative phenomenological, gender differences, gender biases, senior-level, career advancement, corporate America, organizational leaders, feminism and Black feminism, feminist theory, and gender equity. Table 1 incorporates a summary of the

searched literature categories. Performing a keyword search resulted in literature to support the purpose and significance of the study.

Table 1

Research Documentation and Key Word Search

Resource	Number Key	Word Search	Research Location
Books	18	Leadership, model, theory, qualitative research, social, emotional intelligence, leader style, leader characteristics	University of Phoenix University Library
Peer-Reviewed Journal Articles	61	Leadership, racism, gender intersectionality	University of Phoenix Library EBSCOhost; ProQuest
Dissertation	4	Research methods, qualitative, phenomenology, phenomenological, leadership	University of Phoenix Library; ProQuest
Statistical	12	Women leadership, African- American employment, Women Employment, Demographics	Various Federal Governmental sites

Literature Sections and Research Gaps

The literature review consists of two significant sections, historical and current findings emerging from the review of research related to African American women in senior-level positions within corporate America. These sections reveal the reasons African American women are underrepresented and strategies to increase their numbers in corporations and expose research gaps. Both sections relate to the underrepresentation of African American women in corporate America. Research gaps revealed in the literature include Jackson, 2004; Parker, 2005; Brinson, 2006; Beale, 2008; Haley, 2008; Corporate Diversity, 2010 and Freeman, 2012.

Historical Findings

The Historical Findings section relates to the underrepresentation of African American women in corporate America include Race, Hiring Practices and Foundation of Laws of Discrimination.

Race

Racism is “culturally sanctioned beliefs, which, regardless of intentions involved, defend the advantages whites have because of the subordinated position of racial minorities” (Wellman, 1993, p. 49). According to Wright (1998), racism experienced in organizational environments lead to “alienation, meaning being disenchanting, dispirited, hostile to, separated from, not belong to, not being fulfilled while belonging, being involved but feeling detached and uncommitted, being a part of but feeling resentment” .

Although there are many efforts to improve the experiences of African American women, their experiences are still shaped by cultural forces that often demean, disadvantage and deny them equal access and opportunity (Ergüner-Tekinalp, 2009;

Atkinson & Hackett, 1998; Jones, 1997). Several laws have been implemented to eliminate racism, but the focus of White society on maintaining rigid control over Blacks, has continued (Ergüner-Tekinalp, 2009). Decades of racism and oppression have created wounds for African and White Americans and resulted in unresolved relationship dynamics (Hunt & Hunt, 2001). The historic and present racial obstacles experienced by many African American women in receiving the same services and employment as White Americans are the effect of them being the subject of racism (Giscome & Mattis, 2002).

Although there has been some progress made in improving race and ethnicity relationships, there is statistical evidence reflecting the wide-spread in workplace discrimination (NARA, 2012). More than one-third of blacks reported that they had personally been passed over for a job or promotion because of their race or ethnicity (NARA, 2012). It is noted the discrimination does not decline with the rise in the social hierarchy. Recent research shows the perceived discrimination may lead to diminished effort or performance in education or the labor market, which itself gives rise to negative outcomes (NARA, 2012).

Hiring Practices

Hiring of the underrepresented groups into higher positions in the public sector continues to present controversy (Antwi-Boasiako, 2008; Pierce, 2007). Jackson (2004) points out that the senior level corporate appointments have gone primarily to White women; thus African American women continue to lag significantly behind White women in holding senior level positions. Historical and presently, racism and discrimination are a part of America; however, these two evils persist, in disguise, to reduce the hiring and recruiting of minorities including women (Antwi-Boasiako, 2008;

Pierce, 2007). Over the years, especially during the 1960s and 1970s, the federal government paid greater attention to some of the demands of minorities through the Civil Rights Acts of the 1960s, the result of legislation, court rulings, and executive orders in an attempt to eliminate discrimination in America (Abel & Sementelli, 2004; Antwi-Boasiako, 2008).

The perspective of minorities and women was changed after the Thirteenth Amendment, viewing them as equals to the dominant group. (Abel & Sementelli, 2004). Change progressed with the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments, preventing discrimination against blacks and opening the way to the passing of the Civil Rights laws (Abel & Sementelli, 2004; Antwi-Boasiako, 2008). Most Americans have embraced diversity and recognized the importance of change, but the problem lies within the resisters, who discount equality as destroying the fibers of America across the nation (Abel & Sementelli, 2004; Antwi-Boasiako, 2008). Until the hiring body identifies and understands the importance of diversity in any organization or institution, affirmative action and equal employment opportunity policies may not raise minorities to par level with their white counterparts. Others may begin to perceive the organization as one which accommodates minorities, as a welcoming environment to seek job opportunities if organizations practice hiring minorities on a continuous basis (Giscome & Mattis, 2002; Antwi-Boasiako, 2008).

Foundation of Laws against Discrimination

Discrimination is one of the most often faced barriers for African American women in corporate America (Igasaki, 2011). The U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (2012) has defined discrimination as treating someone unfairly, unequally,

and with less favor than another person based on any number of characteristics including gender, race, religion, nationality, disability, etc. Diverse representation at senior management levels is imperative for consideration not only because it is an indication of the level of discrimination in an organization, but with diversity the likelihood of further discrimination is reduced, by recognizing the importance of everyone participating (Bennett, 2002; James, 2000).

Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, made it illegal for an employer to deny anyone a job because of race, color, religion, sex and national origin, and intentional discrimination (U.S.EEOC, 2012). Title VII legally prohibited an employer from "failing or refusing employment or to fire employees, or otherwise discriminate against any employee or potential employee with respect to any circumstance, because of such individual's race, color, religion, sex, or national origin" (U.S.EEOC, 2012, p. 45).

In addition to the hiring provisions, the law dictated that employee segregation cannot be based on race in order to adversely affect their chances at promotions (NARA, 2012). There are law exceptions—the use of a legitimate seniority or merit system to measure performance and earnings based on a quantity or quality measuring system such as, the Balanced Scorecard, can be utilized by a business (Kaplan and Norton, 1996). Employers may use cognitive ability tests as a means to selecting the most qualified candidates for employment as long as the test does not demonstrate racial discrimination in any way, which means the test is not geared to benefit one race over another (NARA, 2012).

Title VII covers all private, federal, state, and local employers with at least 15 employees (NARA, 2012). Thanks to local and state statutes in many states, businesses

with fewer than 15 employees are covered by the same rules (NARA, 2012). The courts amended the 1964 law in 1991, with the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1991 (NARA, 2012). The passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1991 was performed to override decisions made by the Supreme Court, which made it difficult to prove racial discrimination (NARA, 2012). One of the many changes of the 1991 law included closing “a loophole in the 1964 act that also involved a Civil War-era statute known as 42 U.S.C. Section 1981”(NARA, 2012). “The Supreme Court had held that Section 1981 applied to hiring and sometimes to promotions but did not cover racial harassment that occurred in the workplace once a person was hired” (NARA, 2012). “The 1991 act said that all racial discrimination was covered by U.S. law, including post-hire harassment” (NARA, 2012).

The 1991 law change included closing a loophole in the 1964 act concerning Civil War-era statute known as 42 U.S.C. Section 1981(NARA, 2012). Section 1981 applied to hiring and promotions after employment, however, not workplace racial harassment (NARA, 2012). The Civil Rights Act of 1991 covers all racial discrimination to include post-hire harassment (NARA, 2012).

Monetary damages were an added enhancement under the Civil Rights Act of 1991(NARA, 2012). Prior to the passage of this laws, discrimination suits against an employer by an employee “could only recover lost wages or salary, lost benefits, attorney fees, other legal costs, and the costs associated with reinstatement” (NARA, 2012). “The 1991 law said that employees could also recover punitive monetary damages for pain and emotional suffering, mental anguish, future lost wages and benefits, and more” (NARA, 2012). The collection of recovered damages was only possible in proven intentional discrimination cases, and with clear exhibition of malice or reckless indifference (NARA,

2012). A cap of \$300,000 for punitive damages in certain discrimination cases was established in an effort to protect employers from large court settlements, however, no caps in ethnic or racial discrimination suits (NARA, 2012).

The Civil Rights Act of 1991 involves employment practices that have a "disparate impact" of inequality, on racial groups (that is, affect African American groups more than White groups); making it easier for plaintiffs "to receive damages in cases where a discriminatory practice and a nondiscriminatory practice both played a part in a hiring or promotion decision" (NARA, 2012). The implementation of this Act makes it easier for African Americans pursuing discriminatory cases. The ability to challenge the seniority system due to discriminatory purposes was made possible by the Act (NARA, 2012). Changes put place by the Act, increased the number of lawsuits nationwide (NARA, 2012). Although there has been some progress made in improving race and ethnicity relationships, there is statistical evidence reflecting the wide-spread in workplace discrimination (NARA, 2012).

Muffler, Cavico, and Mujtaba (2010) explored the disparate impact theory of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 by analyzing a legal case. The focus on the disparate impact theory was to uncover unintentional discrimination in hiring practices (Muffler et al., 2010). Muffler et al. concluded that organizations need to be proactive in examining testing instruments and procedures before actual testing, to avoid disparate impact and reverse discrimination claims. Part of the discrimination could have been related to institutional culture involving an active lack of diversity.

One of the first laws signed by the first African American President of the United States was the Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Restoration Act (White House, 2009). Ludden

(2010), who noted that women earn 25% less than men on average, evaluated the effectiveness of the Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Restoration Act on the gender pay gap in corporate America. This law was designed to ensure that women received equal compensation for equal employment and equivalent positions in government and industry positions (White House, 2009). However, Ludden (2010) concluded that the act has not been a resounding success for reducing the gap in salaries between genders.

Current Findings

The Current Findings regarding underrepresentation of African American women in corporate America is reflected in literature concerning representation on the Top 500 Corporate Boards in Corporate America, Diversity Experiences, Corporate Salary Gap, Leadership and Mentorship. According to Eagly and Carli (2007), women have progressed in leadership positions within organizations; however, overall, women have remained underrepresented as compared to men in senior-level positions.

The current findings section also includes Glass Ceiling Barriers that impede the professional growth of African American women leaders. These barriers include gender and promotion factors, which hinder minorities in progressing into upper level positions. Researchers and leadership would benefit from understanding the barriers that African American women face when seeking to climb the corporate ladder within organizations. This section continues with the inclusion of the developmental networks, which focus on mentoring experiences or the lack thereof, of African American women in senior-level positions. Corporations can benefit from formal mentorship programs potentially increasing the retention of African American women at the top of the organizational hierarchy, enhancing diversity (Brown, 2011). The section concludes with the question

of becoming an executive in a corporation, mentorship programs and leadership in Corporate America for African American women. Competent leadership is the primary component that influences the achievement of an organization (Lockwood, 2010).

The Underrepresentation of African American Women Professionals

This section reviews the literature on professional disciplines and the representation of African American women in the legal profession. Huston (2010) examined the field of law firms in the United States. Huston learned the three biggest challenges faced by African American women in the law profession were advancing into executive positions, job retention, and finding mentors. Common operational law practices, such as the structure of billable hours, serve as major hindrances for African American Attorneys, possibly due to another manifestation of the old boys' network, such as limiting (approving a very few) or eliminating (not approving any) assignment opportunities (Mystal, 2009).

A new survey suggests that African-American attorneys are experiencing a greater pinch for billable hours than their white counterparts (Mystal, 2009). The problem seemed to stem from the historic challenges minorities can face when it comes to developing professional relationships with whites, such as not knowing or being introduced to the *right people* (Mystal, 2009). In addition, Huston observed that many African American lawyers reported heightened anxiety regarding job security, even after they have made partner. Huston (2010) concluded that African Americans who were successful in advancing, still had less success as attorneys than their White counterparts because the public had less trust in their abilities.

According to Stewart, Wells, and Ross (2011) over the past 30 years, the rate of participation by African American women in the accounting industry was below their representation, as compared to the general U.S. population (Steward et al., 2011). Federal data suggest African American men and women accounting majors constituted over 11% of U.S. business graduates, but the American Institute of CPAs estimated that they formed only 4% of the major firms' employees (Stewart et al., 2011). Moreover, Steward et al. observed that fewer African American CPAs than White CPAs work in the senior levels of the profession's largest firms.

In 2008, the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission According to the GAO, "EEOC reported revised data for senior-level positions, only in the financial industry showed that minorities held 10% of such positions compared to 17% of all other supervisory positions" (GAO, 2010, p. 7). "The revised data further indicated that White males held 64% of senior positions in 2008, with African-Americans at 3%, and others 7%" (GAO, 2010, p. 12). African Americans comprise 4% of the executive team members, and 1 out of 24 executive team members is African American.

Clifford (2012) discussed unequal representation in the U.S. Congress. Clifford reported that U.S. Representatives and Senators tend to be ideologically closer to their White constituents than to their African American constituents. Even when the minority constituents, such as African Americans, outnumber the majority constituents, representatives do not shift their concerns to these constituents (Clifford, 2012). Clifford (2012) had no doubt in concluding that African Americans face a number of challenges to receiving adequate representation from leaders and attaining leadership positions (Clifford, 2012).

Haizlip (2012) discussed the underrepresentation of African American women in counseling and psychology fields, despite the increase of doctorate degrees being obtained by African American women. Haizlip (2012, p. 217) described daunting reports of “challenges with the recruitment and retention of African-American faculty”. Kerr et al. (2008) found that often African American women do not fit the picture for senior level or corporate executive. In another report, Hite (2004) found that while 34.7 % of all employed individuals are in management, professional, and related occupations, only 26 % of African Americans are classified as in the well-paid occupational group. Although 20.3 % of all workers are in professional specialty occupations, Hite reported that only 16.5 % of all African Americans attain those occupations.

In most cases, African American women now have the ability to gain entry level positions (Knight et al., 2003); however, Kerr et al. (2008) showed that they have a difficult time being promoted to senior level corporate positions. According to England (2012), higher positioned, and higher paying jobs are not awarded to African American women not because they do not have the required education but because they are perceived as being different from those who hold the real power in top companies.

Haizlip (2012) suggested that even though African American women have made progress with educational attainment, disparities such as racial inequality, lack of mentorship as well as, publication scrutiny, continue to persist in counseling and psychology that prevent them from moving up the ladder in the field. Benjamin (1997, p. 21) contended “research activities and publications of African-American women academics are often scrutinized more severely by faculty peer review committees, which lends the perception that African American women are less competent than their White

counterparts”. Hite (2004) studied African American women and suggested their access to senior level career advancement was limited as compared to career advancement access of their White counterparts.

Kerr et al. (2008) reported that African American women explicitly experienced the effects of the glass ceiling. Both Kerr et al. and Igasaki (2011) discussed how the glass ceiling phenomenon applies to African American women and found that in most cases, the top and better jobs are not awarded to minorities. Even though research on the glass ceiling is often limited to women, the concept needs greater application to African Americans as a whole (Kerr et al., 2008). While public sector agencies have made significant improvements in diversifying the workforce at entry-level positions, hiring policies rarely address promoting minorities, such as African American women, into higher levels within organizations (Kerr et al., 2008). Kerr et al. concluded that the exclusion of minorities including African American women from senior leadership is detrimental to creating a representative bureaucracy.

Diversity in Corporate Leadership

This section is an overview of literature on diversity in corporations. In the 40 years of affirmative action, diversity in the workplace has not really improved significantly from what it was in the 1970s (Uncovering the Leadership Potential of Black Women, 2009). Diversity is defined as acceptance and respect occurring with inclusion and encompassing the total workplace (Park, Hyung-Jin, & Overby, 2012). Another definition framed by the University of Tennessee Libraries Diversity Committee (2003, p. 5), “diversity is a commitment to recognizing and appreciating the variety of

characteristics that make individuals unique in an atmosphere that promotes and celebrates individual and collective achievement”.

To move this definition to the corporate level means having a corporate philosophy that every individual is unique and recognizing that individual differences matter (Park et al., 2012). Park et al. (2012, p.45) claimed that these factors can be reinforced in “the dimensions of race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, socio-economic status, age, physical abilities, religious beliefs, political beliefs, or other ideologies”. “America's diversity has given this country its unique strength, resilience and richness” (Department of Interior, 2012, p.23). Park et al. concluded that by understanding each other, colleagues and employee can move “beyond simple tolerance to embracing and celebrating the rich dimensions of diversity contained within every individual” (p. 24).

Kezar (2008) addressed the types of politics campus leaders face while engaging in the “work of moving a diversity agenda forward and trying to create an inclusive campus environment”. Kezar reported that a forward diversity agenda generates great topical discussion, but has not surpassed the discussion stage, and an action stage needs to be undertaken. Should a diversity agenda action be undertaken, Kezar offered scenarios representing appropriate proportions. Kezar validated the isolation and inequities that African American women tend to experience when regarded as intellectually inferior to other races, causing African American women to be disparately represented in organizations with non-functional diversified environment.

A discussion about diversity in corporations cannot be held without recognizing the ramifications of the law on implementing employee diversity within organizational

structures (Clifford, 2012). To remain competitive in today's market, diversity is of the utmost importance (Muffler et al., 2010). Some "companies have incorporated diversity training in their employee orientation and development programs" (McMahon, 2010, p. 43), but they have not been successful in incorporating diversity programs for those seeking to advance to senior-level leadership. The study found the percentage of African American women on corporate boards increases as much as 10.16%, for corporations that have a written diversity plan for the board level. Corporations often reap record profits when they choose to tap into the buying power of women and minority communities (Corporate Diversity, 2010).

McMahon (2010) reported that in the business arena, equal opportunity improves performance in the global marketplace for organizations that work with diverse employee labor markets. McMahon's findings should contribute to better decision making process within organizations on a global level since effective decision making models have been attributed to better organizational performance (Gaudine & Thorne, 2001). Jhunjunwala and Mishra (2012, p. X) "discussed the gender, age, race, education, experience, nationality, lifestyle, culture, and religious diversity of corporate boards, and whether diversity improved performance". They tested whether diverse boards of directors possessing different traits and viewpoints facilitate the formulation of suitable strategies, creative problem solving, and improved productivity (Jhunjunwala & Mishra 2012). Jhunjunwala and Mishra showed a positive correlation between greater returns on investments and performance and diversely populated corporate boards. "Diversity is now a political issue, which commands market value but supporters of diversity, think it

should be about morals, doing what is right, treating each other as equals” (Pierce, 2007, p. 4)).

African American Women’s Experiences in Corporations

Hunt (2009) discussed the past generational employment progression of African American women. About 44% of African American women experienced discrimination because of their gender/race, and almost 33% reported being sexually harassed (Hunt, 2009). Ibarra, Carter, and Silva (2010) examined the reports of African American women who held mid-level corporate positions for years without being promoted. The women held the belief that companies were willing to hire men over women due to women handling family responsibilities and to hire Whites over African Americans due to personal preferences (Ibarra et al., 2010).

Buttner and Moore (1997) had earlier found that women leave corporate positions to better themselves and their families as self-employed senior-level leaders or entrepreneurs. According to Hunt (2009, p. 37), “some of the barriers faced in business by African-American women include more frequent questioning of their credibility and authority, a lack of institutional support” and exclusion from the informal networks dominated by their White counterparts.

Corporate Salary Gap

This section provides an overview of literature about the corporate salary gap. Ludden (2010) argued that although the Ledbetter Act provided additional rights for women seeking to file discrimination complaints, it has done little to close the gender pay gap. Ludden (2010) further asserted that women on average earn 77¢ to every male earned \$1.00, and minority women experience greater disparities. Asians Americans

were shown to be the only minority to experience higher salaries than White males. The disparity in the amount of compensation a woman can earn compared to a man remains in corporate America (Wheeler-Johnson, 2012). There is a larger gap in annual earnings for women with higher educational levels; “if rates of employment return to education cost were higher for women, then the gender gap in pay would be smaller for women with higher educational levels” (England, 2012, p. 5).

Huoying (2007) explored the possible causes of salary discrepancies between White males and African American men and women. Despite having the same educational credentials, and years of job experiences, African Americans are still paid less than Whites (Houying, 2007). African Americans are more likely to grow up in poor neighborhoods, to belong to lower social classes, and to lack a quality education (Rogers, 2008). Houying indicated that the salary gaps most likely result from the non-Whites’ lesser quality of education and lower socioeconomic family backgrounds. Rodgers (2008) further indicated that the first reason leading to lower salaries for African Americans relates to their low socioeconomic backgrounds.

Huoying asserted that African American males usually experience longer periods of unemployment, further contributing to the racial salary gap. Huoying observed that African American males are least likely to receive company-sponsored training as compared to White males, White females, and African American females. The current labor market cannot support increased earnings for every race and skill level; market conditions typically lead to reduced pay for the lower-skilled jobs usually occupied by African Americans (Rodgers, 2008). Rodgers (2008) concluded that salary disparities among minorities have less to do with the educational skill level of African Americans,

and more to do with the fragile socioeconomic climate within which many African Americans live. Rodgers attributed lower salaries for African Americans to the economy rather than to workplace discrimination, which is a result that contradicts other studies.

Yap (2010) conducted a Canadian study on employers' perceptions of differences in earnings based on gender and race. Yap concluded that the job level of the employee is the major contributing factor to the salary gap for African Americans and contradicted Rodgers (2008) by asserting that African Americans do not receive equal access to training and advancement opportunities. Even though Yap's results about the presence of discrimination were inconclusive, the perception of individualized discrimination among African Americans continues to represent one of the greatest barriers faced in corporations.

Smith (2011) discussed the difference in pay between African Americans and Whites in the same occupation. The author reviewed the career paths and highest paying careers for African Americans (Smith, 2011). Smith indicated that racial salary gaps may range from \$1,000 to \$14,000 depending on the occupation. Smith concluded that disparities in wealth are often the deciding factor for acquiring wealth or barely meeting monthly expenses.

Barriers that Prevent Minorities from Moving into Upper Level Positions

This section is an overview of literature about barriers to advancement and common practices that impede progression in an organization. Buttner and Moore (1997) found that African American women were most motivated to become entrepreneurs when they experienced the barriers that kept them from breaking the corporate glass ceilings. These authors said the women used their need "for challenge, self-determination and to

balance family and work responsibilities” (p. 43) to leave their corporate positions and start their own companies; because they faced blocks, including discrimination and organizational dynamics, to their career advancement in large organizations (Buttner & Moore, 1997). Jackson and O’Callaghan (2009, p. 476) focused on “inequities in management positions within the corporate sector”. The inequities Jackson and O’Callaghan studied included hiring practices, promotion factors, mentoring issues, and employee turnover issues. Jackson and O’Callaghan concluded that the way corporations and the labor market limit diversity effectiveness, occurs through a “lack of recruitment initiatives, fewer opportunities for advancement, and minimum access to information” (p. 478).

A “multi-phase research design included a survey of professional and managerial African American women in 30 companies” (Giscome & Mattis, 2002, p. 107). Giscome and Mattis found that “retention of African American women was positively correlated with supportive behaviors of supervisors” (p.110). One of the major barriers they experienced was the lack of others similar to themselves in high positions, which could assist them to advancing to the higher level positions (Kerr et al., 2008). Further research describes Gender and Glass Ceiling as a barrier for African American women in corporate America (Giscome & Mattis, 2002).

Glass Ceiling

The glass ceiling refers to the barriers that prevent people from achieving the highest levels of leadership and senior-level corporate offices in the United States (Laufer-Ukeles, 2009). African American women experience a unique glass ceiling related within corporate America (Ibarra et al., 2010). A glass ceiling mechanism occurs

when African American women have a hard time penetrating the *good ole boys club* in many corporate environments. Research consistently reflects the invaluable mentorship and training developed in informal social networks, along with an exchange of pertinent career growth information (Igasaki, 2011). In this case, African Americans are hurt by the persistent stereotype according to which all African Americans are portrayed as less intelligent than Whites and a problem in an otherwise harmonious country (National Opinion Research Center, 2011).

Recent research shows the presence of glass ceiling barriers within the workplace contributes to the lack of senior level positions held by African American women (Kerr et al., 2008). Although the data identify some glass ceiling mechanisms that impact African Americans, the African American woman is most often overlooked or blocked from advancing to senior level positions (Kerr et al., 2008). The glass ceiling effect appears to be in place for the senior-level position attainment in the accounting profession (Stewart et al., 2011). Although disparities are experienced at every level in the workplace, they appear to get more severe, as in the case of accounting, as individuals move up the occupational hierarchy.

Igasaki (2011) showed that in many cases, African American women were perceived as not having enough ability to lead at the senior management level, having received fewer promotions than colleagues of other races, and tended to remain in lower level subordinate positions. When hitting this class ceiling, the women looked for other avenues for professional success by leaving corporate America and becoming entrepreneurs because of lack of senior management's trust in their abilities and because of their inability to be promoted (Buttner & Moore, 1997).

The problems with trust and promotability do not begin in corporate America (Huston, 2010). These problems along with associated fears begin happening to African American women in America's public schools (England, 2012). Educational injustices among black and white public schools were uncovered through the laws of Jim Crow (Dodson, 1965). "By the 1890s the expression "Jim Crow," minstrel-show character, was being used to describe laws and customs aimed at segregating African Americans and others; intended to restrict social contact between whites and other groups and to limit the freedom and opportunity of people of color" (Smithsonian National Museum of American History, 2012, p. 2).

Trust and promotability issues within the public school system are overpopulation, reduced funding, and obsolete teaching materials that ultimately, diminished the scholastic performance of black students (Beyond Brown, 2004). Denied public educational resources, people of color strengthened their own schools, communities and fought for the resources, they had been unjustly denied (Smithsonian National Museum of American History, 2012). According to Smithsonian National Museum of American History (2012, p. 3), "segregated education was designed to confine African Americans to a subservient role in society and second-class citizenship." These social disadvantages are the foundation in comprehending African American women's current experiences, in the education system.

Gender

Although African American women now have the ability to enter the corporate workforce due to diversity policy implementation, they continue to face barriers to being promoted to senior level corporate positions (Kerr et al., 2008). Giscome and Mattis

(2002) examined the unique experiences of African-American women in corporate America where as gender, not just race, can prevent women from advancing. African American women have more difficulty acquiring senior-level positions because they are both women and African American (Beal, 2008). Gender studies have focused on women of color, to describe their leadership experience within the senior-level leadership positions in corporate America (Castilla, 2008; Jordan, Clark, & Waldron, 2007). While research suggests that women have progressed in equalizing their positions, status, and earnings, these improvements do not necessarily reflect African American and other minority women (Bell & Nkomo, 2003).

Promotion Factors

A disparity exists between Blacks and Whites “in regard to various features of their organizations’ fairness such as salary, promotions and recognition” (Kingkade, 2012, p. 1; Gipson, 2009). “Blacks feel their organizations do not treat them as fairly as they do whites, and that minorities need to be more qualified” than those considered the majority, to obtain positions. For the world to be more balanced and unified, race relations need to be improved. Diversity creates the atmosphere for embracing everyone. With diversity, everyone’s voice has the opportunity to be heard. The “underrepresented are hired, but they are first to be refused tenure and for very questionable reasons” (Pierce, 2007, p. 4). Different organizational standards may exist for African American women than for people of different ethnicities, putting members of the former group at a disadvantage for promotions (Parker, 2005). During promotional periods, the evaluations of minorities are not given the same level of ratings, lessening promotional opportunities (Kingkade, 2012; Gipson, 2009; American College of Healthcare Executives, 2008).

Leadership Theories

Scharmer (2009) emphasizes that leadership can be distributed and shared, but that does not mean everyone is, or must become, a leader. Leadership skills are an important component for organizational work, the ability to teach, coach and provide acknowledgement both formally and informally for appreciation; and motivate progression, is as essential as the instruction given. Leadership is a personal endeavor and experience, influences the actions and beliefs of others. Leaders aspire for change towards a desired goal. In the gender leadership perspective, practices demonstrated by male and female leaders; in contrast, be analyzed differently depending on the scope to which the particular leadership role is defined (Eagly, 1995; Thompson, 2000). The leadership perspective of African American women in senior-level corporate American positions is the opportunity for inclusion; to provide essential strategies for respectful entry into the white male dominated culture of organizations. There are several types of leadership, which include Situational Theory, Transactional Theory, Transformational Theory, Charismatic Theory, and Contingency Theory.

Situational leadership theory. Situational leadership involves fostering followers' ability to respond on the level of the leader. In situational leadership, personality, "style, or behavior of effective leaders depends on the situation" at hand (Nahavandi, 2006, p. 246). The situational leader must demonstrate the skill of a follower in every situation because the followers dictate the leader's method for delivering the message. Hersey (2009) defined situational leadership as the leader matching the behaviors and performance needs of the followers. In essence, the situational leader adapts to the maturity level of his or her followers. The leader provides

directions and instructions using methods conducive to promoting positive actions from the followers. According to Wren (1995), a situational leader adjusts his or her behavior by telling, selling, participating, or delegating when spelling out the follower's role and duties.

Transactional leadership theory. Transactional leadership theory is one of equity or give-and-take between the leader and the followers. A transactional leader offers something in exchange for something else provided by the followers.

Transactional leadership occurs when employees are rewarded for the service they deliver. Nahavandi (2006) added that followers receive resources and rewards from their leaders as a result of showing motivation, productivity, and effective task accomplishment. Transactional leadership styles according to Thyer (2003) can be observed in action within predominately bureaucratic organizations. The focus of the transactional leader occurs as a function of rewarding followers for completing tasks, disempowering strategies, negatively reinforcing creativity, and decision making occurring without the opportunity for followers' feedback. Transactionally led organizations increase or decrease production by the messages transmitted by leaders. Annual incentive and reward programs are prime examples of transactional leadership.

Transformational leadership theory. Transformational leaders raise expectations for followers to perform with heightened motivation and support. The transformational leader is about effective change and follower growth, someone who "defines the need for change, create new visions, mobilize commitment to those visions, and ultimately transform an organization" (Tichy & Devanna, 1990, p. 4). According to Burns (1978), transformational leaders create stimulating relationships, seek to convert

followers into leaders and to increase leaders' nobility. The transformational leader has the ability to motivate and strengthen followers.

According to Sarros and Santora (2001, p. 243), the four major behaviors of transformational leaders are "idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration." The transformational leader empowers followers not only to reach the corporation's goals but also to aim higher and improve themselves. According to Kearney and Gebert (2009), transformational leaders can help turn demographic and informational differences among followers into assets rather than liabilities for the organization. Leaders in corporate America may be able to use the information from the research study to predict which executives will develop into senior-level executives, and to ensure they have opportunities to advance their careers.

Charismatic leadership theory. Charismatic leaders appeal to their followers' emotions. Conger and Kanungo (1998) described five behavior attributes of charismatic leaders. Charismatic leaders are articulate visionaries, sensitive to the environment, sensitive to the needs of the followers, personal risk takers, and unconventional in their behavior. Wren (1995) argued that charismatic leaders increase the followers' energy, foster their commitment, and guide followers toward new values (Wren, 1995). To be a leader, a person must have followers. Followers must trust their leaders. The charismatic leader influences followers using charm, persuasion, and influence.

Contingency theory. Fiedler's Contingency theory suggests that leadership style and strategic orientations in business must align with and be flexible to manage the unpredictability and vigor of the operating environment (Scharmer, 2009). Leaders should think strategically to prepare their organizations from the unanticipated by

establishing contingency plans before concerns arise. There should be plans in place for addressing problems as they occur instead of resorting to business failure. In Fiedler's contingency theory, leaders implement different leadership styles depending on the situation and the nature of interpersonal relations between leader and followers. According to Fiedler, leaders can guide organizational activities by motivating subordinates, budgeting scarce resources, all while keeping them informed. The effective leader builds on transformation and ensures that it occurs dynamically at all levels.

Contrast and Comparison of Leadership Theories

In comparing and contrasting the five leadership models discussed above, the transformational, situational, and charismatic models have a similar way of catering to the emotions of the followers. According to Neider and Schriesheim (2002), "transformational and charismatic leadership involve a unique bonding among leaders and followers emotional attachment, respect, and trust form the basis of these approaches" (p. 27). Bromley and Kirschner-Bromley (2007) added that charisma is critical to the success of the transformational leader. Transformational and charismatic leaders must possess the ability for followers to gravitate toward them.

The situational leader must possess the charm necessary for the situation in order to entice the different followers offering diverse levels of maturity. Transformational, situational, and transactional leaders are similar because they each entice followers toward a common goal. No one leadership style is superior to the other and the strategies required for each overlap in many cases. Matching the use of different leadership styles with performance needs garners better results when used in appropriate scenarios (Hersey, 2009) such as using Charismatic leadership for gaining support on new changes

or Transformational leadership to encourage empowerment by way of increased assignments. By studying African American women in senior level positions in corporations, the application of each model may enable greater understanding of the phenomena investigated. Although, several corporations are implementing diversity initiatives, existing research covers models conducive to building cultural cohesiveness. This study addresses models encouraging African American inclusion to increase cultural cohesiveness within corporations.

Mentoring

Mentoring also encourages progression through mutual trust and respect (Wright-Harp & Cole, 2008). According to Jenkins (2005), mentoring, historically was an informal process where top executives identified future leaders and groomed them in social settings such as the golf course. Mentoring can be categorized in two forms: “psychosocial mentoring which includes acceptance, role-modeling and confirmation, and counseling and then friendship career mentoring which includes, exposure, visibility, sponsorship, protection, coaching, or providing challenging work assignments” (Jandeska & Kraimer, 2006, p. 464; Gipson, 2009). Mentoring is a productive tool for senior level administrators to use as a means “to help develop the next generation of leaders”; by passing on the knowledge gained through the years, filling the void with the impending crisis of retiring leadership (Duree, 2007, p. 54).

“A mentor is someone in the field who provides sponsorship, enhances exposure and/or visibility, coaches, protects, and provides challenging work assignments for his or her protégé” (Kingkade, 2009, p. 1). Leadership development of African American women as a component of career development deserves specific attention. Lesslie (1998)

concluded that women continue to experience inequality in promotional opportunities in senior level administrative positions. The inequalities experienced include the lack of development through mentorship opportunities.

“Today 80 percent of women compared to 72 percent of men said they had a mentor. For those that had a mentor, about half of the women report that their most influential mentor was male compared to 82 percent of the men” (Kingkade, 2009, p. 1). “Over time, it appears that both gender groups are citing fewer men as their most influential mentor and more women appear to be serving in this capacity” (Kingkade, 2009, p. 1). “On average, both men and women said this mentor/protégé relationship has lasted five years” (Kingkade, 2009, p. 1).

Mentoring requires special attention for the career development of Black women. Numerous articles and studies chronicle the need for but lack of sufficient role models for African American women (Crawford & Smith, 2005; Hansman, 2003; Stanley & Lincoln, 2005; Wilson, 2004). The consequences of the lack of role models as mentors affect the future of leadership and African American women’s ability to achieve equity in senior-level leadership positions (Pai & Vaidya, 2009; Wood, 2008).

Mentorship programs for African Americans. Companies are called to train on recruiting, engaging, and retaining African American people and women (“Uncovering the Leadership Potential of Black Women,” 2009). Mentors are especially valuable to minorities, particularly to African Americans, and “women, and shifting demographics mean new challenges ahead” (Prasad, 2011). Brown (2011) discussed the effect of mentorship on African American women. Brown regarded the purpose of

mentorship as developing and refining the mentee through one of “two types of mentorship: formal and informal” (p. 68).

The mentor-mentee relationship is crucial to gaining support, information, and collaboration among organizational members (Eagly, 2007; Eagly & Carli, 2007; Kiamba, 2008). Formal mentorship is aimed at recruiting, enrolling, and retaining African American women; whereas informal mentorship tends to be spontaneous and established by two or more persons, for the benefit of those whom the mentors have targeted (Brown, 2011). Those African American women enrolled in formal mentorship programs were more likely to be retained (Brown, 2011). Formal mentorship programs could be used to benefit corporations to improve African American women’s retention, and to facilitate increasing diversity that includes African Americans at the top of the organizational hierarchy (Brown, 2011).

Lester, Hannah, Harms, Vogelgesang, & Avolio (2011) addressed whether and how “mentoring actually positively impacts a leader’s development” (p. 413). Mentorship programs were shadowed for 6 months, to determine if or how targeted mentorship developed the leadership performance of the participants (Lester et al., 2011). Similarly to Brown’s (2011) findings, Lester et al. (p. 408) “showed that targeted mentorship increased participants’ levels of leader efficacy more than” eclectic leadership programs that had been delivered in group settings and more than no mentorship at all. Lester et al.’s implications could lead to less exclusion of African American women from informal social networks, and from formal mentorships designed to enhance professional growth.

Becoming an Executive in a Corporation: What It Takes

Gayles (2006) determined that African American women must be bound and determined to succeed within the corporate sector of America. They will be consistently judged by their race, which is a reality that forms the basis of perceptions and meaning by other races in the workplace (Parker, 2005). Thomas and Gabarro (1999) studied 20 minority executives, including African American women, in a corporation.

Thomas and Gabarro found that most of the executives believed that attribution for success through luck was the single factor responsible for the advancement of minorities to the executive level. Thomas and Gabarro surmised that “creating the necessary levels of preparation and opportunity depends, not on programs but on processes, at both the individual and organizational” levels (p. 82). They concluded “that reaching the executive level is a function of an individual’s ability to build a foundation of competence, credibility, and confidence by the end of early career” (Thomas & Gabarro, 1999, p. 74). If African American women have less opportunity to build this necessary foundation early in their careers, then the findings potentially validate the discrimination felt among African American women (Huston, 2010). They also determined that African American women are less likely to be invited to participate in the processes that would facilitate their building this foundation (Huston, 2010).

Knight, Hebl, Foster, & Mannix (2003) discussed the role that race and leadership positions play in performance ratings for African American women in corporations. According to Knight et al., African American women are usually considered for subordinate leadership positions but at the same time, are not offered equal opportunities for advancement within the organization as are White employees. In addition, when

African American women enter leadership roles, they constantly receive lower performance ratings than White leaders within an organization (Knight et al., 2003). In many cases, African American women are perceived as being less able to lead, explaining why they would receive fewer promotions than employees of other races (Knight et al., 2003).

Conclusion and Summary of Research Gaps

Gender discrimination and the glass ceiling theory are often given the blame for the lack of promotion of African American women to leadership positions. “In evaluating their colleagues, African American women feel that Whites fail to share growth and career related information with them” (Kingkade, 2012, p. 1). “More African American than Whites stated that the quality of all their collegial interactions —with both other minorities and whites could be improved” (Kingkade, 2012, p. 1; American College of Healthcare Executives, 2008). The underlying principles of race, gender and lack of mentorship are critical to understanding the challenges and obstacles faced by African American women in corporate America. Leadership development of African American women as a component of career development deserves specific attention. There is a correlation between mentoring and persistence that promotes professional success.

The problem is that without having greater representation, corporations may not be able to achieve their goals as well as, they could if their leadership teams contained diversity via women of color. Significant research exists concerning the leadership gap founded on gender within senior-level management in corporate America. Research focusing on experienced obstacles and success stories of African American women who overcame the subjection of double jeopardy and good ole boy network are nonexistent.

Research is incomplete in specific areas of underrepresentation of African American women in senior-level positions in corporate America as well as, the stories of African American women who were able to succeed in senior-level management in corporate America. The current study provides an introduction to the experiences of African American women in the said predicament and the progress being made to eradicate double jeopardy as it is known today. This research may begin to seal the knowledge gap of the undisclosed explorations of senior-level African American women serving in corporate America and public sector agencies.

Summary

The present literature review has stated that African American women are vastly underrepresented in senior level positions, corporate boards of global corporations and subjected to several barriers impeding leadership opportunities on executive levels. The double subjugation of racism and sexism was created for African American women, according to Howard-Hamilton (2003), when their “subordinate status was assumed and enforced by White and Black men as well as, White women” (p. 19). Johnson-Bailey and Cervero & Wilson (2004) concede that struggles, contradictions, and opportunities do arise because of the differences in race, gender, and culture, but they state that these issues can be resolved.

Chapter 2 contained information on the underrepresentation of African American women senior-level positions within corporate America and the need for leadership inclusion. For every group in any organization, leadership must be properly represented (Johnson-Bailey and Cervero & Wilson, 2004). Representations of different groups (i.e.,

women, African American, Hispanic/Latino) are important aspects of belonging. Being able to identify with leadership in some way encourages growth and sustainability. Without like representation, unlike groups may suffer alienation and career stagnation. Chapter 3 included a discussion of the research methodology on this study.

Chapter 3

Method

The purpose of the qualitative, phenomenological study was to provide understanding and additional insights concerning the problem of underrepresentation by exploring the lived experiences and perceptions of African American women holding senior level positions within corporations headquartered in the Houston metropolitan area. In chapter 1, the theoretical framework and significance of the study were presented. In chapter 2, the relevant literature was reviewed. This review revealed significant gaps in practitioner and scholar understanding of the potential impact the underrepresentation of African American women in corporations has on leadership and diversity implementation.

Chapter 3 focuses on research methodology used in the present study, the design appropriateness and related quality procedures that were applied to accomplish the study goals. The chapter discusses the target population under study, the geographical location, sampling, data collection and data analysis procedures, as well as quality measures. The chapter also elaborates on ethical considerations such as study permission, method of procuring informed consent, and measures taken to ensure confidentiality.

Research Question

The qualitative phenomenological study focuses on understanding the first person lived experiences and perceptions of African American women holding senior level positions within large U.S. corporations headquartered in Houston, Texas. Those who have currently or formerly held in positions of chief finance officer (CFO), chief operating officer (COO), chief information officer (CIO), and chief executive officer or

equivalent and maintained their positions for a minimum of two years were sought for participation. The purpose was achieved by answering the following research question:

RQ1. *What are the lived experiences or perceptions that influenced the current styles of leadership of African American women in senior level positions?*

The research question and the interview questions were aligned to ensure the validity appropriateness of the study.

Research Method and Design Appropriateness

The qualitative research method selected for the study focuses on understanding the first person lived experiences of African American women holding senior level positions within large U.S. corporations headquartered in the metropolitan area of Houston; who have currently or formerly held positions of chief finance officer (CFO), chief operating officer (COO), chief information officer (CIO), and chief executive officer or equivalent and maintained their positions for a minimum of two years. To identify the reason for their underrepresentation within corporations and their perceptions of leadership qualities considered necessary to hold the said positions. This type of qualitative research allows the researcher to conduct the study within the participants' natural setting and study the phenomena in detail.

Qualitative research provided the appropriate methodology to focus on thoughts, beliefs, lived experiences, and concerns among a purposeful sample size up to 20 African American women holding senior level positions, for a minimum of two years, within large U.S. corporations headquartered in the metropolitan area of Houston. According to Goulding (2005), qualitative research is best suited for focusing on research problems to learn from the experiences of participants.

In qualitative research, the researcher seeks to understand, learn details, and obtain a profound comprehension of the complexity of the central phenomenon. The researcher relied on participant responses to collect data in the form of words (text) for analysis (Goulding, 2005). This type of research allowed a detailed interpretation of participants' experiences related to underrepresentation of African American women in corporations.

These observation opportunities along with the participants' dialogues allowed for gathering an inside view of the research participants' environment and how these African American women view their experiences and the phenomenon under study. Data helped understand the phenomena related to barriers that contribute to the underrepresentation of African American women in senior level positions in corporations. Qualitative data on African American women in senior-level positions within corporate America's lived experiences, may provide crucial leadership perspectives relative to understanding the cause of the underrepresentation of African American women. This study illuminated and brought voice to the unique experiences of African American women holding senior level positions within corporations and their perceptions of leadership.

Phenomenology

Phenomenology is considered a philosophy of experience (Zahavi, 2003). The aim of phenomenology as a strategy for conducting qualitative research is to focus on understanding the experiences revealing the nature of lived life. This life includes the experiences of the individual and the knowledge provided by participants or informants about their obtained experiences and their constructions of meaning, that is, the content of consciousness (Vaivada, Blinstrubas & Mockevičienė, 2011).

The purpose of the qualitative, phenomenological study was to provide understanding and additional insights concerning the problem of underrepresentation by exploring the lived experiences and perceptions of African American women holding senior level positions within corporations headquartered in the Houston metropolitan area. One subsidiary purpose of exploring the different types of leadership involves the interdisciplinary competencies of leadership and mentorship relevant to senior level position attainment. The second subsidiary purpose involved collecting a deeper understanding of the impact leadership and mentorship had on the successes of the African American women in senior level corporate positions. The methods for achieving the study's purpose are described in this chapter.

The phenomenological methodology required employing three characteristics essential for a qualitative study: (a) the semi-structured interview as the primary instrument, (b) an inductive process, and (c) rich descriptions to disclose how the findings qualify the semi-structured interview as the primary instrument (Merriam, 2009). Accordingly, phenomenology is the most appropriate research method to understand the perspective of African American women holding senior level positions within corporations.

Hermeneutic Phenomenology

Hermeneutic phenomenology is different types of research in phenomenological research philosophy (Moustakas, 1994), which is the study of lived experience (Lavery, 2003). Hermeneutic phenomenology has evolved significantly to represents the discipline of studying self-interpretation of individuals in regards to their lives and lived experiences (Cohen, Kahn, & Steeves, 2000). According to Koch (1996), the theory of

hermeneutic phenomenology is the continuation of interpreting, creating understanding, and reality constructing of lived experiences.

Design Appropriateness

A qualitative, hermeneutic phenomenological research design was an appropriate methodology to address the proposed study's purpose because the focus was on individuals' lived experiences of a shared phenomenon. To focus on understanding the first person lived experiences of African American women in senior-level corporate positions (Groenwald, 2004) to identify the reasoning for their underrepresentation within corporations and the perceptions of leadership qualities considered necessary to hold the said positions. Rather than mutual understanding, several layers are built from the foundation of leadership, befitting the phenomenological mode of analysis (Cohen, Manion, & Morrision, 2000; Fletcher & Kaufer, 2003).

The phenomenological design provided a vehicle for African American women in senior-level corporate positions to describe the experiences of leadership, to generate examples of leadership skills and to convey perceptions of their lived experiences. The phenomenological design allowed the participants to convey their perception of their experiences (Moustakas, 1994) through in depth descriptions and examples (Corbin and Strauss, 2008). The possibility for other qualitative designs to understand African American women in senior-level corporate positions' perceptions were considered. Since there is no theory formulation, a grounded theory design would not be appropriate for this study (Corbin and Strauss, 2008). The purpose of the study was to focus on understanding African American women in senior-level corporate positions' perceptions, not to compare views to generate a theory (Moustakas, 1994).

Although a collective case study design was considered it was not appropriate because there were no cases selected for use in this study. While this approach would focus on a limited group, African American women in senior-level corporate position, the design does not meet the requirement of in depth focus on only select cases (Merriam, 1988, p. 49). Selection of cases may introduce bias or omit some participants' perceptions (Onwuegbuzie, Johnson & Collin, 2007). Case studies involve collecting and drawing from selective related information, which would prove ineffective among the lived experiences of the African American women in senior-level corporate positions' construction of leadership (Onwuegbuzie & et al). The phenomenological design best serves the purpose of revealing the entire understanding of the African American women perspectives (Onwuegbuzie & et al).

Population, Geographic Location, and Sampling

A population is a group of individuals or potential participants who have the characteristics that generalized the results of the study (Goulding, 2005). A target population or sampling frame is a group of individuals who have common characteristics relevant to the study (Goulding, 2005). The population size was fewer than 60 senior-level African American women within large U.S. corporations in Houston, Texas, currently or formerly in positions chief finance officer (CFO), chief operating officer (COO), chief information officer (CIO), and chief executive officer or equivalent positions. This population is very small and is not suitable for quantitative research methods. The final sample size consisted of 20 African American women holding senior level positions for a minimum of two years.

Current business connections previously obtained through professional networking experiences and opportunities to reach potential interview candidates by email and telephone. The corporate senior-level African American women membership directory of Women Enlight was also used to recruit for this study. Houston, Texas is the geographical area in the study. Houston, Texas was chosen for the geographical location due to it being the headquarter hub location for several global companies.

Sampling Design

A sample represents the population (Salkind, 2003). Sampling for qualitative research is usually done through a purposeful sampling approach (Goulding, 2005). Purposive sampling is appropriate when the population is specialized (Neuman, 2006). Unlike random sampling used in quantitative research, the selection of the sample in qualitative research is to understand the central phenomenon (Shank, 2006). The present study used homogenous sampling meaning that the potential participants possess a similar characteristic (Goulding, 2005).

The similar characteristic for the study is that all participants were African American women in senior-level positions within corporations. Sample size in qualitative research varies with the nature of the study (Goulding, 2005). The final sample size was 20 African American women holding senior level positions within large U.S. corporations in Houston, TX. Those who have currently or formerly held in positions of chief finance officer (CFO), chief operating officer (COO), chief information officer (CIO), and chief executive officer or equivalent and maintained their positions for a minimum of two years were recruited for participation. To reach a sufficient number of

participants, interviewed participants were asked for recommendations with contact information for contacting additional recruits (snowball sampling).

The qualitative study involved using a combination of criterion-based and snowball sampling schemes. Criterion-based sampling involves choosing individuals who are available and willing to participate and who meet certain criteria (Onwuegbuzie & Collins, 2007). To address the purpose of the qualitative study, senior-level African American women working in large U.S. corporations headquartered in the Houston area with more than 200 employees were invited to participate. Participant candidates have maintained their positions for a minimum of two years within their current organization, be willing to participate in the study, and share insights about their company's approach to including African American women in senior-level positions within corporate America. These criteria helped ensure that qualitative study participants can provide in-depth insights on the potential impact of the underrepresentation of African American women in corporations on leadership.

Interview candidates were identified from extended professional networking (snowball sampling) through already identified interview candidates as well as through assistance of the membership coordinator for Women Enlight. Candidates were invited to participate via email, telephone, or in-person, depending on their preferred method of communication and point of contact. The interview participant email and script for telephone recruitment conversation can be found in Appendix E. Two weeks after the initial contact, candidates who have not responded with a yes or no will receive a follow-up email or telephone call, depending on their personal communication preferences (Appendix F).

Informed Consent and Confidentiality

Precaution was taken to protect participants from possible physical harm, psychological abuse, stress, legal litigation, deception, and coercion (Neuman, 2006) by maintaining confidentiality, obtaining informed consent, and by adhering to a strict records maintenance protocol. Research ethics was monitored on a continuous basis throughout the research process to ensure that the ethical parameters and code of ethics are upheld in every stage and phase of the research (Cone & Foster, 2006). Research ethics are moral norms and standards upheld by a study (Cooper & Schindler, 2008).

Obtaining informed consent from study participants is a fundamental part of ethical principles guiding research (Neuman, 2006). Participants were informed of the purpose, intended use, and consequences of the research before participating (Goulding, 2005) and everyone who is asked to participate in the qualitative study have the right to remain anonymous, and maintain the right to refuse to participate in or withdraw from the research at any time without repercussions. In the event, any participant choose to withdraw from the study, all original data associated with that individual would have been destroyed upon notification of the individual's withdrawal. However, in this study, none of the participants requested to withdraw. Prior to being interviewed for the study, potential participants were introduced to the project through an email, asked to print and ink sign an Institutional Research Board (IRB) approved informed consent document (see Appendix D). The informed consent form provided participants with detailed information about the research project, participating individuals role, and participant rights. The purpose of each respondent's participation of describing their lived experience as contributing to the understanding and additional insights concerning the problem of

underrepresentation of African American women holding senior level positions within corporations headquartered in Houston, TX, of the United States was explained.

Participants' confidentiality was protected and all participants and their respective corporations were assigned pseudonyms with no possibility of linking the information and responses to the subjects' identities. These pseudonyms were used as part of the data reporting. To help ensure privacy and confidentiality, all paper documents (data) were kept in a locked office in the privacy of the researcher's home on a password protected computer. The results of the research study may be published but participant identity remains confidential and their name/PIN was not made known to any outside party.

The semi-structured interviews were documented using a digital audio recorder and were personally transcribed by the researcher. During transcription, all names were changed to the aforementioned pseudonyms and any comments that would directly identify the speaker was removed. Except for interview summaries used to verify the accuracy of transcripts by interview participants, no results were reported with any identifying information of the interviewees. Upon completion of the transcriptions, all electronic files (data) were maintained on a password protected computer in a locked office in the researcher's home. The electronic, digital, and paper files will be destroyed according to University of Phoenix guidelines after a period of three years following the completion of the study. After three years of securing privacy of storage, all original and backup versions of electronic records pertaining to the research will be deleted, and digital audio tapes will be shredded. Following the research code of ethics will ensure the elimination of any possible falsification or distortion of data, research fraud, plagiarism, and abuse of power (Neuman, 2006).

Pilot Study

A pilot study was conducted to improve the draft set of interview questions (Appendix C) and ensure questions were clear (Coopers & Schindler, 2008). The fundamental purpose of instrumentation is to ensure participants unbiased comprehension to safeguard the accuracy of the responses (Cooper & Schindler, 2006). The pilot study involved the participation of 3 African American women, who agreed to participate in this study as pilot testers. The pilot study participants were encouraged to submit feedback on survey items that appeared unclear. Feedback was incorporated into the final version of the interview questions (Appendix G).

Data Collection

Qualitative research data form the basis for meaningful analysis and interpretation (Goulding, 2005). Qualitative data consist of “direct quotations from people about their opinions, feelings and knowledge obtained through interviews” (Merriam, 2009, p. 43). Interviewing is a technique used in qualitative phenomenological research that provides a way to gather descriptions and interpret the meaning of a particular phenomenon in a specific context (Kvale, 1983; Seidman, 2006). Face-to-face (FTF) interviews have the advantage of providing non-verbal and social cues not readily available in phone interviews (Opdenakker, 2009). These cues can provide the researcher with opportunities to probe and ask follow-up questions, which can lead to a richer understanding of the research phenomenon (Kvale, 1983). In the present study, FTF interviews were conducted in person, or via Skype from participants own private homes, on privately owned computers, and guided by an interview protocol; seeking to answer the qualitative research question.

According to Kvale and Brinkman (2009), qualitative phenomenological interviews should be structured according to high-level themes based on the researcher's knowledge about the subject under investigation and the research question. Interviews were semi-structured to allow the opportunity to probe while maintaining focus on the central issue (Goulding, 2005). Asking open-ended, unbiased questions allows participants the opportunity to fully reflect on and express their personal lived experiences (Goulding, 2005). Using open-ended interviews with the selected participants helped derive embedded patterns and themes pertinent to the qualitative research question, and helped address the central phenomenon leadership practices associated with underrepresentation of African American women in corporate America.

Role of the Researcher in Data Collection

Qualitative research involves using the researcher as the main data collection instrument (Morse, 2006; Sinkovics, 2008). The researcher must, therefore, strive to maximize the trustworthiness of collected data and minimize personal bias by omitting personal perspectives, eliminating preconceived notions, and remaining open, sensitive, and empathetic to the views of the participants (Krauss, 2005). The ability of the interviewer to reflect on information provided and consciously unmask preconceived ideas and assumptions that may stem from embeddedness in the research context is, therefore, crucial to collecting quality data during the interview process (Sands & Krumer-Nevo, 2006).

Conducting a quality interview also requires interviewers to balance focus on addressing the purpose of the study and answering research questions with the ongoing adaptation to the interview situation and responses provided by participants (Sommer &

Sommer, 1997). Knowing when to probe and when to move the conversation in a new direction demands that the interviewer a) pays close attention to verbal and non-verbal signs, b) carefully manages the allotted time, c) exercises good listening skills, and d) conducts the interviews in a friendly, tactful, and diplomatic manner (Sommer & Sommer, 1997; Warren & Karner, 2005). The proposed study followed these guidelines to minimize bias during the data collection stage.

Field Notes

To improve the standards of collected information, field notes were used (Bernard, 2013). Groenewald (2004) suggested using field notes, like observational notes, theoretical notes, methodological notes, and analytical memos while gathering data. Field notes are used to capture non-verbal cues, which contribute to the phenomena's interpretation. The credibility of findings was increased by triangulating collected data with the field notes (Duffey, 1993). Field notes taken after each interview can be found in the Research Journal in Appendix I.

Instrumentation

Instrumentation for this study involved developing a set of semi-structured interview questions for data collection (Appendix C). The interview questions were designed to yield high quality data from the participants regarding their first person lived experiences and perspectives and ensure the voices of those living with the phenomenon studied would be heard and recorded (Goulding, 2005; Lewis et al., 2011). Interviews used a set of open-ended questions, followed by probing questions to allow participants to offer their personal opinions and experiences with underrepresentation of African American women in corporate America from a senior-level perspective. The researcher

used a semi-structured interview guide (Appendix G) to ensure each scripted questions is read verbatim for each interview. The process ensured the collected data addresses the research but also allowed flexibility as responses to questions might veer differently.

The interview research guide was selected over other instruments as the tool to guide the interviews. The instrument included an interview guide. The interviews were semi-structured and were open-ended interview questions, possibly followed by probing questions to allow participants to offer their personal opinions and experiences with underrepresentation of African American women in corporate America from a senior-level perspective. The semi-structured interviews permit the opportunity to investigate different perspectives, perceptions, and understanding of the phenomenon to emerge, based on the experiences of others (Leedy & Ormrod, 2005). Appendix G includes the draft questions used for the semi-structured interviews.

Interviews also employed the use of probes and sub-questions to extract in-depth data and allow participants to share opinions, knowledge, uncovered feelings, and inner expressions (Cooper & Schindler, 2008). After introducing the study and its purpose, and addressing any questions or concerns the participant may have, a series of questions pertaining to central themes may be asked.

Data Analysis

The goal of phenomenological data analysis is to provide a “thick description that accurately captures and communicates the meaning of the lived experience for the informants” (Cohen, Kahn & Stevens, 2000, p. 72). A qualitative, hermeneutic phenomenological research is different types of research in phenomenological research philosophy (Moustakas, 1994), which is the study of lived experience (Laverly, 2003).

According to Ricoeur (1981), analysis in the hermeneutics phenomenological approach involves translating collected qualitative data into a narrative text that addresses the central research question. Qualitative narrative phenomenological studies include an emphasis on the experiences, feelings, and viewpoints of individuals regarding a particular phenomenon through an interview process (Hays & Wood, 2011). Patton (2002) identified study preparation as an added value to the final data analysis and report conclusions to provide the ability to more explicitly describe the conduction of a credible study and note areas of strength and weakness.

Data Analysis Process

Cohen, Kahn and Stevens (2000) outlined a 4-step hermeneutic phenomenological analysis process, which was followed in the present study:

1. Immersion in the data.
2. Data reduction.
3. Thematic analysis.
4. Narrative writing.

The first analysis step, immersion in data, involves establishing an initial representation and understanding of the data that drives coding of data in subsequent steps (Cohen, Kahn & Stevens, 2000). In this step, attempts to bring lived experiences and meanings expressed by study participants into presence within the context and purpose of the study (Giorgi, 2006). Conscious awareness of researcher bias and potential implicit assumptions affecting data immersion in this step is essential to achieving clarity and proceeding with the analysis (Giorgi, 2006).

In the second analysis step, data reduction, the researcher a) determines the unit of analysis, b) edits the interview transcripts to eliminate off-topic and verbal digressions,

and c) may reorganize the data to group sections belonging to the same topic together within each unit of analysis (Cohen, Kahn & Stevens, 2000). Determining the unit of analysis involves deciding the major entity to be analyzed in the study (Trochim, 2006). According to Graneheim and Lundman (2004), whole interviews are a suitable unit of analysis as long as there is enough encompassing data, which were the case in the present study. Grouping data into content areas within each unit of analysis (interview) helps structure the data and enables detailed coding in the next analysis step. Content areas may reflect high-level themes used to structure the interviews or grouping of topics emerging from the interviews (Graneheim & Lundman, 2004).

The third step, thematic analysis, comprises the central element of hermeneutic phenomenological data analysis and is aimed at inferring meanings from narrative interview data through inductive explorations that ground the identification of themes and patterns in the data (Zhang & Wildemuth, 2009). A theme is a common thread of meaning, as interpreted by the researcher (Graneheim & Lundman, 2004). Themes may be broken into subthemes and are not necessarily mutually exclusive. Meaning units are defined as “the constellation of words, sentences or paragraphs containing aspects related to each other through their content and context” (Graneheim & Lundman, 2004, p. 106). Meaning units are the basis for all further coding and identification of themes. Identifying meaning units involves highlighting key words, sentences or paragraphs. The data included a narrative research design characterized by collaboration with the participants and their chronological experiences and stories to find themes within and between their experiences (Spector-Mersel, 2010).

A basic issue to consider in the thematic analysis step is the type of coding used to identify themes (Taylor-Powell & Renner, 2003). Thematic analysis may involve manifest coding or latent coding. Manifest coding includes obvious elements in the text (Graneheim & Lundman, 2004), and answers the question what does the data say? The disadvantage of manifest coding is that it does not take the context of words and phrases into account (Neuman, 2006). Understanding the research context is central to capturing the meaning behind the words in a text in hermeneutics phenomenological research (Laverly, 2002). The latent content was uncovered through interpretive (latent) coding. Therefore, thematic analysis in the present study involved latent coding of the data line-by-line and writing tentative theme names in the margin of the text and in the data analysis software.

Before the latent coding process can start, an initial coding scheme was developed, consisting of rules for assigning codes (labels to meaning units), definition of themes and subthemes, and examples. The coding evolved and changed as more meanings were uncovered in the analysis of subsequent interview transcripts; causing revisions to previously coded materials (Creswell, 2012). The final coding scheme can be found in Appendix O. The researcher passed through the data within each unit of analysis several times, using constant comparison for updating and refining themes and subthemes, and updating the coding scheme as needed. Constant comparison is the iterative processes of systematically comparing new themes to already identified themes distinguish one theme from another (Zhang & Wildemuth, 2009). This process ended “when new cases do not bring any new information to light and themes can be described as saturated” (Boeije, 2002, p. 393). The final outcome of step 3 in the hermeneutics

phenomenological analysis process is thus a description of themes and subthemes across the interview data.

The fourth and final step in the hermeneutics phenomenological analysis process is writing a narrative translating identified themes to illustrations of the sum (Cohen, Kahn & Stevens, 2000). The essential task in step 4 is reflective writing and rewriting based on the three previous steps, triangulation of data, and focus on research context and the research question (Giorgi, 2006). The final result of data analysis was thus a comprehensive, contextualized description of themes.

Data Analysis Software

Qualitative data analysis was conducted using the software package Dedoose 3.3 for qualitative data analysis. Qualitative software analysis tools are specifically designed for effectively analyzing large amounts of textual data (Di Gregorio & Davidson, 2008). The software was used to provide a means for the researcher to distance self from the data and access coding features to detect potential themes and patterns that emerged (Welsh, 2001). Integrating the Dedoose 3.3 software application into the data analysis process allowed the researcher to analyze participant responses across interview transcripts. Oswell (2005) posited that “the explicit detailed analysis of qualitative software adds to the overall study’s validity and reliability” (p. 89).

Transcribed data from interview audio recordings was loaded into Dedoose 3.3. Second, Dedoose 3.3 was used when coding interview transcripts and identifying themes in the data (“Using Dedoose,” 2012). Third, Dedoose 3.3’s reporting features was used to summarize data during narrative writing.

Research Study Quality Measures

Research studies are often subjected to the quality measures of validity and reliability. According to Cooper and Schindler (2006), in order to maintain validity and reliability, all pertinent and concrete connections to construct, represented in data collection instruments must be included. Validity is different for qualitative studies than for quantitative studies. Validity in qualitative research concerns the viability of findings from the viewpoint of the researcher and participants (Goulding, 2005; Patton, 2002). Content validity is high if the subject matter is relevant and important to the participants. To ensure content validity, the researcher ensured the topic was relevant to the participant's experience. Qualitative researchers use reliability to measure the momentum of developing pattern themes. The reliability of the interview instrument was assessed through the pilot study.

In addition to addressing the quality of data collection instruments, researchers must also apply quality criteria to the study itself and the research method used. Qualitative research methods must address trustworthiness criteria (Morse, 2006), such as credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Hoyt & Bhati, 2007).

Credibility, Transferability, Dependability, and Confirmability

The goal of qualitative phenomenological research studies is to uncover meanings as experienced by participants and expressed by the researcher (Giorgi, 2006). The focus of qualitative research is on the lived experiences of small individual groups (Hoyt & Bhati, 2007) rather than obtaining statistically representative samples, leading to a focus on trustworthiness rather than validity and reliability. The aim of trustworthiness in a

qualitative inquiry is “to support the argument that the inquiry’s findings are knowledgeable, as well as, important (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), criteria for qualitative research method trustworthiness include *credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability*. Credibility of findings indicate verifiable truthiness (Cohen & Crabtree, 2006). To enhance the credibility of the findings, the present study involved member checking, which is the process of sharing identified themes in collected data with interview participants and providing participants an opportunity to provide feedback and ask questions (Creswell, 2012). Furthermore, the credibility of findings was increased by triangulating collected data with a) existing research on African American women’s path to leadership in organizations, and b) negative evidence, which include “absent events, empty intervals, [and] disconfirming instances” (Duffey, 1993, para 1). Negative evidence can be essential for uncovering meanings and understanding key issues in qualitative research, including hermeneutic phenomenology (Sokolowski, 2000).

Transferability of findings indicates the degree to which findings are pertinent in other events (Cohen & Crabtree, 2006). Transferability can be enhanced by basing data analysis on solid and thick descriptive data of participant experiences (Giorgi, 2006). Enhancing transferability of the findings in the present study involved collecting in-depth information from study participants about their personal professional experiences concerning leadership and employee participation by asking open-ended questions and following up with additional probes as warranted by each interview situation. To further increase transferability, the interview protocol was piloted with at three African American women in leadership positions to verify that interview questions were clear and

unbiased, and yielded meaningful information (Creswell, 2012). Data from pilot interviews was not included in data analysis but resulted in rewording and reordering of some questions.

Dependability refers to the degree to which research findings “are consistent and could be repeated” (Cohen & Crabtree, 2006, para. 1). Confirmability is being neutral to the subject, excluding the thoughts of reshaping the collected data into material reflecting self-interests (Cohen & Crabtree, 2006). Dependability and confirmability are often determined through a formal external research audit (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The proposed study involved engaging a qualified external researcher who reviewed coding of interview transcripts and verified that coding and identification of themes were void of researcher bias. The external reviewer signed a confidentiality agreement to protect participants’ identity (Appendix H). Upon completion of the quality review, the external auditor wrote a summary report, which is located in Appendix P.

In addition to the external audit, the proposed study sought to enhance dependability of findings through the consistent application of proper hermeneutic phenomenological data analysis techniques, whereas confirmability was enhanced through careful records management of all taped interviews, notes from interviews, and electronic copies of transcripts. Furthermore, a research journal was maintained to a) document coding rules and decisions made, b) allow the researcher to reflect on the research process and the role of the interviewer through field notes, and c) articulate any observations and insights that may affect the outcome of the study (Krysik & Finn, 2010). The research journal with field notes can be found in Appendix I.

Summary

Chapter 3 included an explanation of the research method used in the present study. The study used a qualitative hermeneutic phenomenological research design to help answer the qualitative research question. Qualitative data was collected using face-to-face interviews to address leadership practices associated with the underrepresentation of African American women in senior level position in corporate America. Interviews were utilized to explore the lived experiences of African American women executives in senior level positions in relation to corporate America with particular focus on alleviating the underrepresentation. The research sample for this qualitative study consisted of 20 African American women holding senior level positions in large corporations in the Houston, Texas area. Informed consent and confidentiality procedures was followed according to IRB guidelines.

The quality of the proposed study was addressed in several ways in chapter 3. First, the validity and reliability of the qualitative data collection instrument was discussed. Second, measures to enhance the quality of the qualitative interview protocol were outlined. Third, the quality of the entire research study was discussed, including enhancing trustworthiness of the qualitative research phase. Chapter 4 presents the results from this study, including identified themes and subthemes that emerged from data analysis.

Chapter 4

Results

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to research the problem of underrepresentation by exploring the lived experiences and perceptions of African American women holding senior level positions within corporations headquartered in Houston, TX. The study also involves investigations of professional challenges such as salary gaps, promotion factors, leadership development, as well as, faced barriers to include gender and racial discrimination in the workplace. The use of a phenomenological approach helped to identify themes and patterns based on the lived experiences of the participants (Moustakas, 1994). In Chapter 4 the following things are provided: study themes as well as a detailed analysis of interview transcripts from participants, in-depth interviews using semi-structured questions ratified different perspectives, perceptions, and understanding of the phenomenon, as well as, a description of the sample and results.

Pilot Study Results

Prior to collecting data for the main study, a pilot study was conducted with three participants. The pilot study was performed in order to test the logic of the interview questions, and to gather specific information for the main study (Lancaster, Dodd, & Williamsons, 2004). The purpose of conducting a pilot study was to improve the interview protocol, clarify and refine the interview questions, and check the reliability and validity of the research instrument (Yin, 2011). Pilot participants were recruited from the membership directory of Women Enlight (Appendix L) and were invited to submit

structured feedback to the draft Pilot Study (Appendix A). Each content item on the draft Pilot Study was marked by the pilot participants as not understandable, somewhat not understandable, neither not understandable or understandable, somewhat understandable or understandable.

The pilot study participants were not included in the study and were asked not to share the questionnaire information with prospective study participants. A signed informed consent form (Appendix D) was obtained prior to pilot interviews. The data collection and analysis processes were the same for both the pilot study and the comprehensive study. Table 1 summarizes the Pilot Study participant’s feedback and subsequent changes. Participants made recommendations regarding specific ambiguities in the questions and the instrument was refined by removing three questions, to reflect their recommendations.

Table 2 Summary of Pilot Study Participant Review

Pilot Test Participants	Not Understandable	Somewhat Not Understandable	Neither Not Understandable or Understandable	Somewhat Understandable	Understandable
PTP 1	1	1	0	1	19
PTP 2	1	2	0	0	19
PTP 3	1	2	0	0	19

The removal of the three questions was due to redundancy and readability concerns. After incorporating specific phrasing suggestions, performing modifications and extractions suggested by the Pilot Study participants, the draft was sent back to the same three participants for re-review. The Pilot Study Participants returned the final

instrument with an approval. The revision of the instrument, ensured clarity and that the questions would elicit the type of responses desired from the participants. The final set of interview questions can be found in Appendix G.

Description of the Sample

Participation in this study was limited to African American women holding senior level positions for a minimum of two years, within large U.S. corporations headquartered in Houston, TX, metropolitan area. This location was chosen because the researcher resides in the area and has access to this population. Participants were selected from the Women Enlight organization membership directory, and snowballing techniques such as referrals from the members. Communication with each participant was via e-mail and telephone conversations, which establishes rapport.

To protect the privacy and maintain confidentiality of data, each interview was conducted via in person or Skype. The names and any other identifiable information was disassociated from responses during the recording and coding process. All participants were eager to participate. As one participant stated, “There is so much information and stories about everyone but us.” “I am ecstatic about the opportunity to tell our story.” All interviews lasted one hour or less and were recorded using a Sony Professional Digital 2GB MP3 Voice Recorder.

Interview data was downloaded and entered into DeDoose, a web-based qualitative and mixed methods analysis program. DeDoose allows for coding qualitative data and storing information about documents or participants in a spreadsheet format.

Questions in the introductory section of the interview instrument gathered personal background data about participants. Conditions for meeting criteria for the study required participants to (1) be an African American woman (2) hold a senior level positions, within a large U.S. corporation, headquartered in Houston, Texas (3) and have maintained their positions for a minimum of two years. Twenty participants from various industries in corporate America were a part of the study. During the sampling process, the participants identified their highest degree achieved as well as their current professional industry and position. All of the African American women interviewed were referred to as numbered participants (i.e., P-1 through P-20) throughout this study. Creswell (2009) asserted that participants who desire to remain anonymous should have their anonymity protected. The demographic data provided a comparison of the background characteristics of participants in order to gain insight into the professional and personal background of each participant. All participants shared revealing information to include their professional titles, employment status, as well as educational history with the researcher. Table 3 depicts the demographic data of the study participants.

Table 3 Demographic Data of Participants

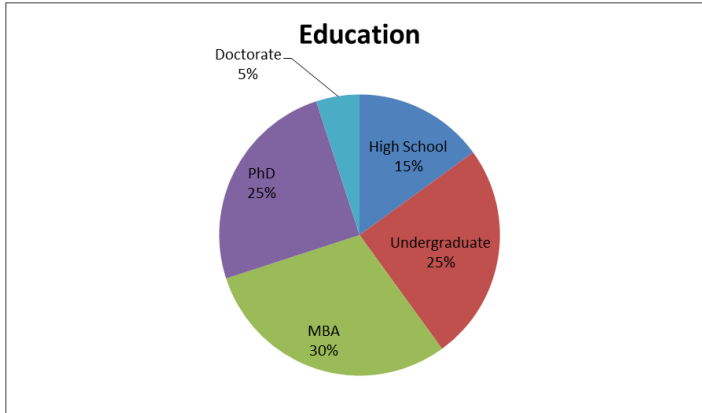
Participant #	Position	Industry	Business	# of Years	Status	Education
P1	Assistant Loan Guaranty Officer	Financial	Federal Government	30	Employed	High School
P2	Corporate Senior-level manager	Clothing/Textile	Apparel	5	Employed	High School
P3	Corporate Strategist	Financial	Investment Firm	5	Entrepreneur	PhD
P4	Corporate Accountant	Financial	Accounting Firm	15	Employed	MBA
P5	Senior-Level Banking Consultant	Financial	Investment Firm	10	Entrepreneur	Undergraduate
P6	Executive Director	Medical	Federal Government	25	Employed	PhD
P7	Senior-Level Manager	Operations	Federal Government	8	Employed	PhD
P8	Hospitalist	Medical	Federal Government	35	Employed	MBA
P9	Human Resource Manager	Oil and Gas	Oil and Gas	3	Employed	Undergraduate
P10	Educational Executive	Education	Education	5	Employed	Doctorate
P11	Executive Director	Operations	Transportation	28	Employed	Undergraduate
P12	Senior Management	Information Technology	Technology	10	Entrepreneur	Undergraduate
P13	Senior Management	Chemical	Chemical	25	Retired	Undergraduate

P14	Professor	Education	Education	8	Employed	MBA
P15	Professor	Legal	Legal	5	Employed	MBA
P16	Corporate Executive	Public Relations	Education	5	Entrepreneur	PhD
P17	Healthcare Administrator	Medical	Medical	10	Employed	MBA
P18	Human Resource Manager	Human Resource	Federal Government	6	Entrepreneur	PhD
P19	Senior-Level Manager	Administration	Automobile	20	Employed	MBA
P20	Vice President	Oil and Gas	Oil and Gas	5	Employed	High School

The data in the table represent the sample of female participants with various educational backgrounds, job titles, and industries. The data shows that 50% of the participants have held their positions within various industries for 10 years or more. Of the interview participants, 70% of them remain employed within their position, 5% are retired and 25% of them left their positions to pursue entrepreneurship.

The figure below depicts the educational percentages of the interviewed participants.

Figure 1 Participant Educational Percentages



The data in the figure above reflects that 60% total hold or are completing advanced degrees, 25% hold are completing their undergraduate degrees and 15% of the participants highest educational level is of a high school graduate.

Themes and Subthemes

The qualitative analysis yielded a number of themes and subthemes related to lived experiences to provide understanding and additional insights concerning the problem of underrepresentation by exploring the lived experiences and perceptions of African American women holding senior level positions within large U.S. corporations headquartered in Houston, TX, of the United States. Data was coded using coding scheme located in Appendix O. Table 4 shows the high-level themes.

Table 4 Themes Emerging from Qualitative Analysis

Themes	Explanation
Organizational Practices Leading to Inequalities	Discriminatory practices encountered by African American women in leadership positions
Diversity	Organizational diversity programs and value of diversity as expressed by participants
Journey to Leadership	Strategies employed by participants to reach and succeed in leadership positions

Leadership Practices	Participants leadership styles, role modeling, and mentoring others
Perceptions about gender and race	Participants perceptions about individuals of race and gender differences

Each of the five themes was divided into subthemes revealing patterns in the data.

Selected quotes illustrating each of the subthemes are included in the following sections.

Theme 1: Organizational practices leading to inequalities. Table 5 below shows subthemes associated with the theme labeled Organizational practices leading to inequalities, including the number and percentages of participants who addressed each subtheme.

Table 5 Theme 1 - Organizational Practices Leading to Inequalities

Subthemes	Addressed by # of Participants	% of Participants
Trust/Respect	18	90
White Privilege	13	65
Different Set of Standards	8	40
Good Ole Boys Network	7	35
Access to Resources	6	30
Negative Reviews	6	30
Double Jeopardy	5	25
Role Models	4	20

Trust and respect. Trust and respect are major components to producing a healthy organizational culture. Ninety percent of the participants mentioned lack of trust and respect in their interviews as being an obstacle to leadership success. Several of the participants provided useful comments, which were offered to expound on their answers to the interview questions. P10 said, “I would have to say there was some level of trust but not the same level as given to White men or White women.”

P2 said,

They did not want to support and trust because they did not want me there to begin with but over time, they had no other choice. When I proved, I was the best at what I did, even if they wanted to distrust me they had to respect me.

According to P9,

Not being heard or taken seriously, affected the trust and respect levels within her position. Not being taken seriously because they were not used to hearing the things I say from someone (African American Female) like me. Although, what I told them, which they failed to listen to it, actually happened the way I said it would.

Therefore, by not listening to me as an equal, as a business professional, they found themselves in the position of playing catch up on more occasions than one.

The lack of trust and respect created an obstacle for P14, which stated, “Under the leadership of men, mostly white men, I would perform to the best of my abilities to only experience less trust to handle major projects.”

In contrast to the previously mentioned, P17 said,

I believe that I had support from my organization. The support is much better since I am in higher positions but, even at this level, there are some, who will attempt to disregard you as being on the same level.

P16 stated,

In my previous roles in senior management, I believe I received a level of organizational trust. When I say a level of, I mean, more than average, less than some. In almost every case, the some would be White males.

Interviewees P4, P5, P8 said, “Yes, my organization supports and trusts me.”

P18 stated,

The support that I received from my previous position was strong to a certain point. They trusted me to perform my job and to assist others. They trusted me to train others that they promoted over me but they did not trust me enough to pay me to demonstrate that I was executive level material. When this happens, there is no substance to the organization because the employees recognize the games being played. In my company, my organization trusts me completely because, I am fair and they know I will do what I say.

White privilege. Sixty-five percent of the interviewed participants mentioned white privilege as an obstacle to leadership and the ability to be promoted. P1 said, “The top senior level officers are predominantly white men (white privilege). There are not many African American women and even few African American men. I am beginning to see an influx of Arabic men as of late.

P18 noted,

When I worked for others, I witness men with less education and even less talent be promoted over me. African American Women are very intelligent, resourceful and are great planners and forecasters. With all of the skills we possess, we find ourselves in positions where there is a

pay disparity between men and women as well as inequity in promotions.

P1 said,

Yes, yes, yes. The glass ceiling has been a part of the Federal Government for years. I have been with the Federal Government for over 30 years in different positions. I have seen bright, educated and motivated women, especially African American women be subjected to positions considerably beneath their capabilities. I witness the frustration and confusion as white men with less education and experience catapult pass them in their careers (white privilege).

Personally, I was passed up of promotions, I knew I was qualified for but overlooked for either white women or white men with less experience. In most cases, it would be white men but if there were not a white male applicant, a white woman would get the promotion. It just really did not matter how much education or experience you possessed, you were not going to get the promotion. Women in general lost out to men but women who were African American as well, lost out to everyone.

In regards to major obstacles, P19 said, “There was a glass ceiling as well as a glass floor. I say that because once you were getting too close to the perceived glass ceiling, you would start noticing the cracks in the glass floor. I believe this was in the culture and the system, where African American women were just not promoted.” P3 stated, “Having

white people with less education or experience than I, being promoted over me” as a disappointing obstacle.

P5 said,

I witnessed several educated African American women, as well as, myself, present our credentials for promotion, only to be overlooked for less educated White men (white privilege). I witnessed women receiving lower salaries than men do but were doing the same job. The glass ceiling pushed African American women into stereotypical positions and undervalued them as being unequally intelligent and capable.

P19 describe obstacles as,

Guarded, a lot of information is held back. African American women have to work harder to get information. Our counterparts, being white women or white men can get all the information they need from one person while we, s African American women have to get bits and pieces from several people to make up the whole. White people, male and female ensure they do not put the whole puzzle together for African American women to lessen any advantage the information may provide them. African American women have to work longer before they are supported. We still have to work twice as hard to only

get less than half of the credit. There are still privileged classes; they are just smarter about being privileged.

Different set of standards. Forty percent of interviewed participants mentioned different set of standards as being an obstacle for African American women in senior-level management.

P19 said,

I think I respond to people differently and different people respond to me differently. I have experienced some Whites, male and female, view my personality and behavior as "How dare you". I have to wonder if the "How dare you" is because I am an African American or because I am an African American woman.

P14 said,

There is a glass ceiling, not so much in salary but in promotion which leads to higher salaries. Men are promoted more than women. I am still considered new to this organization and therefore it has not really affected me, here. In previous senior level positions, the glass ceiling did affect me, when I was trying to move up the corporate ladder. In my current position, there is a lot of transition going on where as the positions held by women are being eliminated and the men are

retaining their positions. So, has it affected me directly no, but I am aware of what is going on.

P17 noted,

One of the obstacles I have faced included being seen as overly confident because I possessed an advanced degree. It started to feel as if I was being punished for getting my education and for wanted to be respected as an educated professional.

P2 expressed, “I find it appalling that there is a need for Affirmative Actions, just so African Americans can prove they are just as smart as White people are.”

P17 stated,

I begin to network with people who did not feel threatened by my education. I discovered that the people who were not threatened were in better positions. I soon discovered that they were not threatened because I was not a part of their direct organization. When I became a part of their organization, a few ensured that I could only make it to a certain area but not any higher. They also ensured I felt that there were certain areas where I did not belong.

P20 said,

African American women have to overcome the stereotypical expectation, that we are going to be loud and do not bring as much to the table. We have to overcome being invisible. In my previous positions, I think there was a bit more of having to prove yourself and

not just having to overcome some negative stereotypes. We had to prove ourselves when White women did not have to prove themselves.

P6 said, “These new African American women are arriving with advanced degrees and confidence. I am happy for them but I cannot say that everyone is. Although they are degreed, they are still being placed in positions lower than their capabilities.”

Good Ole Boys Network. Thirty-five percent of participants mentioned the Good Ole Boys Network during their interview. P3 said, “Hiring measures being only about utilizing a "Buddy System" and popularity. People hiring only their friends instead of merit.” P14 stated, “To ensure that these men are not terminated, positions are created to hold the "good ole boys" club together.”

P7 expressed, “I faced the obstacles, well because, I was not in that good ole boys club.”

P9 said, “they (white people) are just not ready for African American women leadership. It is something that they would like to keep silent.” P5 responded, “I was affected by the glass ceiling as well as the good ole boys network, which is why I chose to pursue entrepreneurship.”

P20 stated,

On a corporate level, unless there are people in place to stop this type of mentality, the "good ole boys" club or anything else in that nature is not going to change. Generally, the people who have the "good ole boys" club mentality are in their 50's or older. The majority of people with this mentality are racist and/or sexist. They use terms such as gals or girls when referring to grown professional women. The middle-aged individuals, with this mentality are normally people who cannot think

for themselves. So they gravitate to this club in hopes of being "included" as "one of them" and not the "other". This is why it is so important that diversity is embraced and African American women have a voice in corporate America. Without there being someone in power who wants the change, you just will not be able to change this type of people. Those in power will have to manage in a way to prevent "good ole boys" club members from harming others.

P9 answered,

Considering my company has been operating in the mentality from 90 years ago, I doubt if they know what the glass ceiling is. I have spoken to them on their lack of women in higher positions but when doing so they give you the blank stare of like a deer being caught in headlights. I try not to challenge them too often. Therefore, yes, there is a glass ceiling issue within our company.

During the interviews, 30% of the participants mentioned *Access to Resources* or the lack thereof in regards to their ability to promote within the upper ranks.

P12 stated,

I have found that companies are purposely not set up to include African American women in their senior level positions. We have all heard the term 'good ole boys network', this was really the case within the organization. The people, who were invited to the trainings to assist you with moving forward, did not look like you and I. The

people looked like the people who were already there, White people. In order to get into the best or even better spots, you had to be introduced to the right people. To be connected to those people, you had to be in their circle. There is a large pool of talented people who have not been given access to proper training and opportunities for growth, simply because they were African American.

P11 described her lack of access to resources by stating, “My company has not offered me any professional developmental programs.”

P12, said

The glass ceiling is developed from a lack of connections with the right people. For example, one corporation I worked for, within the first three years of a new hire's career, would label them as HIGHPOS or not. HIGHPOS was short for high potential. Employees tagged as HIGHPOS would be ensured great training, opportunities for growth, connections with the right people and right jobs. In this company, they would systematically not select a certain group of people. This certain group was African Americans. I found that African American women had no tags at all. White men had the highest tags, white women were second and Asian women were third. By African American women having no tags, it was as if they did not exist, an African American woman would not be selected for specialized training. Therefore, this was a form of glass ceiling because they were not even given the opportunity to access achievement. Being an African American

woman, I found myself in same situation of not existing within these corporations for a period. My corporation offered several professional developmental programs but you had to be selected to attend them.

Therefore, my answer is none.

P13 said,

The biggest obstacle I faced was requesting training for leadership and being denied. The company offered the training I needed to assist me with getting to the next level but I was denied access because they felt it did not mesh with my current position. The people, who received the training, get access to the better opportunities. The people who are denied training either do not get it or have to pay for it, themselves.

P19 expressed,

To add insult to injury, one the biggest obstacle was having to train the people whom I eventually end up working for. There were pay inequities, limited knowledge. In the 90's and early 2000, they treated women as inferior employees and people. They did not consider many behavior issues. During this time, I became pregnant and they did not have pregnancy included into their insurance, because they had never had a pregnant woman there.

Negative Reviews. Thirty percent of interviewed participants stated that negative reviews were impeding factors to their senior-level aspirations. P10 said, “Yes, White men tend to rate me harder than women in general, White women rater me harder than

African American (Black) women and African American (Black) women rated me harder than African American (Black) men.”

P17 followed with,

if I was in a position where my managers felt threatened by education, they rated me poorly to stunt my growth. As I progressed through the ranks, my ratings became better but they still made sure I did not move too quickly.

P2 stated, “If it was for promotions, they (superiors) always found something negative to say although, I was the top producer.”

P20 described her experience as,

When you encounter people who attempt everything to hold you back, you need to know who this person is and what is motivating them to their action. There was a high-level executive, White woman, who did not like me. She tried her best, to hold me back but, because I have favour, there was nothing she could do. I tried talking to her, being cordial, whatever I thought was necessary. I ensured that I never allowed her to place me in position where I was not cordial or did not speak. By doing this, she could never say I was not cordial, so we cannot send her to other places or she does not know how to do this or that. I performed a 360 evaluation and included her. She scored me between a five and a six, on a 10-point scale. All the other responders scored me as a 9 or a 10. Therefore, not only did the program throw out her scores, other people in the organization saw what you wrote

and how she handled my 360. While others were trying to promote me, she was trying to tear me down. Therefore, this reflected more poorly on her than it did me, which called her into question.

P5 responded similarly with, “Yes, if it has to do with evaluations. For evaluations, I do great but for promotion factors, they manage to rate me lower.”

P9 said,

Yes, I find that when a non-degreed person reviews me, they are negative and there is not a time when I can do enough. There have been occasion where I have solicited additional responsibility and was told no, but when they reviewed me, they told me I should take more initiative.

Double Jeopardy. Double Jeopardy is a term used to describe the discrimination of women of African American women heredity; a term coined to separate two different types of discrimination against one segment of people. Double Jeopardy was mentioned by 25% of the interviewed participants. P11 stated, “They (white people) could not conceive the thought of an African American woman as a manager, over them.” P2 said, “Getting your foot in the door to major corporations, first because you are African American and secondly because you are a woman. It is automatically a fight or some type of struggle.”

P15 said,

It is disheartening as an African American woman (double jeopardy) to have to prove yourself repeatedly. The company as well as, your colleagues expects you to prove yourself repeatedly. The biggest

obstacle is getting in but once you are in, there is this constant reproving yourself. I have an African accent, so I am perceived differently. This perception is diminished once they see my credentials but yet, I am first looked upon as a “black woman” before they see my credentials.

P16 stated,

Yes, I have worked in corporations where the glass ceiling was prevalent. In my personal experience, I was affected by the glass ceiling and discovered that I could not penetrate it or certain areas within the corporation as an African American woman.

P2 said,

I experience double discrimination from White men for being African American and a woman. There have been instances where White women have discriminated against me. As funny as it may sound, I was discriminated for the same reasons but it was a cumulative effort. I was discriminated for being an African American woman. I asked myself why one woman would discriminate against another woman and they demonstrated the answer. They did not see me as being a woman like them. They could only see me as an African American (Black) woman in competition with them. Neither the White man nor the White woman could get passed the fact that I was African American. White men are the worst at this because they feel as if you

(an African American woman) should not have a top-level position and it should be theirs (white privilege). They come in trying to take your position from you.

In contrast, P6 responded with,

The glass ceiling has been noted to cause a disparity among women and minorities, who desire to achieve senior management positions within the workplace. As women, we have always had to contend with gender-based barriers. As African American women, we have an additional barrier to contend with and have to overcome racial and ethnic obstacles in order for us to move up the corporate ladder. I have witnessed a shift in our organization, as far as improvement. I will never say that the glass ceiling is totally gone but there has been a small shift. There is a diverse group of people that run the company. Actually more women than men are in leadership positions.

Role Models. Twenty percent of interviewed participants mentioned role models or the lack there of as a component in impeding professional growth. P17 stated, “As, I moved up the corporate ladder in my career, I noticed that there were not many people that looked like me. I also noticed that on my way up, less and less looked like me.”

P13 expressed,

Really all one had to do was look at the hierarchy of the corporation, there were no women within the leadership positions or even in the lower management positions. I realized early in life that everyone could not be an entrepreneur or have the ability to make something out

of nothing. However, to rise within an organization, we had to have something to climb and you cannot go up the ladder of success with only a few wrens on the ladder. The corporation began to look at this fact from the value aspect because they were competing globally. It is said that values are the link between emotions and behavior, which is true, so they changed some of their behaviors. In other words, women are customers too and throughout the world, you will find women in various leadership positions. For a corporation with global business goals, you have to have people within your organization that mirror the customers in which you do business with. This became a corporate win/win, to open up what were male dominated senior level ladders of success. Although, there is a biological difference between men and women, jobs women could not perform physically they could perform mentally. Working this way allowed for supplemental and complimentary aspects of performing the job.

P17 stated,

In previous corporations, there has been a diverse population of employees however, not in senior-level management. Definitely not any African American women, in higher positions. I was affected by the lack of diversity in previous corporations because there were not many people that looked like me or experienced the same issues that I did. I found myself being the only African American, as well as, only African American woman in my professional setting.

Theme 2: Diversity. Table 6 below shows subthemes associated with the theme labeled diversity, including the number and percentages of participants who addressed each subtheme.

Table 6 *Theme 2 - Diversity*

Subthemes	Addressed by # of Participants	% of Participants
Official Approach to Diversity vs Reality	9	45
Approach to Diversity	7	35
Diversity Program	6	30
Value of Diversity	4	20

Official Approach to Diversity vs Reality. Forty-five percent of interview participants mentioned the difference in the official approach to diversity vs reality where the implementation or the lack of diversity was concern. P12, “The corporate take on

what they think is diversity is very different from what I know. I grew up in the military and everyone was different everywhere.”

P14 said,

There is a Diversity program of sort however, you see more White male in leadership roles and hardly no African Americans or African American women. You do see African American women in local director positions but not in regional and national positions. So, although there is a diversity program, it is just not all that diverse.

P1 expressed,

Our company has a diversity program. Being in the Federal Government, there is a mix of different types and different race of people. It does very well at considering the ideas of others but not as well at race issues, concerning African Americans.

P18 said,

Prior to coming to the Federal Government, I experienced issues with diversity or the lack there of. During blind bidding, where names and ethnicity is not identified, I was accepted because of my education and experience. I could tell the difference in the organization's attitude once they discovered I was an African American woman. Everyone

should have the opportunity to work together on reaching the organization's goal. Everyone should be allowed a chance.

P3 said, “The company looks at a certain group of people that they do not understand but they try. So, they put African American women in the role of diversity leaders but adhering to their standards.” P20 stated, “I do not know if there is a formal diversity plan.”

P19 said,

I was affected by the lack of the Diversity Program as well as the implementation of the Diversity Program because the behaviors did not change. I discovered that just having the program in place and everyone "signing on" did not create acceptance of diversity. The organizational culture nor did the people change. The change does not take place until you actually alter the culture and you ensure the consequences from not accepting diversity are adhered by to make aware of their behavior.

The Approach to Diversity. The approach to diversity was mentioned by 35% of the interviewed participants. P8 said, “Yes, there is a diversity program. The inclusion of all races is encouraged within the Federal Government.

P13 said,

When I initially hired on, the population was diverse in origin or ethnically but not in high-level positions. As time progressed, the corporation realized that some changes had to be made. This was prior to a major merge of two global chemical corporations; they recognized

a need for diversity training. Being a member of the Diversity Council, we had many diversity workshops. The training we received opened the eyes of many employees to the importance of diversity. Because of the diversity training, we were embarking on a cultural shift, which was advantageous for the corporation. People bring into workplaces, the world in general, innate or perceived prejudices. Often, we are not aware of these prejudices, which is why diversity training or awareness is important.

P15 said,

There was a diversity plan in place however; there are not a lot of African Americans or African American women... I cannot say that I was affected by the glass ceiling because the company I worked for encourage the hiring of minorities. They offered programs where minorities were provided scholarships to go to school in exchange for working for them for a few years.

P11stated,

I have been with this company for 28 years, during the early years, there was no diversity. When I started, there were only a handful of women and less than a handful of African American women. As time passed, there were some obvious changes; some were good and others not so good.

P16 said,

I cannot truly cite any companies that I have worked with that had a formal Diversity Program. They were general employee relations, more ad hoc, morale building activities. I cannot say that I can point to any program that was specifically centered on diversity. Nothing was diversity specific.

P17 said,

Yes, our organization or agency offers a Diversity Program. I would have to say that diversity started to become appreciated about 10 years ago. There was a time prior to the 10 years that it appeared only a certain group of people could possibly have good ideas.

P19 said,

The Company did not have a Diversity Program initially. This was evident by the population of employees. After a lawsuit, in which I was a part of they actually developed a company wide Diversity Program. I was one of the original members of their Diversity Program due to this lawsuit.

Diversity Program. Thirty percent of interviewed participants mentioned Diversity Program during their interviews. P4 said, “Yes, there is a diversity program. The inclusion of all races is encouraged within our company.”

P3 said,

Yes, there is a diversity program however, it is very institutionalized. The company hired minorities, women and people of different ethnic backgrounds as well as drew up a documented program as a push to

ensure they met federal requirements verses it being something that they really cared about.

P5 said, “Yes, we have a diversity program. Our firm is diverse on the lower levels but not so much in the higher levels. The higher levels are flooded with White men and some White women (white privilege).”

P2 said,

There was a time when Affirmative Action was crucial to African Americans being able to get employment within organizations. Today, in 2013-2014, it is a shame that it is still necessary. In some cases, Affirmative Actions are a necessary tool for African Americans to even make to any level of management within major corporations. We should be at the point where Affirmative Action and Diversity Programs are no longer needed. African Americans should be able to secure employment within major corporations without the feeling of tokenism or quotas.

P6 said,

Our company has a diversity program. Being in the Federal Government, there is a mix of different types and different race of people. The top senior level officers are predominantly white men. There are not many African American women and even few African American men. I am beginning to see an influx of Arabic men and women as of late.

P7 said,

Yes, there is a diversity program. Our company has over 90k employees worldwide, therefore there has to be an established formal diversity plan.

We encourage inclusion of all people, fostering a work environment where employees can perform their jobs and pursue their careers free from discrimination. There are three principals, we value integrity, and we value differences, equal opportunity and affirmative action.

Difference can include personal points of view, beliefs and different ways of thinking.

Value of Diversity. Twenty percent of the interviewed participant spoke on the value of diversity in the workplace. P13 said, “Diversity awareness has a unifying effect.”

P7 said,

As far as diversity, we value all the contributions made by every individuals at our company. Equality opportunity and affirmative action are all part of the commitment that we hold when it comes to diversifying our company. We understand the benefits that come with having a diversified workplace.

P12 said,

Diversity is more of people who do not think like you than people who do not look like you. In the same instance the people who do not think like you, do not look like you either. This is why diversity is so important and allowing people who do not look like you an opportunity to be heard is so important. The corporate diversity

programs offered were very superficial and missed an opportunity to discuss the value of diversity. The programs lack the ability to teach why being different should be valued.

P18 said,

When it comes to diversity, I work with many people from different educational backgrounds as well as from different places. When you diversify the type of people working in our organization, you have the opportunity to bring in new ideas. Diversity offers unique talent that differs from having an organization where everyone thinks the same. Diversifying your company and organizations encompasses a larger pool of educational differences and knowledge.

Theme 3: Journey to leadership. Table 7 below shows subthemes associated with the theme labeled journey to leadership, including the number and percentages of participants who addressed each subtheme.

Table 7 Theme 3 –Journey to Leadership

Subthemes	Addressed by # of Participants	% of Participants
Educating Self	16	80
Staying current in profession	15	75
Determination	11	55
Networking	11	55
Having a mentor	10	50
Entrepreneurship/control your own destiny	8	40
Assertiveness	6	30
Work Ethics	5	25
Positive Attitude	3	15
Self Worth	3	15

Educating Self. Eighty percent of interviewed participants mentioned educating self as fundamental to eradicating underrepresentation with in senior-level management. P18 said, “African American woman must be vigilant in updating their skills and returning to school for advanced degrees. Organizations, economy and the environment changes every day and we must be ready to change with them.” P14, “Educationally, several of my colleagues have completed advanced degrees, I am in the final stages of completing my Doctorate. Across the board, I am perceived as a colleague of integrity and my work speaks for itself.” P17 said, “I consider continuing my education on a more formal basis as my personal initiation of professional development.”

P15 said,

The professional development included one-day courses to receiving a second Masters. I am now preparing for my Doctorate. I chose to take courses in media because there are more ways to express your education than just with pen and paper. I share this with my students to encourage them to broaden their thinking in ways of conveying a message. Most students are not challenged to do more than the traditional. Therefore, I have initiated this one professional development.

P19, said, “Initially, there were not any established professional developmental programs, I had to seek the outside the organization. They did pay for my tuition for my formal education.” P12 acknowledged, “I was able to overcome these obstacles by paying for my own training. If after you have paid for the training and they still will not allow you

the opportunities, find a company that will.” P19 said, “Educationally, I am working on my dissertation to earn my Doctorate.”

P17 stated, “Continuing my education, reading everything I could get my hands on and making myself noticed.” P18 said, “I went to school for the skills I needed to ensure promotibility within my organization to meet the standards of the company I worked for.”

Staying current. Staying current was mentioned by 75% of interviewed participants. P18 said, “My previous position offered me leadership, safety and management professional development training... For professional development, I attend professional conferences within my field. I also read plenty of professional journals.”

P16 said,

Learning as much as I could about the current position as well as learning the responsibilities and duties of the positions I wanted. Thus far, I have been able to perform at a level where when there was an opportunity to assume a leadership role, I have been able to do that.

P14 stated,

In my current as well as my past organizations, they offer a PDP, which is a Professional Developmental Plan. These plans were created to measure the impact it has on the participants. The courses were geared to enhancing current skills. Seminars and training.... The courses I have initiated include management, technology, ethics, and facilitation. These courses were offered online as well as in classroom settings.

P6 said,

In the last 10 years, I have been offered several leadership and management skills courses. There are some mandatory classes that have to do with my positions and a few privacy act courses... I have not initiated many personally because there are so many being offered by the agency.

P20 stated,

My developmental programs all occurred during my previous position. I went through three long-term (6mos-1year, some 2-3 years) developmental programs. This included shadowing, series of courses, detailed assignments offsite and in different locations as well as having a mentor.

P20 said,

Early on during one of my programs, I was interviewed by an Executive panel. I asked the panel "If you could talk to the younger you, what would you say to yourself to improve your career, what would you tell yourself to do differently? One of the panelist responded, "I would tell myself to ignore what they are trying to teach me and focus on what I need to learn". This is what I have done my entire career because the people who put the developmental programs together, have specific ideas on what they want to teach you. However,

If you do not have weakness in those areas, you could spend a year, doing what they want you to do and not strengthen your weakness.

Determination. Fifty-five percent of participants interviewed considered determination as a major component to professional growth. P3 said, “Perseverance, tenacity, congeniality, by not being angry, bitter and mean. Helping people understand how you can help them.” P6 stated, “Making conscious efforts where my career was of concern, keeps me grounded in my profession.” P6 said, “Go to college and get your education for yourself not just for a job. Do things that will improve your career possibilities.” P8 stated, “I lasted longer than the bulk of them. Some died and others retired to die. I was still here and had the experience.” P17, “Get your education. Go after what you want or think you should have and do not allow others to place you in the box they want you to be in.” P19 expressed, “I turned the obstacle into an opportunity. I incorporated my training of others into my assessments to ensure I received credit for them.” P11 said, “Keep striving for what you want out of life.” P12 said, “When you find one (mentor) that is willing to help you, take the opportunity.” P2 said,

Individually, I believe they wanted me to leave but I would not give that type of gratification. I believed the ones that wanted me to leave because I am African American and a woman that was their personal issues not mine. I have a right to the pursuit of happiness just like anyone else. I am human too and some of the looks I am given or things that are said hurt me.

P13 stated,

I overcame my obstacles with knowledge. Women cannot have defeatist mentalities. They have to be prepared and have a leadership approach for handling business. I came aboard equipped with the knowledge and skills needed to prove to my male counterparts as well as, the white women there, that I was more than capable of doing the job and advancing. I became the first female, the first African American woman to advance to the senior level position that I held.

Networking was mentioned by 50% of the interviewed participants as a tool for discovering new opportunities. P3 stated, “My goal was to network with other women. Have as many contacts as you can to discuss opportunities.”

P7 said,

I started networking with other women leaders, asking them questions about their career journey. How did they get to their positions and how they overcame their obstacles? They gave me advice such as joining several organizations that I knew would benefit me. I also asked what it would take me to get to the next level based on my skills. I had all of the skills obtained by other leaders. Above all, I felt that I would not be recognized unless I put myself out there. Above all, I felt that I would not be recognized unless I put myself out there. This led to me

doing more networking. Not just with women leaders but with men leaders in important positions, as well.

P3 stated,

If you are very good at the skills required for networking, you will be fine but if you are not good at communicating to others, meeting at different venues and building rapport, it will not work for you. Having this type program in place is wonderful and can assist with making someone successful but, if the connection is not made, the person will not be successful.

P14 said,

I am a member of several civic and social organizations so, I get to meet different people. I ensure I encourage them and introduce them to people I know in their professional or educational field. I think that as it was important that I have a mentor, it is important that they have one as well.

P16 expressed,

It is good to remain engaged and attend different networking opportunities. Networking, has been a great professional development tool for me. By doing so, I was able to meet people within the corporation and other corporations that I normally would not have had the opportunity to meet. There were panel discussions as well as opportunities to exchange business cards. I was not offered formal

professional developmental programs such as management skills or negotiations by the corporation.

P10 stated,

You really need someone in a key position, willing to mentor you and show you how to move around. It has to be someone who does not consider you a threat. There are plenty of people in key positions with no formal education and they consider you a threat when you show up with your formal education and experience or even looking to gain experience. Join some committees. You have to be seen. If you are not in a position where you can be seen, and what you can do can be seen, you will be lost among the rest.

Having a mentor. Having a mentor was mentioned by 50% of the interviewed participants as a matter of preference for professional growth.

P13 said,

Yes, but the person would not consider themselves as a mentor. My mentor was my mother. I have looked up to many individuals and received advice from them... In my mentee experience, I learned early in life that you treat people the way you want to be treated. I know that is an old cliché but it is a fact. Outside influences effect employee's work. These outside influences may be a sick child, spouse, or elderly parents. I learned early on in my profession, to be considerate of

employee's circumstances. I would listen to people and empathize with them.

P14 said,

The factors that contributed to my success as a leader include having a mentor. My mentor was very intricate in my success. Another factor is not being afraid to step forward. When I found myself in those times my mentor gave me that extra push to apply anyways. It is also good to surround yourself with people who are in good positions as well gleaning from them creates opportunities for learning. Staying abreast on what is going on in my field, to ensure I am on the right tract and have accountability in my own career.

P19 stated,

Yes... I have been mentored by Minority and Non-Minority. I have taken different experiences away from them. Male as well as female mentors have also mentored me. My experience with male mentors has been more progressive than with female mentors. I felt the mentorship with females was limited because there was a perception that there was not enough room for all of the females. With my male mentors, I had to work at keeping the relationship balanced between professional and personal. All experiences have been positive and have provided opportunity for growth within several organizations. Although, they all

were great and provided what was needed during the time, I found I had to look for different mentors for different segments of my career.

P7 said,

I have had a mentor... My first experience was not a good one. I did not receive the training I needed to progress. Just because a person is your mentor, does not mean that they have your best interest at heart. You should always ensure that your goals and your mentor goals for you are aligned properly. There should be some communication on what is expected from each other. Just having a mentor does not mean you will be successful. My current mentor and I have aligned goals.

P3 stated,

My mentor was a Caucasian woman who placed herself in the role of my mentor. She was not assigned from the organization nor did I ask her. She took it upon herself to rotate all of the African American people of power, to make one on one introduction to me to them. She also helped me to create a network of senior and junior people within the bank. She took on and developed this role on her own.

In contrast, some interviewed participants did not view having a mentor as being essential in their professional growth. P4, P6 and P7 said, "I have never had a mentor."

Entrepreneurship. Forty percent of interviewed participants mentioned entrepreneurship as the best route to leadership.

P5 said,

(I was affected by the glass ceiling as well as the good ole boy network,) which is why I chose to pursue entrepreneurship. The inequities of pay, promotion and even job security led several African American women out of corporate America and into entrepreneurship. I removed the obstacle by leaving corporate America 5 years ago and creating my own company where I control my salary.

P16 said,

I would remain in an organization or corporation for as long as I needed to secure the training or information that I needed and then would seek out opportunities else, where. If there was not enough growth I would make the decision to remove myself. Of course, in a professional way, I have never burned any bridges.

P17 said,

I was told that needed to work on being more of a team player. I stop presenting my ideas to her and presented them straight to upper management. I could tell they were not too thrilled with new approach; however, they did want the ideas. My direct manager accused me of

trying to undermine her authority and rated me poorly on my evaluations. I eventually applied to a new department.

P18 said,

The biggest obstacle is dealing with the glass ceiling. If women can find a way around the glass ceiling, there will be more women in senior level positions. I overcame this obstacle by resigning from their company, taking my good ideas and talents from them to start my own company. I discovered that I do not have to be anywhere, where I am not valued and appreciated.

P2 said,

My current corporation consists of all African American people. I have found that White corporations want African Americans to come in and do lower end jobs but they will not come into our companies and do the same. I left corporate America and started my own corporation. God gave me this vision and I wanted to ensure I employed as many African American people as I could. I felt this way because as African Americans we are perceived as being the last, the least and the lost. I was tired of this being the thought where American Americans were concerned, as well as, African American women. I was tired of us being last. I was ready for us to be on top! Eventually, we were on top. I am not sure if this helped or harmed us.

Assertiveness. Assertiveness was mentioned by 30% of the interviewed participants. P7 said, “I overcame the obstacles by being curious and never taking no for an answer.” P18 said, “You also need survivor skills such as being assertive to help you handle the experienced inequities within companies.”

P1 said,

At that time, the most I could do was just accept it, especially if I wanted to keep my job. More recently, since the implement of EEO policies and laws, I have been able to challenge inequalities. I no longer feel my job security is threatened if I speak up against unfair treatment. I was able to overcome my obstacles by speaking up and not just accepted what the felt I should have.

P13 stated,

As I alluded to earlier, I wanted to prove to them that just because I am a female; it does not mean I was there to make coffee for them. African American women or women in general do not have to be aggressive but they must be assertive. They must assert themselves based on the power they stand on, which is knowledge.

P2 said,

I find myself wanting to respond to them the same way but I am professional and they are not. Their ugly looks and mean words cannot make me leave.Educationally, I do not have any degreed

education but I proved that I am just as smart if not smarter than the ones who what degreed education.

P6 stated,

At that time, the most I could do was just accept it, especially if I wanted to keep my job. More recently, since the implement of EEO policies and laws, I have been able to challenge inequalities. Even with the EEO in place, if you make a report you are forever marked. I was able to overcome my obstacles by speaking up and not just accepted what they felt I should have.

Working Ethics. Work ethics was mentioned by 25% of the interviewed participants. P5 stated, “Always demonstrate solid work ethics and network with people in different industries.” P10, “The factors that have contributed to my success include being around a group of good people as well as, hard work and determination.” P15 said, “Hard working, continuing my education, consulting members with same experiences, having the same goal and going after them one by one.” P2 stated, “I continued to work hard and never let them shake me to the point where I wanted to give up. No, I worked too hard to get where I am to just leave.”

P20 said,

I would say, the first challenge is being good at what you do. I am not saying that you have to know everything but do not go to the table making demands when you do not have anything to bring. Read

everything, even when you are not supposed to read it. There will come a day when you will be challenged and if you prepare yourself, you will be able to stand up for what you know. In the majority of cases, the corporation is dollar and cents driven, with that, they want the smart people.

Positive Attitude. Fifteen percent of the interviewed participants mentioned the words, positive attitude. P9, “Having a positive attitude, keeping a smile on my face and remaining grounded, keeps me going.” P13 stated, “Just knowing that African American women have been in the workforce for a long time, from slavery, we have taken care of White folk’s kids, and we have been domestic engineers, to corporate management, today.” P2 stated, “Be yourself and do not be afraid. Fear is dangerous. It keeps you in a job you do not like and in relationships, you do not want. Be fearless. They are not going to like you anyway so, who cares.” P2 stated, “To keep a positive attitude, I listened to John Maxwell, Les Brown, Lisa Nickels, Miles Monroe, Kirby John Caldwell. They were all motivational speakers for leadership development.” P9 expressed, “Being spiritual Inclined, I do not look at issues as obstacles; I look at them as opportunities.... Once again, by being spiritually inclined, I look to my heavenly father for my success.”

Self-Worth. Fifteen percent of the interviewed participants made comments along the lines of self-worth. P12 said, “I found it important to place value on myself.” P20 stated, Having high emotional intelligence and the ability to work with different levels of education were valuable in my progression.

P19 said,

My educational background and being in a member of a strong African American community were important. I had a high self-esteem and confidence so; I did not mind questioning things that did not seem right or fair. I never was one to just do because, it was asked of me.

Theme 4: Leadership practices. Table 8 below shows subthemes associated with the theme labeled leadership practices, including the number and percentages of participants who addressed each subtheme.

Table 8 Theme 4 –Leadership Practices

Subthemes	Addressed by # of Participants	% of Participants
Feedback	20	100
Leadership Styles	20	100
Reputation	16	75
Role Modeling	16	75
Mentoring Others	11	55

Feedback. Feedback was mentioned by 100% of the interviewed participants. P11 said, “Yes. Initially, prior to me discovering my worth, I would receive poor ratings regardless of how good my work was. I begin to dispute their feedback and show proof of my work and my ratings drastically improved.” P16 stated, “All of the feedbacks I have received from others have been positive... The feedbacks I have received have not varied according to who was giving it. It all was positive.” P18 said, “I have received a lot of

love from my followers. They believe and have conveyed their appreciation of my assistance in their careers. When they are asked, they always speak highly of me.”

P13 said,

As I previously mentioned, my corporation used the 360-Degree evaluation. In every session, the feedback I received was positive. I was very knowledgeable of my job, a consensus and team builder. It provided a great source of information on what the cumulative thoughts of my performance... all of my feedback has been positive.

P17 said,

I have experienced ridicule from a few of my followers by saying that I was very hard nose. I do not see myself as a hard nose manager. I believe that I was never given any freebies so, I do not just hand them out to others.

P18 stated,

The feedback I have received varied with the occasion. In my previous position, if it was a general feedback session, the feedback was uplifting and encouraging. The feedback reflected a job well done. If there was a position available that I was vying, the feedback reflected that I need to do more work. Males and females gave this type of feedback across the board. Once the position was filled by someone

else, my feedback was back to reflecting how great of a job I was doing.

P7 stated,

I am often asked not to leave. In every job, I have had, I have been known as the "fixer". Whenever the company has a problem, they ask me to go over and fix it. I treat people how I want to be treated. I do not look at people for or as their position titles; I see them as a human being first. So, when it is time for me to move on to another organization, I am asked to tell them my secrets to success.

P7 said,

My feedback is very positive, from the top down and back up. I have been confronted with employees that resisted my presence. Normally, it was due to past managers or supervisors. Where they were treated poorly or believed they were given the bad part of the deal, which made them resistant. When they got to know me and saw that I was building trust with them, the guard they held, came down.

Leadership. Leadership was mentioned by 100% of the interviewed participants.

P1 said, "Collaborative Leadership... Collaborative Leadership works for me because we have several degreed employees and I enjoy getting their input and ideas on certain matters." P10 said, "As a collaborative leader, I have demonstrated that working together to meet a goal is more productive than not being involved." P11 stated, "I am a servant leader.... I have been able to promote several times during my career. I take pleasure in

helping others to accomplish goals... It took some time but my followers became receptive to my leadership.” P13 expressed, “Good interpersonal skills. I always took initiative and risks. I respected others. I was very knowledgeable of my responsibilities, as well as, the organizational responsibilities.” P14 stated, “As a Servant Leader... I prefer to work beside my subordinates oppose to telling to go do the assignment. Doing this has created a better atmosphere with my subordinates.”

P17 stated,

I am a Transactional Leader... my leadership style works because I motivate my subordinates to go after what they want. If they want something, work for it. If you do not, either you do not get it or you do not deserve it.

P12 stated,

African American women were brought up as nurturers, which is who we are. Once we learn to embrace that and bring it into the corporate culture, it will change the current organizational cultures. When you have a manager who is more sensitive to the makeup of the group and more collaborative, they have better team ship.

P12 said,

Democratic (style)... I like to get the input of those involved but I will ultimately make the final decision. I recognize that I do not know

everything and I believe in the power of different perspectives. My teams seem to appreciate this type of leadership from me.

P13 said,

Transactional ... I do not believe in micromanagement. I feel that if I have to constantly stand over you to do your job, then you do not need it. If my subordinates had any questions, they could always come to me but I expected them to know and do their job. ... I have always had an innate style of leadership. When I tell you to do something, without any equivocation, I also explain what the results should be and that is what I expect. I welcome changes because organizations are made from innovated ideas. I may ask a subordinate how to do something; they may have a better way of doing it. I am open to new ideas. I employed the same values and approach with my children.

P15 said,

I prefer a combine type of leadership such as collaborative leadership. Most leaders as well as subordinates prefer to have some part in formulating the direction of their future or even their assignments. We are all grown people and everyone should be treated as such. When this happens, you empower others to take some responsibility for their career. This fosters the sense of management/employee cooperation.

P15 stated,

First of all, it is important to know, you cannot please everyone. The way you lead determines the outcome of your project. My style of leadership allows for the voice and input of everyone. The results of projects are better when all participants listen to each other and respect the ideas of others.

P16 said,

Collaborative Leadership... My style of leadership has provided a unique approach to getting assignments completed. With it I ensure that everyone is heard, although, in almost every case, everyone will not be happy with the outcome but none the less had a voice in the process.

P18 stated.

Charismatic and Transformational Leader... By being a transformational leader, take pride in showing my subordinates and employees how to be successful. As a charismatic leader, I am able to convince them to be receptive to the mission. I make it a point not to just tell them what to do but to show them and to take part in the activities.

P19 said,

Transformational... I have always been able to fill teams. In an organization, you have to be able to work in teams. As a transformational leader, I do not shy away from doing the work of others. By doing so, I have been able to build an environment of trust within our organization. As a transformational leader, I have developed others and myself. I have been able to get things done that others could not. I always try to be fair. As African American women, we try to be helpful. Sometimes we allow being helpful steer us in the wrong direction. We must stick to the guidelines and here is where we are willing to help.

P2 said,

Transformational... I prefer to be myself, down to earth. I let people know I did not just walk into greatness, I worked for it and they can too. By being Humble, I have been able to assist many people because I am approachable. When you are not approachable, you miss a lot of people. You have to have the ability to be strong, bold and meek. A good leader must be well rounded. You have to know how to reach people on every level.

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P9 said,

Servant Style Leadership has been encouraging for me. I am always learning from my subordinates, and try to be a servant as possible to everyone. I am open to receiving information even if it is coming from the janitor or the highest-level person in the company.

Reputation. Reputation was mentioned by 75% of the interviewed participants.

P10 stated, “My experiences in previous organizations have always been positive. I was perceived as being a hard worker as well as a good steward in all of these capacities.”

P11 said, “When I walk through a room of employees who have known me for years, I hear them tell others, she started as a clerk, now look at her. My peers perceive me well individually, educationally and professionally.” P12 said, “I have been told on several occasions by my followers that I am the best manager they have ever had.” P14 stated, “Professionally, I think I am viewed as an equal. ... I am perceived as being someone who is trustworthy and my work speaks for me.”

P1 said,

I am perceived well by my colleagues, many of whom have not been here as long as I have. As far as educationally, I do not have an as

extensive formal educational background as many of the new employees. Employees with 25 years or more, do not have the same educational background as most of the new employees. A few have gone back to get their undergraduate degrees but that is the most that they have. Since we do not have the education, we value work experience more. Having the ability to create work longevity is becoming an unheard of skill.

P13 said,

There are people always watching you and the way you conduct yourself. I have always taken pride in the way I conducted myself, in the upmost of integrity. You cannot expect other to respect you, if you do not respect yourself. I have had individuals to tell me that they really enjoyed working with me.

P7 said,

I know that I am a recognized leader with in my organization. If you speak with any of my colleagues or subordinates, they will all say that I lead by example, integrity is my middle name. I am an accountable person and very trustworthy.

Role Modeling. Seventy-five percent of the interview participants mentioned role modeling. P12 said, “I enjoy being a role model for others.” P15 said, “For those who look up to you, you want to set an example. It does not matter your race or gender but the goals you set. You should work towards attaining your goals.” P17 said, “I never

considered myself a role model for others. I was more concern about making it for myself.” P4 said, “I tell them (my followers) to make them remember you. Always present excellent work ethics.” P2 said, “I have always been the type of person who tried to help anyone when I could. My thoughts as being a role model is the demonstration that if I can do, it so can you.” P10 said, “If there is anything I can do to minimize the struggles of the person coming up next, that, is what I do. If I notice someone going down an unfruitful path then I try to redirect him or her.” P2 said, “After observing me, they (followers) have gone into business for themselves.” P16 said, “I never considered myself a role model. When I worked for different corporations, I did my job and expected others to do their job. I believed that if there was a position you wanted, apply for the position.” P5 said, “When African American women are successful, we open the door for the next African American woman to be successful. When we empower African American women in positions of leadership, we assist with removing stereotyping and stigmas placed on African American women.” P6 said, “I never believed I was a role model for others until I began to be promoted by that time, African American women were obtaining positions and promotions.” P8 stated, “I really do not consider myself to be a role model for anyone because I was forced to take the back roads to get where I am. I hope no one else is subjected to what I have experienced to get where I am.”

P1 said,

I never believed I was a role model for others until I began to be promoted by that time, African American women were obtaining positions and promotions. I now see more new African American

women coming in, they are impressed with my title but, do not realize how long it took me to get it. These new African American women are arriving with advanced degrees and confidence. I am happy for them but I cannot say that everyone is.

P18 said,

I find it a privilege to be a role model for others, especially African American women. I impress on them that we have the ability to do and be whatever we want and I feel that I am living proof. I am proof that African American women dreams can come true. It is not easy but I got there and other people can do the same.

P20 stated,

I believe that African American women have to overcome things that women of other races do not have to overcome. That does not mean working harder at our daily task. I do not see myself as a representative for others. I see myself as a representative for the (Black) African American people who work here. When we are at an event and I see them all sitting together, I do not mine going over and telling them, they need to break "this" up. I tell them to go mingle with other people. How else will they get the chance to speak with a VP, so, I reach out to them.

P5 said,

As an African American woman role model, I try to do my best and demonstrate that success for us is possible. Being the only African American woman in most cases in my professional settings, I try to encourage other African American women to join me. There have been plenty that have tried but they fall through the cracks. I always felt because of this, I had to hold myself at a higher standard because I am at a double disadvantage being African American and an African American woman. I strive for a level of excellence.

P7 said,

As far as being a good leader, I question myself. I question my ability, and myself whether I would be a good leader. What do they think of me? These are the thoughts that go through your mind. It is one thing to have obstacles but when you are placed in a leadership position, you tend to start judging yourself, actually wonder if you will be a good leader. This is a good question because you should always question yourself on whether you will be a good leader or not. By questioning yourself, it keeps you mindful of your position as well as being the leader that you want to be. At different points of my life, I would often hear people say that "If I am ever in that person's shoes or in a position of such one day, I will never treat a person that way or this way. Now,

that I am in the position, I reflect back on the comments as well as look at my ability to lead and skill sets.

Mentoring. Mentoring others was mentioned by 55% of the interviewed participants. P14 said, “Yes, I have been a mentor. My experience has been a rewarding one because I watched women and men grow professionally using the knowledge I provided.”

P15 stated,

Yes, it was good to have someone under my tutelage. By being in the educational industry, I find myself in the position to be a mentor to many as well as have several mentees. Being in the educational as well, as the film industry. I am able to explain to my mentee the good, bad and the ugly side of both industries, especially concerning being an African American woman in these industries. Both industries are geared towards being an industry dominated by male leaders.

P16 said,

Yes, I mentor others but in a group format through public speaking. I was a member of the "Making it Count" through Monster.com. It was a national speaker network. I received the opportunity to travel and meet different participants about their aspirations. While doing so, I was able to impart my own advice and encouragement to them.

P10 said,

Yes, I am always in the role of a mentor to several different people. Mentoring has been a rewarding experience. I always have been an advocate for African American (Black) women for having a mentor. Someone who is in the higher positions or have been in the positions to demonstrate to others as to how it is done. I believe everyone should have a mentor, especially people coming up in the ranks. Having a mentor lessens the debacle of traveling in circles, while trying to be successful.

P1 said,

Yes, I have been a mentor. I have had a few mentees and all of them have been females. The majority of my mentees have at least an undergraduate degree and the rest are non-degreed. I actually prefer to work with the non-degreed because they need the extra help on refinement. My experience with the degreed mentees is that they feel they are not moving up fast enough with their degree. I explain to them that they cannot just walk into the corner office because, they have a degree, experience is a requirement. I am discovering, those with advanced degrees are receiving hands on training in their career field, either physically or virtually. We never received anything of such 30 years ago.

P13 said,

My corporation often adopted local high schools, which gave me the several chances to mentor. I found mentoring these young adults to be a learning opportunity for all of us. It made me feel good and the mere fact that I showed them I cared, they begin to show more concern for their future.

P7 said,

No, I have not in terms of a formal or structured mentor-mentee relationship. I believe I have mentored several on an informal level. I also feel that I have been successful at this undertaken because I begin with having the right interest in those involved for their progress. I draw out the positive in them.

I feel like every day I am at work, I am someone's mentor.

In contrast, the other participants were not real supporters of mentoring others.

P17 said, "No, I am too busy to be a personal mentor. I am still trying to get to my proper place in my career." P8 stated, "No. I have not formally mentored anyone." P9 said, "No, not on a structural level but, every single day, employees come in my office to solicit feedback on something they are working on. So, I think I help in some way."

Theme 5: Race and gender perceptions. Table 9 below shows subthemes associated with the theme race and gender perceptions, including the number and percentages of participants who addressed each subtheme.

Table 9 Theme 5 –Race and Gender Perceptions

Subthemes	Addressed by # of Participants	% of Participants
Perceptions about African American women	7	35
Perceptions about humans	3	15
Perceptions about white males	2	10
Perceptions about women	2	10

Perceptions of African American women. Thirty-five percent of interviewed participants mentioned perceptions of African American women for example, P2 stated, “As African American women when we were raised, we were taught to fight for what we wanted.” P2 said, “Regardless of how high we rise in our profession, other races only see us as Black Women.”

P12 said,

My thoughts consist of why we, as African American women do not try to help one another on a consistent basis. I have witness African American women walking in a room and will walk around the whole room and not speak to another African American woman. White people do not do that.

P15 stated,

I am not sure if you want opinions but to me there are not barriers to keep us from going after our goals. We should continue to reach our goals. Being a woman and African American does not make us less capable.

P19 said,

I think there is a lot of work that needs to be done because we as African American women are not seen as equals. An African American woman has to take on male characteristics in order to advance. However, if you take on too much of the male characteristics, you are view differently so, you have to find the balance. It is still difficult for women to have careers and a family. Many organizations talk about work, life, balance however, it is not supported at many of the jobs.

P19 stated,

I have experienced with African American people that some believed because we both are African American that they would have the ability to get away with things others cannot. This is not the case. When I make an assignment, I expect the assignment to be completed by whom I assigned it to, on time. I recognize that I cannot treat everyone the same, the experiences will be different because we are different people. We have different cultures. I believe as African American women we need to network outside of our comfort zone as well as make others feel comfortable networking with us.

P2 said,

African American (Black) women have to and have worked much harder than any other race to get what they wanted. Yet, it is so easy for them to lose what they worked hard for quicker than the other races. When other races see us excelling, they look at us and wish we were White instead of wishing us well as African American women. The hate is to the point where many African American (Black) women, wish they were a different race. I called this brainwashing. They have been subjected to so much hate, discredit, inequality, and unfairness; they long to not be African American women. This same brain washing has caused self-hatred as well as hatred of anything that mirrors them. Their self-hatred has led to repeating the same actions other races used against African American women. African American women have been conditioned to not help other African American women; to not like or be happy for other African American women. The Jim Crow indoctrination did a number on African Americans. The damage of Jim Crow lives on today. We as African American women need to wake up and realize that we can have anything that anyone else has. We also need to realize that it does not have to happen to just one of us, it can happen for all of us.

P20 stated,

I did not know if there is a formal diversity plan but the owners' perspective in this industry has developed into significant diversity. I am the only (Black) African American female senior manager. Actually, I am the only African American female in the entire company. There is a large number of other, what is considered minority races; I am the only African American female. Today was the first time I actually said it and thought about it. When I was younger and worked in other companies, I often was the only African American and would notice it. Today, I am in a point of my life that if I am in a position where I can bring someone on, then fine, if I cannot, fine. I do not make a stink that there is not any other (Blacks) African Americans. When I was younger at other companies, I could not affect the numbers and it bothered me not seeing any other African Americans. Now I am in position where I can affect the numbers and it no longer bothers me.

Perceptions of humans. Perceptions of humans were mentioned by 15% of the interview participants. P14 said, "As far as men goes, we have to ensure that we are three times as good as men and twice as good as White women."

P13 said,

As women, we should not isolate ourselves as just being women in leadership positions. We are leaders, just be a leader. Many women

believe they had to be manly in order to move up the corporate ladder in a male dominated hierarchy. This is not true. In today's culture, everything is centered on the bottom line, which is profit. To be a productive employee, you have to be cognizant of what is profitable and what is not. Some males, because of their cultural upbringing, they resent the fact that you are a woman. In today's culture, this type of male does not represent the overall new-aged organizational culture. The prevalent values of many organizations are that women are an intricate part of every organization, or corporation. They play a pivotal role in the economy because when you are dealing domestically and globally, you are not dealing with only men. You are dealing with women, as well. Now, these corporations need to realize the importance of having African American women in high-level corporate positions for the same reasons. Domestically and globally, African American women are an intricate part of our society and economy. In order to get and retain our business, they must demonstrate that we are valued members of their corporation and not just customers.

P14 stated,

Now, we have two women in charge and I can see the direct changes for the better of our organization. It would be easy to say it was because we have women in charge but I think it has more to do with

having the right kind of leadership. Women offered more support to everyone oppose to men only mainly trusting other men.

Perceptions of white males. Ten percent of interviewed participants mentioned perceptions of white males. P2 stated, “White men think they should always lead (white privilege). They have always thought themselves to better leaders than African Americans.” P9 said, “It (discrimination) is something that they (white men) would like to keep going but be silent about it.”

P2 said,

Although we (African Americans) were on top in our chosen industry, White people would not join our company. I am not sure if this was to ensure they did not assist us in remaining on top, or what was the reason. I will tell you this, money is green and people of any color can make it.

Perceptions of women. Ten percent of interviewed participants mentioned perceptions of women.

P3 said,

A group of professional women just do not hang out the same way a group of men hang out, the things that they do and the things that they call each other to do. While they are nice and cordial to you but you will never be a part of "that" group.

P14 said,

As women, we have to stick together and encourage each other. We as women, once we make it, we have to reach back and get other women.

This is the only way we are going to be able to get ahead and be able to keep up with the men. I am an advocate of organizations that support women in their professionalism. Men are going to take care of each other so we as women, have to take care of one another.

Summary

Chapter 4 contained the data derived from the qualitative narrative phenomenological study design used to explore, through lived experiences, to reveal African American women are underrepresented at the senior executive level of Corporate America in large U.S. corporations headquartered in Houston, TX, of the United States (Freeman, 2012; Stewart, Wells, & Ross, 2011). The interview guide was used to understand and analyze data collected from the 20 participants on their lived experiences in senior-level positions to answer the following research question: What are the lived experiences or perceptions that influenced the current styles of leadership of African American women in senior level positions? The semi-structured interviews were recorded and transcribed. The data was analyzed to identify the experiences and additional themes presented. The analysis also identified the data collection and analysis methodologies. The analysis and examination of responses were conducted using Dedoose 3.3 © qualitative software and manual processing to determine Themes. The data analysis process conveyed five emergent Themes with subthemes. The Themes

were Organizational Practices Leading to Inequalities, Diversity, Journey to Leadership, Leadership Practices, and Perceptions about gender and race. Chapter 5 presents the analysis of the results, conclusions, and recommendations for further research into the lived experiences of African American women in senior-level positions.

Chapter 5

Discussion, Recommendations and Conclusion

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to research the problem of underrepresentation by exploring the lived experiences and perceptions of African American women holding senior level positions within corporations headquartered in Houston, TX. The study also investigated professional challenges such as salary gaps, promotion factors, leadership development, as well as, faced barriers to include gender and racial discrimination in the workplace.

A total of 97 pages of qualitative data were collected via semi-structured interviews with participation from twenty African American women in senior corporate positions. Interviews were transcribed in MS Word and uploaded to Dedoose for coding and thematic analysis. The analyzed the data was surveyed for identified data pattern of responses, as well as, disconfirming evidence in order to add credibility to the identified themes (Creswell, 2007). Upon locating disconfirming evidence, data differing from the consensus in the themes, verification of the transcripts was preformed to ensure no remote information was missed. Five main Themes emerged from the qualitative data: a) Organizational Practices Leading to Inequalities, b) Diversity, c) Journey to Leadership, d) Leadership Practices, e) Perceptions about Gender and Race. Each of these Themes reflects a unique aspect of African American women's lived experiences relative to being underrepresented in corporate America. Chapter 5 includes a discussion of the finds and comparisons.

Interpretation of Results

This chapter presents a summary of the research results. An analysis of the data will allow for validating of the results adequately explaining the research question.

Theme 1: Organizational Practices Leading to Inequalities.

Discrimination today tends to be more subtle and can often be directly attributable to unconscious bias. Theme 1 provides an explanation as to the discriminatory practices, which are organizational practices leading to inequalities encountered by African American women in leadership positions. The study includes African American women in, as well as, aspiring to be in senior-level management in corporate America or corporate agencies. African American women experience difficulties when attempting to progress to and within senior-level management. These difficulties include barriers not experienced on the same level as white women in the same position. African American women experience subjection to double jeopardy, which is the discrimination of women of African American women heredity; a term coined to separate two different types of discrimination against one segment of people. Male dominance and sexism are additional barriers contributing to discrimination against African American women.

African American women have to deal with being discriminated against because of being African American but to receive additional discrimination as an African American woman decreases promotion chances at a greater rate. Thirty percent of the participants mentioned receiving negative reviews when promotion consideration was discussed, although they were top performers. During promotional periods, “minorities say that their evaluations are less thorough or careful than those given to whites”, lessening promotional opportunities (American College of Healthcare Executives, 2008;

Gipson, 2009; Kingkade, 2012). In the current study, all of the participants stated that prior to them refuting the feedback they received; they would receive poor rates regardless of how well they performed. One participant stated, “I was in a position where my managers felt threatened by education, they rated me poorly to stunt my growth because I had more education than them; as I progressed through the ranks, my ratings became better but they ensured I did not move too quickly.” Out of all of the interviewed participants, one stated “I excelled without formal education and believed I would have not accomplished nearly as much with a degree.” I was able to progress through the ranks as ‘being one of them’, meaning without the threat of education.” There is literature about the barriers African American women experience in the workplace but not as much concerning the leadership success and expertise experience within organizations. The current research offers an exploration of the leadership characteristics, barriers, success strategies and resilience of African American women leaders through their own experiences.

Data related to theme 1 suggest the limited or even non-existence of professional African American women role models has led to isolation of qualified individuals who are dealing with double jeopardy on a professional level. This is an indication that African American women are underrepresented in corporate America. African American women experienced barriers of the lack of others similar to themselves in high positions, which could assist them to advancing to the higher-level positions. Having the ability to see African American women in senior-level positions provides motivation to achieve higher, as well as, the possibility for access to knowledge unavailable at lower levels of management. The data produced from the current study shared information of deplorable

experiences of discriminating actions by way of the Good Old Boys Network. The Good Ole Boy Network has always consisted of (usually, older) white men in power. Double Jeopardy is another Good Ole Boy Network strategy to keep African American women off the corporate ladder. The said club or network provided privileged opportunity for those that resembled the look and like of the current members. Despite having the required education and qualifications, African American women experience difficulty in securing high level positions in organizations with prevalent good ole boys networks and clubs.

Experiences of exclusion from better opportunities, given to white men or white women with subpar qualifications have persisted for African American women. Accredited with being life-long leaders—African American women lack access to the training, secret clubs and perks given to white men and white women. African American women are viewed as being different from white men and white women. These networks and clubs have established themselves as the gate keepers of the senior level positions, were as, making every effort to keep African American women, as well as, anyone who does not look like club members. The Good Ole Boys Network is a major professional growth impediment for African American women in corporate America. One of the most critical barriers to diversity in the workforce involves the eradication of barriers to entry and attainment of senior-level positions for those who are not both White and male; through the works of the good ole boy network. The good ole boy network is also known as the phenomenon of breaking the glass ceiling, indicating strong needs to take action against such behaviors. A glass ceiling mechanism occurs when African American

women have a hard time penetrating the good ole boys club in many corporate environments.

The study raised the theory of white privilege, as a benefit of being White. African American women living in a “white world”, visualize white privilege as being akin to suffering. White privilege provides the norm or standard by which all other things are judged. White privilege is the upper echelon of racism and the benefactors have created a world in their own image and a system of values that reinforces the power and privilege of those who are white. The study participants opined the need for workplace trust and respect which produced common dialogue that trust and respect only went as far as being lead and not as true leaders. Experiences of measurements by different sets of standards in the workplace; having to work twice as hard as African American women than a white male or white female emerged from the data. Their professional growth and success has been limited due to lack of access to resources. These lived experiences and perceptions influence the current leadership styles of African American women by causing them to be aware of their actions towards their subordinates. African American women have developed resilience from the adversity of discriminatory treatment. Experiencing subjection to unfair and unequal treatment causes those being subjected to be more mindful of proper business practices.

Theme 2: Diversity.

Organizational diversity programs and the value of diversity in the workplace as expressed by participants was the focus of Theme 2 and related subthemes. Diversity in the workplace is the practice of having a mixture of racial, ethnic, national origin, cultural, sex, socioeconomic, and personal differences represented in the workforce.

Diversity can be defined differently but are essentially people from different groups, even races or identities working together in a defined system (Jackson, 2009). The findings of this study in relation to diversity express the multifaceted character of diversity. Diversity involves more than practicing a mixture of different races. It also involves the mixture of different thought processes. Having individuals with the capability to think independently creates a diverse environment. Through diversity, the atmosphere for embracing everyone is created. With diversity, everyone's voice has the opportunity to be heard. One participant stated, "She was appalled by African American women requesting to be a part of corporations headed by Whites." She continued that, "African American women should start their own corporations and not mix with others." A common subtheme emerging from the participant's data was that there was an official approach and a reality to diversity in corporate America and those two do not always align. The official approach consisted of the legal aspects of diversity to remain a global business, ensuring an increased bottom line.

Despite the diversity of the current workforce, barriers and limitations still exist for some. In most corporations, diversity program are in place, however, the organizations are far from being diverse in top management. The findings corroborate the statistics showing most top level executives in corporate America are white males. The unifying effect of diversity can only be achieved if it is practiced throughout the entire organization and not just in parts. Diverse opportunity improves performance in the global marketplace for organizations that work with diverse employee labor markets and findings should contribute to better decision making process within organizations on a global level since effective decision making models have been attributed to better

organizational performance. Understanding diversity is understanding the differences as well as talents of individuals who may not look or think the same as the current inhabitants.

Diversity is a majority component in organizational success and the advancement of African American women in leadership roles. This study may assist with creating leadership models and competencies not previously addressed by other researchers. Organizational diversity in senior-level management within the corporate America does not appear to be a subject many are interested enough in to expand. In order for senior-level management diversity to move to the forefront of discussion, repackaging, promotion and persuasive selling of the idea is in order. The lack of senior-level management diversity or gender neutrality proved to be a barrier to advancement and ability to shatter the glass ceiling for African American women. The current study revealed there was no magic formula for expanding diversity at this level instead increasing the representation of African American women diverse thinkers, cultivating environments receptive to leadership development and making it available to all regardless of race or sex. An organization committed to diversity initiatives would cause a shift in the current organizational culture. When more leaders believe there is a need to include all employees (regardless of race and sex) and remove barriers to achievement, the more successful the organization becomes.

Theme 3: Journey to Leadership.

Theme 3 and the subthemes relate to the strategies employed by participants to reach and succeed in their journey to leadership positions. Education is the key factor in professional growth. Eighty percent of the participant's agree to the importance of

educating yourself. This self-education included pursuing advanced degrees or simply an undergrad degree. Educating one's self professionally is fundamental in professional development. Staying current in your profession should be as rewarding as it is an obligation. According to Combs (2003), the stigma placed on African American women as being unable to lead and unqualified for the positions available to them, made possible by affirmative action; undermines the potential talent and knowledge, thought to contribute to developing African American women's leadership abilities. There is often misconception centered on the skill set and leadership of African American women. The glass ceiling convey existing barriers for women by assuming incompetence compared to their male counterparts which hinders acceptance by others within the organization as leaders. Awareness of the misconception should not cause discouragement but yet motivation to not become stagnant in their professional growth. To remiss and underutilize the talents of African American women is a disservice to any corporation.

African American women utilize management, strategic planning and empowerment as essential leadership traits to influence their current leadership styles. Recognizing the abilities, as well as, the talents offered by African American women as attributes to improving organizations may lead to eradicating promotion discrimination. It is imperative for African American women to take every opportunity to lead to expand their professional, as well as, personal growth. If leadership is the ultimate goal, African American woman should seek other ways to accomplish the goal such as taking assignments outside of the normal scope of their position. Develop vital new skills to add to current skills, while utilizing them in another organization. Look for opportunities to

work in a skill base higher than current position. Use every opportunity to get skills and education to build knowledgebase.

The African American women participants felt determination kept them on the professional trajectory for successful careers. Some of the participants attributed controlling their own destiny by being entrepreneurial spirited. This dialogue is consistent with the research by Butter and Moore (1997), who found African American women were most motivated to become entrepreneurs when they experienced the barriers that kept them from breaking the corporate glass ceilings. Entrepreneurial spirited professional African American women possess characteristics of motivation and professional experience, which are success factors in entrepreneurship. Many participants conveyed mutual experiences of limited growth within their corporation, which lead them to pursue entrepreneurship. One participant said, “my corporation refused to compensate me fairly for all the money I made for them so, I decided to stop making it for them and make it for myself.” Another participant stated, “African American women should realize that they have to wait their turn to lead.”

Many participants mentioned networking as a means for gaining access to “the right people” or “the right conversations” (Evans & Diekman, 2006). The sense of the right people included acquiring mentors. According to Hite (2004), African American women have suggested that access to people who may assist with career advancement is more limited for them than compared to the access to career advancement of their White female counterparts. Research consistently reflects the invaluable mentorship and training developed in informal social networks, along with an exchange of pertinent career growth information (Igasaki, 2011). Although, African American women have

made progression with educational attainment, disparities such as racial inequality, lack of mentorship as well as, publication scrutiny, continue to persist that prevent them from moving up the professional ladder.

Mentorship is a very important element in professional development, playing a significant role in the ability to move up the corporate ladder. Noting the benefits of mentorship, many have refused the opportunity and prefer to not be mentored. Positive mentoring provides the structure and direct information required to obtain promotions. It also provided gateways to network with influential members of senior management. In most cases, new employees begin their careers without the personal knowledge of their co-workers or upper management. It is to their advantage to develop a mentorship with a seasoned (veteran) employee who has a successful career and does not mind assisting with career building. Taking advantage of a one-on-one interaction with a higher-level employee provides career direction and emotional support to the lower-level new employee. The beginning days for a new employee consists of training for the job. A good mentor provides the instruction around most hurdles and the guidance for clearer career pathways. African American women should take advantage of mentoring relationships to assist with building essential knowledge outside of professional training. Mentorship is extremely significant and is the missing link for being afforded the opportunity for advancement. African American women must take the responsibility of seeking out mentorships if the opportunity is not presented automatically.

Theme 4: Leadership Practices.

Participants' leadership styles, role modeling, and mentoring others were discussed in Theme 4, as well as, the subthemes. Participants discussed specific aspects

of their lives that attributed to their trajectory to professional leadership. According to Northouse (2007) leadership is not dependent on the position, title or privilege, but is instead associated with the capacity to influence others by creating a vision and inspiring by advocacy. Historically, in the United States, African American women have suffered along the sides of African American men and have continued experiencing oppressive treatment in today's society (Zamani, 2003). Recent studies by Northouse (2007) indicated that the leadership perspective of African American women in senior-level corporate American positions is the opportunity for inclusion; to provide essential strategies for respectful entry into the white male dominated culture of organizations. The bias from society towards African American women in leadership roles are derivatives of their refusal to conform to societal expectations of African American women. Society acknowledges the intelligence and skills of African American women when it is convenient or advantageous for them but deny the reward of leadership roles at will. African American women must continue to take a stand against the dismissive perceptions from societal conformity.

The participants subscribed to different leadership styles, which supported their way of leading in their personal professions. The leading leadership attributes involved collaboration and service, which essentially included working together with others. One participant stated, "I am always learning from my subordinates, and try to be servant by being open to receiving information even if it is coming from the janitor or the highest-level person in the company." Another participant stated, "I am mindful that there are people always watching you and how you conduct yourself; I am recognized because I remove pride and conduct myself in the upmost of integrity." African American women

must not fall victim to the thoughts of others. Their value is not diminished by one's who do not attempt to know their worth.

Although reputation ranked highly in common dialogue, role modeling and mentoring others were considered a matter of preference. Some of the mentored participants paid it forward through mentoring others. An increase in professional career-minded individuals as mentors would close the gap in areas lacking mentorship and motivation within organizations. One participant stated, "I made myself available to mentor ...to assist others in maneuvering past the unnecessary experiences that I had to contend with as I climbed the corporate ladder." All of the fore mentioned factors assist with getting into a profession but it does require good work ethics, a positive attitude as well as, knowing your self-worth to remain in a profession successfully (Chesterman & Ross, 2011).

Theme 5: Perceptions about gender and race.

Participant's perceptions about individuals of race and gender differences were discussed through Theme 5 and the subthemes. Even in today's society, it is not uncommon for other races to have several perceptions of African American women and even cumulative perceptions of them as a race. The perceptions include "having an attitude", "being an angry black woman", "being loud", "being ghetto", as well as, being "unable to lead". The participants all battled negative stereotypical perceptions throughout their professional journey. One participant said, "I would not have become the successful leader I am, if I had demonstrated any of the stereotypical tendencies they [white people] expected." Another participant stated, "I am accepted for who I am and

not what [white people] think I should be.” “I am free to be me regardless of how different I am.”

Although there are many efforts to improve the experiences of African American women, their experiences are still shaped by cultural forces that often demean, disadvantage and deny them equal access and opportunity (Ergüner-Tekinalp, 2009; Atkinson & Hackett, 1998; Jones, 1997). Society as a whole influences the perception of African American women significantly. The majority of these perceptions are negative by means of bias, misogynistic images or plain ignorance. These same perceptions have tainted the possibility of leadership roles and diversity within organizations. These perceptions were attributed to the stereotypes about African American women based on what society believed were their behaviors and societal roles. Because of these stereotypes, African American women faced challenges that are born from beliefs about African American women characteristics and the subsequent attributes of African Americans. The findings of this study may inspire businesses and corporations not only to understand diversity initiatives but also to institute more innovative initiatives in relation to ending the racial stereotypes known to be obstacles for African American women in their companies (Dickerson, 2006; Browne, 2000).

There are several perceptions about humans by every race. Humans are “loving”, “heart-less”, “opportunistic” and “manipulative”. The severity of the perception depends on the individual and the position they take on the subject. Societal perceptions of what males or females are typically, is the stereotypical assessment, which causes advantages for one and disadvantages for the other. For centuries, the perception of white males being better leaders has been perpetuated. There have not been any sure findings to this

perpetuation. In contrast, the perceptions of women as being better nurturers oppose to leaders have continued through the same time span.

Theoretical Implications

The findings of this study have implications for generating further understanding of the underrepresentation of African American women in Corporate America and in senior leadership positions. The majority of the themes that emerged from this study (Diversity, Leadership Practices, Race and Gender Issues) are consistent with the underrepresentation of African American women taxonomy developed by Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (GAO, 2010) while other themes from this study potentially extends the taxonomy. The study reflected that African American women are highly underrepresented in senior level positions within corporations. The study showed that minorities held 10% of such positions compared to 17% of all other supervisory positions. African American women held only 3% of the total 10% senior level positions (GAO, 2010).

Implications from the study also provided awareness of men regarding the barriers preventing women from reaching career levels paralleling men, as well as, limitations and challenges African American women face in corporate senior-level. This is not an individual problem but a problem for society as a group, which illustrates additional effort is required for the creation of an impartial and just environment for all people in the workforce. The research findings may contribute to the educational awareness on racial and gender inequality considering that this study explored experiences of underrepresentation due to racial and gender issues, within the context of business leadership. An important contribution of this study that extends the previous

literature and understanding of racial and gender inequality is that it explored developmental and educational strategies for deterring such behaviors. Specifically, these findings can help to advance the scholarship on literature concerning glass ceilings, with the inclusion of double jeopardy and the Good Ole Boys network, preventing them from moving up the promotion ladder (Haizlip, 2012). In addition, the findings of this study illustrate how unchangeable factors, such as being African American and female, can attribute to the feelings of diminished value as well as, open the gateway to entrepreneurship.

Implications for Leadership

The perpetuated racial and gender gap at senior-management levels across all industries originate from antiquated perceptions of the different roles of certain races and genders in life and in work. African American women continue to be under-represented in senior-level positions versus the lower-level positions in many fields despite the fact that they make up nearly half of the workforce and more than half of new university graduates in the United States (Brinson, 2006). Scharmer (2009) emphasized that leadership can be distributed and shared, but that does not mean everyone is, or must become, a leader. However, if an individual is qualified and possess the required skills; race or gender should not be a factor.

African American women experience subjection to double jeopardy, which is the discrimination of women of African American women heredity; a term coined to separate two different types of discrimination against one segment of people. Having to deal with being discriminated against because of being African American but to receive additional discrimination as African American woman decreases promotability tremendously

(Sylvester, 2006). Current study findings conferred implications of influential double jeopardy on the leadership experiences as it pertains to African American women in corporate America.

Recent research shows that gender diversity pays off and that there is a positive correlation between African American women in leadership and business performance (Lott, 2009). To compete on a global level, the understanding should be that customers are diverse in race and gender. The same understanding should be demonstrated throughout the corporation. The understanding should also exist that customers are more willing to patron corporations with leadership mirroring them. Senior-level management, as well as, researchers and practitioners may use the findings of the study by focusing on the theoretical frameworks that address double jeopardy in organizations and leadership practices (Lott, 2009).

Limitations and Recommendations

Study limitations and assumptions were initially outlined and discussed in chapter 1. How these study limitations and assumptions played out over the course of the study was reviewed in this section. Issues reviewed was the honesty and time constraints of the selected study population, the size of the sample, the ability to generalize the findings and the assumptions made by the definition of leadership development.

According to Leedy and Ormrod (2005), the findings of qualitative studies are potentially specific to a particular perspective and not transferable to other contexts. There are limitations in all research studies, and the genuine investigator is cognizant of the assistance required in arbitrating the study's legitimacy (Cooper & Schindler, 2006, p. 534). The limitations of a study help identify any areas of potential weakness (Creswell,

2009), and reflect study conditions beyond the control of the researcher (Simon, 2011). Significant limitations of the present study included the honesty of participants during their interviews, as well as, how liberal they were in information elaboration. The limitation included time constraints by the participants. The time constraints involved the number of participants with time available to participate in the study. The small sample from the population may pose a significant limitation in terms of the ability to generalize the findings to not only the study population but also the population in general (Leedy & Ormrod, 2010).

Significant delimitations of the present study included not reaching out to individual corporations for potential participants. This decision was made in order to preserve quality research time, which would be better served during data analysis. There were several populations, which were considered for the current study. The considered populations included white men and white women in senior-level positions. These additional populations were dismissed to ensure the select phenomena of African American women in senior-level positions were captured. The final delimitation involved elimination of possible other methodology. The other possible methodology was Quantitative. Quantitative proved to not be the most effective type of methodology due to the inability to properly explain the basis of the participant's experiences in statistical measurements or size. Quantitative research is effectively the collecting of raw data, whilst Qualitative research is the interpretation and analysis of this data in order to find underlying meaning. The purpose of the research was to explore the phenomenon of women's experiences of leadership development in an in-depth way rather than establish a statistically significant argument about how or why the phenomenon occurred.

Qualitative methodology was chosen and was the most effective methodology for this study because it involves focusing on understanding the social phenomenon from the perspective of the involved participants of the study.

Recommendations for organizational leaders

The framework of the study necessitated exploring participant experiences with the underrepresentation of African American women in corporate America. 1) I encourage the private sector, governments, as well as social associates to prevail in ensuring racial and gender balance in senior-level positions, which is good for businesses and the economy 2) Business leaders must support diversity initiatives by recruiting and retaining the best employees selected from the broadest pool of human capital; and extend their leader search beyond white males 3) The inclusion of African American women in senior-level positions must become a priority to global as well as local businesses, and 4) Corporations should implement specific tools to foster the leadership potential of African American women – role models, mentoring and networking.

Recommendations for African American women in professional jobs

Based on the study's finding, African American women must become and remain visible within their organizations and communities. I encourage talented African American women to commit to applying for board membership in companies and move forward as candidates for top positions. I encourage them to continue to educate themselves personally as well as professionally to ensure they are qualified to attain any position within the corporation. This study supports the belief that African American women in senior level positions or who aspire to participate in the ranks must be prepared, ready to compete, have the ability to prove their capabilities. Know your value.

Recognize the value in yourself, work hard, persevere, and be willing to take structural criticism, refuse abuse. This is disheartening especially when you are working hard and the recognition you should receive is given to someone else. As discouraging as this may be, continue working smart if leadership is the ultimate goal. When you are underappreciated and the opportunity to leave is presented, be courageous enough to leave. Recognize that confidence is not conceit and it is a value in leadership. Understand that good leaders empower others and not oppress them.

Recommendations for further studies

Additional studies on African American women populations could improve the comprehension of how to encourage organizational inclusion of African American women, most effectively through racial and gender diversity. Continuous research could benefit corporations as well as, federal agencies by offering and understanding the importance of inclusion of all races and both genders on every hierarchical level. Further study recommendations include examining whether there should be a more customized approach to professional development for African American women in senior-level positions and for those with senior-level aspirations. The final recommendation for further research could include incorporating specialized mentorships for African American women in different hierarchical levels, including branching out to colleges and high school African American young women.

Conclusions and Summary

This qualitative phenomenological study was designed to understand the underrepresentation of African American women in corporate America. Limited research exists regarding this selected group of successful women. The participants of this study

harmonized on the negative affect of double jeopardy in contrast with the benefits of racial and gender equality. Through this study, it was discovered that all participants agreed that professional development, formal education, mentoring, as well as, networking were key in assisting them in obtaining senior-level management positions.

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Appendix A

Draft Pilot Study Description

Investigator Contact Information

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This Pilot Study was created to test the user friendliness and comprehension of interview questions for the study you agreed to participate in: A

PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF UNDERREPRESENTATION OF SENIOR LEVEL AFRICAN AMERICAN WOMEN IN CORPORATIONS. Please rate the questions according to provided rate information and in accordance to your comprehension of the provided information. Thank you.

Rate The Questions:

After reading the interview questions, please rate them according to the information below:

- 1-The question was not understandable.
- 2-The question was somewhat not understandable.
- 3-The question was neither not understandable or understandable.
- 4-The question was somewhat understandable.
- 5-The question was understandable.

What are the perceived factors that contribute to the success of African American women leadership experience?

1. How has your formal education affected the productivity in your position?
2. How would you describe your organization's diversity program?
3. Explain why you think the Affirmative Action Plan is important or not?
4. How would you describe discrimination towards you as an African American women or any other African American woman in your organization, if any?
5. If there has been some discrimination against you as an African American woman, how would you describe your experience?
6. Do you believe African American women have to work harder than other races and other genders, if so, explain your experience?
7. How do you feel being the representative of such a small group (African American and African American women) in your organization?
8. Have you thought about leaving your job because of race and/or gender-related problems?
9. How would you describe the organizational support and trust towards you as an African American woman?
10. How do you describe your working life experiences within your profession in comparison to other races or other genders?
11. How do feel you are perceived individually, educationally and professionally within your organization?
12. What type of professional developmental programs have you been offered?
13. What type of professional developmental programs have you initiated for yourself?

14. How has the developmental programs assisted with your professional progression?
15. Do you have a mentor? How would you describe your mentor/mentee relationship?
16. How has your mentorship assisted with your professional progression?
17. What leadership qualities are most prominent in senior-level African-American women?
18. What is your preferred style of leadership? As an African-American woman in your position how has your leadership style affected you lead?
19. What type of leadership roles or initiatives are you responsible for?
20. The good ole boys club is when men (particularly-white men) are prejudiced against women leaders, how would you describe a group of such at your organization?
21. The glass ceiling is a term for an invisible barrier that exist in an organization that hinders minorities especially women from advancing to leadership positions, how would you describe the existence of a glass ceiling in your organization, if any?
22. Would you like to contribute any additional information about female leaders?

Appendix B

Research Question

The qualitative phenomenological study explores lived experiences and perceptions of African American women holding senior level positions within large U.S. corporations, headquartered in Houston, TX. Those who have currently or formerly held in positions of chief finance officer (CFO), chief operating officer (COO), chief information officer (CIO), and chief executive officer or equivalent and maintained their positions for a minimum of two years were sought for participation. This purpose was achieved by answering the following research question:

RQ1. What are the lived experiences or perceptions that influenced the current styles of leadership of African American women in senior level positions?

Appendix C

Draft Instrument for Data Collection

Time: _____ Date: _____

Location: _____ PIN: _____

What are the perceived factors that contribute to the success of African American women leadership experience?

1. How has your formal education affected the productivity in your position?
2. How would you describe your organization's diversity program?
3. Explain why you think the Affirmative Action Plan is important or not?
4. How would you describe discrimination towards you as an African American women or any other African American woman in your organization, if any?
5. If there has been some discrimination against you as an African American woman, how would you describe your experience?
6. Do you believe African American women have to work harder than other races and other genders, if so, explain your experience?
7. How do you feel being the representative of such a small group (African American and African American women) in your organization?
8. Have you thought about leaving your job because of race and/or gender-related problems?
9. How would you describe the organizational support and trust towards you as an African American woman?

10. How do you describe your working life experiences within your profession in comparison to other races or other genders?
11. How do feel you are perceived individually, educationally and professionally within your organization?
12. What type of professional developmental programs have you been offered?
13. What type of professional developmental programs have you initiated for yourself?
14. How has the developmental programs assisted with your professional progression?
15. Do you have a mentor? How would you describe your mentor/mentee relationship?
16. How has your mentorship assisted with your professional progression?
17. What leadership qualities are most prominent in senior-level African-American women?
18. What is your preferred style of leadership? As an African-American woman in your position how has your leadership style affected you lead?
19. What type of leadership roles or initiatives are you responsible for?
20. The good ole boys club is when men (particularly-white men) are prejudiced against women leaders, how would you describe a group of such at your organization?
21. The glass ceiling is a term for an invisible barrier that exist in an organization that hinders minorities especially women from advancing to leadership

positions, how would you describe the existence of a glass ceiling in your organization, if any ?

22. Would you like to contribute any additional information about female leaders?