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A phenomenological study of competing priorities and African American women striving to achieve work-life balance

Gayle Colston Barge

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A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF COMPETING PRIORITIES AND

AFRICAN AMERICAN WOMEN STRIVING TO ACHIEVE WORK-LIFE BALANCE

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction

of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Education in Organization Change

by

Gayle Colston Barge

November, 2011

Margaret Weber, Ph.D. — Dissertation Chairperson

This dissertation, written by

Gayle Colston Barge

under the guidance of a Faculty Committee and approved by its members, has been submitted to and accepted by the Graduate Faculty in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

Doctoral Committee:

Margaret Weber, Ph.D., Chairperson

Jennie Spencer Green, Ph.D.

Rogelio Martinez, Ed.D.

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated:

To God, whom I praise, knowing from Him all blessings flow. I glorify your Holy and Righteous Name.

To my phenomenal and loving parents, Geneva Laws Colston and the late Ervin "Mike" Colston for guiding, loving, and nurturing me. You were there from the beginning. Thank you for holding, encouraging, and strengthening me throughout my life and in particular, during this extraordinary journey. Mom, I especially thank you for encouraging me to follow my drummer even when the beat was not like that of others. Your love enables me to dream.

To my amazing, loving, supportive soul mate and husband, Carlos for always believing in my ability to rise to the occasion, persevere against all odds, and stay focused on God's will in my life. Your love was the bridge over tumultuous waters; your love is the wind beneath my wings today and beyond.

To my sons, Darron and Mario, who represent all that Carlos and I hold dear in life. Your love and faith is a priceless gift on which I depend. Your confidence in me made all the difference.

To my maternal grandparents, the late V. C. Laws Sr., and the late Esther Thomas Laws who first instilled in me the importance of education. Your love was unconditional. I am proud to be an heir to your extraordinary legacy of love, compassion, and service to others.

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Dr. Drew and Kathleen Alexander, my sister and brother of the heart, who challenged me to be more than I thought was possible.

Mrs. James Murphy Holloway Spigner, who travelled this path with me, encouraging and challenging me to give my best at all times.

Dr. Troy Lee Roland, my brother and Nava colleague, who coached me and saw me through every step of this experience.

My family in Ohio who kept the light of faith burning bright: Aunt Virginia, Aunt Ethel, Uncle J. R., Aunt Rosanna, Aunt Ida, Aunt Catherine Crandell (in memoriam), and Aunt Gert.

Mrs. Patricia Shanahan, my 10th grade English teacher at Bishop Watterson, who encouraged me to write and express myself when others were silent.

To the phenomenal 30 women who spoke truths from their hearts. Thank you for these gifts from your spirits.

VITA

Gayle Colston Barge

ACADEMIC HISTORY

Minot State University Minot, ND	B.A.	1981
Seton Hall University South Orange, NJ	M.A.	2007

EMPLOYMENT HISTORY

JCPenney Company Plano, TX	Sr. Community Relations Manager	1979–1995
The Barge Group Plano, TX	President	1995–1998
Countrywide Home Loans Plano, TX	Vice President, Marketing PR	1998–2001
Accor Dallas, TX	Director, Corporate Communications	2001–2002
Parker College Dallas, TX	Chief Marketing Officer	2003–2004
Texas Southern University Houston, TX	Director, Marketing Communications	2005–2007
Winston-Salem State Univ. Winston-Salem, NC	Assistant Vice Chancellor	2007–2008
North Texas Community	Volunteer and women's rights advocate	2008-Present

ABSTRACT

Organizations must address a myriad of issues from diversity initiatives to ensuring that work-life programs are responsive to the needs of its fastest growing segment—women of color of which African American women are the largest minority group. Despite the significance of their presence, research to date on the topic of work-life balance and family issues is based primarily on the experiences of middle-class white women.

All women struggle with issues related to work-life conflict. Missing from this dialogue are the voices of African American women. Despite evidence that work is a significant domain in their lives, researchers have limited information about their career experiences or how they integrate the world of work with their personal lives. The intent of this study was to provide, via narratives, diverse views of how African American women conceptualize and balance work and family.

1. How do competing priorities impact the lives of African American women who are striving to achieve work-life balance?

2. What experiences shape the life course of African American women that impact work-family life balance decisions?

3. How do sociodemographic variables influence work-family life decisions?

The research design for this phenomenological study was qualitative. Thirty African American women participated in interviews and provided sociodemographic data. The interviews were taped and downloaded into NVivo9 software that was utilized to analyze the histories of each participant, including developing linkages between sociodemographic data and qualitative data. The analysis was compared with Giele's themes using the theoretical framework from the 4 life course dimensions.

Thirty African American women shared personal and professional experiences affirming their cultural and historical perspectives and commitment to bring their voices to a dialogue that previously marginalized the relevance of their journey. Findings confirmed that relationships, discrimination, ageism, workplace dynamics, and wellness were among the competing priorities impacting their abilities to achieve sustainable balance at home and work. This study challenged previously accepted discourses of scholarship, incorporated new thinking, and facilitated understanding of the historical and socioeconomic impact from African American viewpoints.

Chapter 1: The Problem

Background and Statement of the Problem

Demographic changes in the workforce and workplace during the last 3 decades are accounting for the emergence of a myriad of issues that are impacting every aspect of life for women, their families, and organizations. As women enter the workforce, they are faced with new challenges as leaders and homemakers, charged with the daunting task of managing competing priorities (Daniel, 2004; Noor, 2004; Nordenmark, 2004; Rothbard, Philips, & Dumas, 2005). In particular, discussions and research on the topic of work-life balance are gaining momentum and a prominent place on the national agenda of key thought leaders, including First Lady Michelle Obama, who identified it as a priority during her husband's administration.

According to results from a recent survey conducted by Strategy One, 89% of respondents view work-life balance issues as a difficulty, including 54% who say it is a significant problem (as cited in "Amid economic woes," 2010). The study illustrates how consequences of economic uncertainty extend beyond workplace settings, disrupt family time, and negatively impact efforts to maintain semblances of balance. Additionally, nearly half of American workers (43%), are dissatisfied with their employer's efforts to address this issue. Bird (2006) notes the increase in demand for solutions to the issue of work-life balance is affecting every aspect of organizational culture.

With increasing numbers of women entering and advancing in the workforce, organizations are challenged with addressing complex issues from developing and implementing diversity initiatives to ensuring that work-life programs are responsive to the needs of its fastest growing segment—women of color. Within that segment, African

American women are the largest minority group. Despite the significance of their presence in the workforce, research to date on the topic of work-life balance and family issues is based primarily on the experiences of middle-class white women.

This is in part a result of their ascension to the world of work during the last 4 decades, facilitated by the feminist movement and advocacy by Betty Friedan and Gloria Steinem who encouraged women to leave the confinement of homemaking for corporate settings. Within this assertion, women in general were uniformly categorized without regard for cultural and historical diversity. African American women were inadvertently marginalized without regard to life experiences historically impacted by slavery and other socioeconomic factors. Women of African descent entered the work force based on economic and social necessity, understanding that it was critical for the survival of their families versus doing so out of a need for personal gratification.

Despite the dearth of scholarly research, two studies in 1999 and 2008 provide valuable insights that established a foundation for further research and the nexus for this study. The Center for Women Policy Studies' National Women of Color Work/Life Study (1999) is credited with being the first quantitative study to focus on how women of color in corporate America manage work-life balance. The study, published in 1999, addressed the issue across a diverse population that included African American, African, Latinas, Native American, Asian, and Pacific Islander women, with African American women constituting 52% of respondents. Tucker and Wolfe (2002) stated the findings in part, "reveal the invisible line between the workplace issues defined as "balancing work/life responsibilities and workplace diversity and how the interplay between them affects women of color" (p. 1). The second study, Giele (2008), compared and contrasted

perceived identities of career mothers and stay-at-home mothers. In each instance, these studies contributed to a knowledge base that is still evolving. The intent of this study was to provide, via narratives, a broader, more diverse view of how African American women conceptualize and balance work and family. Such analysis can potentially inform organizational policy and practice in public and private sectors.

Heightened interest in the topic of work-life balance is evident in a plethora of books, magazine articles, and talk show programs. The challenge of managing the world of work with personal lives is a problem that affects women in general (Frone, Russell, & Cooper, 1992; Gershbain & Brownstone, 2007). While all women struggle with issues related to work-life conflict, missing from this dialogue are the voices of African American women who constitute one of the largest demographic groups in organizations. Researchers have limited information about African American women's career experiences or how they integrate the world of work with their personal lives, despite evidence that work is a significant domain in their lives (Blair-Loy, 2003).

Their life experiences and cultural dynamics inherent within historical antecedents of slavery and oppression are significant points of reference that must be added not only to topical debates, but also to diversity initiatives implemented by organizations within every business and industry. This phenomenological study argued in favor of exploring, via narratives and the life story method, a broader, more diverse approach to understanding competing priorities that impact African American women who are striving to achieve work-life balance. It endeavored to present an analysis that could potentially inform organizational policy and practice in public and private sectors.

Significance of the Study

All women, regardless of race or ethnicity, struggle with issues related to work-life balance. Kamenou (2008) states, "With few exceptions, issues around ethnicity and culture have been absent from the majority of discussions around work-life balance debates and initiatives" (p. 100). The study of work-life balance among African American women was important for three primary reasons: to challenge previously accepted discourses of work and scholarship related to this topic that were based on one demographic perspective, to incorporate new thinking and understanding of the historical and socioeconomic impact of balancing work and family from an African American view point, and to contribute to a significant knowledge gap in research related to work-life balance in diverse families.

Tucker and Wolfe (2002) note, "Women of color do not experience their workplace culture with their race-ethnicity and gender neatly compartmentalized as two separate facts of life" (p. 8). This statement reinforces both the complexity of understanding the nuances of workplace diversity and family issues. Treatment of African American women as persons of color is associated with workplace diversity issues while challenges to balance responsibilities via work and personal life are separate and distinct from the aforementioned category. This study further explored the impact of life experiences and how they have impacted African American women's ability to achieve balance in their personal and professional lives.

Theoretical Framework

The Giele (2008) study, which utilizes the narrative and life-story approaches, served as the model for this specific study and is grounded in systems theory and social

identity theory. There are linkages between Giele's view and that of Capra (1996) who suggested an extension of the systems concept of life to the social domain. The social domain was referred to as linkages among the natural and social sciences—biological, cognitive, and social. He drew upon philosophies espoused by respected theorists, including Ilya Prigione (self-organization of dissipative structures), Humberto Maturana (cognition and consciousness), Lynn Margulis (Gaia theory), and Francisco Varela (Santiago theory of autopoiesis and cognition) among others. Capra's visionary approach identified sustainability as a consequence of five basic principles of ecology— "interdependence, recycling, partnership, flexibility, and diversity" (p. 304). Holistic thinking within this framework creates diverse paradigms for using systems theory and social identity theory to view new ways of understanding work-life balance.

Systems Theory

The work of biologist von Bertalanffy (1950) and his formal introduction of general systems theory offered a comprehensive view that embraced multidisciplinary perspectives and elevated discussions related to cause and effect via interconnectedness in subsystems. His intent was to substitute mechanical foundations of science with a holistic vision by defining general systems theory as one of wholeness. Regarding general systems theory, he noted:

> [It] is not a mere catalogue of well-known differential equations and their solutions. On the contrary, the general system conception raises new and well-defined problems which do not appear in physics…but which are of basic importance in non-physical fields. (p. 142)

In *An Outline of General Systems Theory*, von Bertalanffy (1950) acknowledges the role that interactions among subsystems play in creating complexity, thereby giving credence to the holism of systems. He affirmed, "The significance of general systems

theory may be characterized in different ways" (p. 138). This interpretation not only elevated general systems theory from a scientific orientation to a new doctrine of wholeness, but it also differentiated between living organisms as open systems with input and output and closed systems without inflow or outflow. The significance of this step was monumental because it extended the parameters of a theory previously relegated to science and closed systems.

Von Bertalanffy's (1950) work affirmed that "living systems are the most important examples of open systems and steady states" (p. 157). Many definitions exist with little overall agreement, so for the purposes of this paper and in concert with work, systems theory is defined as a transdisciplinary approach that abstracts and considers a system as a set of interacting and independent parts or subsystems. From the contributions of von Bertalanffy, systems theoretical approaches evolved to incorporate social sciences and every aspect of organizational theory, opening avenues for interdisciplinary dialogue and the emergence of contemporary thought leaders.

Contributions of contemporary thought leaders to diversification of systems theory. The work of various thought leaders is credited with diversifying the application of systems theory. The evolution of schools of thought from scientific to humanist approaches in the 1960s established a solid basis for systems theory that challenges us to see organizations from holistic perspectives and affirm new science connections to knowledge and capacity building (Wheatley, 2006). Such influential figures as Laszlo (1972) expounded upon the impact of complexities associated with the relationship between organizations and their environments. In his classic work, *The Systems View of the World*, Laszlo wrote, "If you want to change the world…you must choose an

empirical concept for your understanding—one that is based on how human beings interact with the world around them" (pp. v–vi). This led to a more pronounced understanding of interdependence.

Margaret Mead and Gregory Bateson are credited with reinforcing the relevance of utilizing interdisciplinary approaches to systems theory such as positive and negative feedback. Their groundbreaking work with Kurt Lewin, Norbert Wiener, John von Neumann, Claude Shannon, Warren McCullough, and others at the Macy conferences from 1946–1953 redefined systems theory and ushered in a new era that undergirded further unification of social and physical sciences (American Society of Cybernetics, n.d.). Collectively they challenged conventional ways of thinking, laying the foundation for breakthroughs in technology, feedback, engineering, and communications to name a few. Applications of systems theory to management theory by Kast and Rosenweig (1972) resulted in the identification of key characteristics associated with organizational systems and the following insights:

> They are not natural, like physical and biological systems, but are contrived. There are boundaries that separate the organization from its environment. Open systems display growth through internal elaboration and have the characteristic of equifinality—objectives may be achieved with varying inputs and in different ways. (p. 120)

In *The Web of Life*, Capra (1996) discussed the end of the century and potentially the impact it would have on humankind's ability to survive while remaining ecologically literate. This new wave of being and functioning provided a powerful platform for groundbreaking work by Senge (2006), founder of MIT's Center for Organizational Learning at the Sloan School of Management, who explored systems theory and leadership from an organizational development stance. Concepts based on learning and

inclusiveness, viewed as radical by some in the early 1990s when command and control were in vogue, are now embraced and incorporated into organizational dynamics worldwide. In particular, his focus on using learning and knowledge sharing as cornerstones for achieving sustainable change redefined how leaders approached managing their teams. Senge encouraged leaders to see circles of causality, noting that the core of true leadership is adopting a new way of thinking; seeing the forest and the trees—the whole versus the parts.

Wheatley (2006), noted cultural anthropologist, espoused the concept of linking science and management. Her approach to systems theory provided tools that leaders can use to understand how to navigate complex issues in their organizations. The combination of quantum physics with chaos theory and theology ushered in a new era of learning and empowerment within the field of organization development. Viewing organizations as living systems, she compared them to fundamental processes associated with creation and renewal. Describing a paradox in living systems, she affirmed the linkage to systems theory, noting, "each being is noticeable as a separate entity, yet it is simultaneously part of a whole system" (p. 20). Her work in the field of new leadership created diverse paradigms for using systems theory to embrace change and address issues that impact lives globally. From von Bertalanffy to Wheatley, systems theorists continue to elevate thinking, challenging leaders and followers alike to be active participants in finding solutions to current problems. Their contributions to the field of organization theory and change affirm why is it is important to view organizations as systems.

There are numerous value-added benefits of embracing systems theory and systems thinking within an organization. Those organizations that embrace systems

thinking are likely to discover that at the heart of complexities reside endless possibilities. In a systems-thinking environment, organizations have the potential to unlock collective and individual power reinforced by a sense of purpose. Senge (n.d.) further suggested a link between personal purpose and personal vision, which he described as "a key to unlocking the power of purpose" (p. 1), denoting vision as "the vehicle for bringing purpose into the domain of acts and commitments" (p. 1).

Systems thinking challenges us to transcend the way we attribute value and logic to causality. Senge (2006) encouraged the view of causality as that which "underlies the longer-term patterns of change in complex systems" (p. 2). By delving more deeply into these areas of understanding, we may gain more insight into relationship dynamics and the impact on organizational effectiveness. According to Senge, "Systems thinking is needed more than ever because we are becoming overwhelmed by complexity" (p. 69). In a mercurial environment, leaders must be prepared to address challenges via multifaceted applications of systems thinking and must embrace learning to experience success and greatness. Leaders with true clarity of vision will embrace paradigm shifts in thinking. They will "discover how to tap people's commitment and capacity to learn at all levels" (p. 4). This shift in thinking will facilitate a more comprehensive understanding of the role of organizational dynamics.

Inherent complexities within systems thinking require leaders to understand the role of organizational dynamics as they seek to shift from reacting to the present to creating the future (Senge, 2006). Walsh, Meyer, and Schoonhaven (2006) posited three fundamental questions that must be answered to gain in-depth understanding of organizational dynamics: (a) "How can we understand today's organizations?"; (b) "How

can we live in today's world?"; and (c) "How can we live with today's organizations?"

(p. 661) Answers to these questions require leaders to understand the role of

organizations within the global universe via a wider and often untested vantage point.

Literature in the field suggests that current approaches to organization change pose

challenges and opportunities for the fine-tuning of future schools of thought (Palmer &

Dunford, 2008). Further research and dialogue must occur to allow the emergence of new

ideas.

Those challenges, in addition to opening up new opportunities for dialogue,

enable us to revalidate the impact and influence of systems thinking, and recognize the

inevitable effect of historical, institutional, cultural, and political contexts on facilitating

change (Palmer & Dunford, 2008; Walsh et al., 2006; Weick & Quinn, 1999). Systems

thinking reinforces the relevance of significant mind shifts from conventional wisdom

and individualistic thinking to collaborative, open-ended rationalizations. This includes

seeing change as a continual process versus a series of occurrences.

Social identity theory, as discussed in Chapter 2, provides a solid theoretical

framework that can be used in concert with systems theory to expand understandings of

competing priorities impacting African American women's ability to achieve work-life

balance. Specifically using this framework facilitates understanding, but also

acknowledges the importance of valuing the interactions among structure, culture, and

agency. The intent was to employ the aforementioned categorization strategies in concert

with the social identity theoretical framework and systems theory discussed in detail in

Chapter 1. Information in the next section was excerpted, in part, from a current study in

process under the auspices of M. Weber (personal communication, December 21, 2010).

Life-Story Method

The life-story method is a multifaceted approach that was also used to guide this phenomenological study. It allowed for the inculcation of cultural elements with an emphasis on exploring what Kamenou (2008) describes as, "African American women's perceptions of the reciprocal relationship of career demands and other aspects of their lives" (p. S99). These included, but were not limited to, community expectations and responsibilities. Four themes within this theoretical framework were lives and historical times, the timing of lives, linked lives, and human agency as espoused by Elder (M. Weber, personal communication, December 21, 2010).

Definition of terms—Life-story method. The following definitions for the life-story method as postulated by Giele (2008) were used throughout the study and dissertation.

Human agency: Relates the human being as actor on the larger life stage of society within the world

Identity: Being different versus conventional—is associated with a person's location in time, space, and cultural milieu

Motivation: Achievement versus traditional—sums up the accommodations and changes how a person has learned to negotiate while living through changing conditions and life transitions

Relationship: Egalitarian versus deferent—shaped by social networks and loyalties

Research Questions

The research questions guided this study.

1. How do competing priorities impact the lives of African American women who are striving to achieve work-life balance?

2. What experiences (identity, relationship style, drive and motivation, and adaptive) shape the life course of African American women and impact work-family life balance decisions?

3. How do sociodemographic variables (education, age, ethnicity, family composition, profession, marital status, spouse education, and profession) influence work-family life decisions?

4. What are the relationships among influencers (family background, mentoring, and faith) and career goals on work-family life balance decisions?

Summary

The study explored, via narrative, the competing priorities that impacted African American women's lives as they strive to achieve work-life balance. To provide a context for the research methodology, Chapter 2 includes a literature review of the following categories: cultural beliefs, work, family, and work-life balance. It concludes with findings from a work-life balance study commissioned by the Center for Women Policy Studies and a theoretical framework for the research.

Chapter 2: Review of Literature

The pertinent review of literature for this study includes the following categories: cultural beliefs, work, family, work-life balance, and an overview of the life-story method adapted from the Giele (2008) study. The cultural literature includes the following subcategories: faith, values, and norms. The work literature provides a review of mentoring and leadership while the family category includes relevant overviews of family, motherhood, feminism, and womanism. Literature on the evolution of work-life balance is reviewed, and this chapter concludes with views of the life-story method and applicability to systems theory as the primary framework for the study's conceptual-theoretical model.

Cultural Literature: Faith, Values, and Norms

Shifting demographics are redefining how people work together with interrelationships and the dynamics of culture in the workplace taking center stage (Chao & Moon, 2005). Culture affects behavior, ways of thinking, and to a great extent, values and norms, and yet there is little consensus regarding how to define culture. Various sources offer a plethora of definitions. Admittedly, culture is one of the most complicated words in the English language (Kroeber & Kluckhohn, 1952). The previous statement is as appropriate today as it was 5 decades ago because of the complexities inherent within diverse cultures. Taylor (1924) initially used the term culture in a sociological and anthropological context and defined the word as "that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society" (p. 1).

Further, culture can be viewed as a construct that distinguishes individuals in addition to groups or group properties, often as the main source of identity (Chao & Moon, 2005; Schein, 1996). Classic definitions of culture are synonymous with the behavior with which it is linked as an important antecedent, a value component, and the missing link to furthering our understanding of the dynamics of organization behavior (Erez & Earley, 1993; Hofstede, 1980; Sackman, 1997; Schein, 1996; Schwartz, 1999). By viewing culture as a mosaic, Chao and Moon (2005) introduced a process for considering an individual's culture simultaneously from global and local perspectives. To enhance previously limited views from the stance of gender or ethnicity, Chao and Moon suggested that combinations or patterns of tiles allow for a multilayered approach to understanding individuals' cultural orientations. Additionally, the researchers noted that an individual's cultural mosaic comprises three primary categories: "demographic, geographic, and associative" (p. 1129). In concert with systems theory, the cultural mosaic as posited by Chao and Moon viewed culture via a broader and more holistic lens. Table 1 summarizes the three categories.

Table 1

Taxonomy of a Cultural Mosaic by Chao and Moon (2005)

Primary Category	Definition	Sample Mosaic Tiles
Demographic	Physical characteristics and social identities inherited from parents and ancestors	Age, ethnicity, gender, race
Geographic	Natural or manmade physical features of a region that can shape group identities	Climate, temperature, coastal/inland, urban/rural, regional/country
Associative	Formal and informal groups with which individuals choose to associate and identify	Family, religion, employer, profession, politics, avocation

Chao and Moon (2005) state, "Every individual has a cultural mosaic. The patterns of mosaic tiles that emerge in an individual represent localized patterns of structures within the person" (p. 1132). These structures comprise the individuals' cores, from attitudes and values to behavioral characteristics. The other factor within this mosaic is how others are viewed in relation to the various mosaics. In some instances, individuals have certain tiles in common, whereas in other situations, divergent tiles are evident. Each of the tiles within the mosaic individually and collectively embraces the complexity of culture, providing a basis for a more in-depth understanding of interrelationships. This stance is offered as a platform for further review of cultural literature as it relates to understanding the complexities of African American women's life experiences in conjunction with the impact of achieving work-life balance.

Kamenou (20008) argues for a more holistic and broad-based approach to understanding the linkages among work, life, and family within the context of work-life balance and ethnic minority women's life experiences. While her work focused on ethnic minorities and not African American women specifically, it provided a context within which to understand "different forms of life which may fall out of the standard white western model" (p. 99). Other research explored the pressure on minority women to balance commitments to their families, culture, and religion. With rare exceptions, the aforementioned categories are intertwined with and dominate the life component of work-life for women of color, creating bicultural stress. This term, coined by Thomas and Alderfer (1989), is defined as "the set of emotional and physical upheavals produced by a bicultural existence" (p. 135). It explains why in many instances, myriad levels of expectation abound at work and home. At work, they feel the responsibility to fit in to be

accepted and have opportunities for career advancement. At home and within their

communities, they may at times, be subjected to criticism from those who feel they are

denying their culture by assimilating and adapting to westernized cultural norms. This

delicate and demanding balancing act can result in the aforementioned bicultural stress

and frustration.

The African American Women's Voices Project, chronicled in *Shifting* authored

by Jones and Shorter-Gooden (2003), is recognized as the "largest, most comprehensive

study to date of African American women's perceptions and experiences of racism and

sexism" (p. 4). The project focused on various aspects of African American women's life

experiences as they dealt with discrimination, gender bias, and its impact on their

personal and professional lives, relationships, and community affiliations. Shifting, as

defined by the authors, refers to "all the ways that African American women respond to

and cope with racial and gender stereotypes, bias and mistreatment" (p. 62). They further

contend:

> Black women are forced to react or respond in some way to these challenges—
> and thus all Black women shift. Sometimes it is conscious—the person is fully
> aware of her reactions…but perhaps more often, shifting is done subconsciously.
> (p. 62)

When used as a coping strategy, shifting can incorporate cognitive functions,

requiring the use of varied thought processes, and behavioral functions, necessitating

changes in how one behaves (Jones & Shorter-Gooden, 2003). The authors proffered the

following shifting strategies Black women use to cope in their various environments: (a)

battling societal myths; (b) scanning, surveying, and scrutinizing the environment; (c)

walling off the impact of discrimination; (d) seeking spiritual and emotional support

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through churches, religious communities, friends, and family members; (e) retreating to the Black community and abiding by the home codes; and (f) fighting back.

Literature related to culture, domestic labor, and household management issues suggests that a key to understanding the experiences of African American women is based, in part, on the shared history of slavery and colonialism (Carby, 1982; Gardiner, 1997; Patterson, 2007). These studies assert that African American women sought work outside of the home as a result of socioeconomic necessity and survival; consequently, choosing full-time motherhood was not an option for the majority of African American women, many of whom have a pattern of earlier motherhood than their white counterparts (Bradley, Healy, Mukherjee, 2005; Gardiner, 1997; Holdsworth & Dale, 1997; Kamenou, 2008).

Recognizing the impact of different life experiences in conjunction with work-life balance will enable leaders to manage effectively and address the needs of a changing demographic within their organizations. The cultural mosaic, as postulated by Chao and Moon (2005), affirms the complexities inherent within this discourse while underscoring the importance and relevance and value of the study.

Work: Leadership and Ethics

The adaptation of ethical leadership behavior to address the complexities of achieving work-life balance must be at the forefront of meaningful dialogue in organizations. As an affirmation of its relevance and appropriateness to this study, discourse related to pertinent literature begins with definitions of leadership. This premise is grounded in an understanding that proposed interviews with a myriad of participant leadership styles will be pivotal factors in their life lessons.

Leadership is total engagement offered for the well-being of the earth and all its inhabitants. This statement by Terry (1993) implies that leadership must be viewed within the macrocosm of life and the universe. Kouzes and Posner (2003) approach it from a similar standpoint, describing leadership as a relationship between those who aspire to lead and those who choose to follow. Researchers continue to debate without arriving at a consensus regarding a collective understanding of what leadership is and how to delineate adaptability of cultures and styles to achieve success in the workplace.

A plethora of studies assert that servant leaders are more effective in static environments while transformational leaders are successful in high change environments. This section focuses on charismatic, transformational, and servant leadership. Personality characteristics and behavior factors that impact followers within leadership theories are also discussed.

Charismatic leadership as the genesis. Weber (1947) is credited with defining charisma as a special personality characteristic that gives a person superhuman or exceptional powers and is reserved for a few, is of divine origin, and results in the person being treated as a leader. House's (1976) theory of charismatic leadership suggested such leaders act in ways that affect their followers. Personality characteristics he associated with charismatic leaders included dominance, overtly influential, self-confidence, and possessing overt self-morality. House noted specific types of behaviors synonymous with charismatic leaders: (a) They are strong role models for the beliefs and values they want their followers to adopt; (b) they appear competent to followers; (c) they articulate ideological goals that have moral overtones; (d) they communicate high expectations for followers and exhibit confidence in followers' abilities to meet these expectations; and

(e) they arouse task-relevant motive in followers that may include affiliation, power or esteem.

In concurrence with Weber, House (1976) contends such effects are more likely to occur in contexts in which followers feel distress, because during these periods followers look to leaders to provide respite. Kuzmenko (2004) notes that charismatic leadership research spanning the last 2 decades has focused on several variables including followers, behaviors, relationships between leaders and followers, and influences and challenges (Bass & Avolio, 1990, 1994; Conger & Kanungo, 1998; Dorfman & House, 2004). Strong empirical evidence supports the importance of charismatic leadership in the West, and growing evidence suggests that it is also important in non-Western societies (Dorfman & House, 2004). The initial concept of charisma as espoused by Weber provided the foundation for charismatic leadership that undergirded transformational and servant leadership.

Transformational leadership. Transformational leadership's emergence as an important style began with Burns' (1978) classic work, *Leadership,* and Bass (1985) expanded upon it. Burns (1978) articulated the connection between leadership and followership, emphasizing the role of leaders as the persons who capitalize on the talents of followers to achieve mutual results. He articulated distinct delineations between transformational and transactional leadership.

Avolio (1999) and Bass Avolio (1990) and assert that transformational leadership is concerned with the performance of followers, including the personal and professional development of team members to maximum potential. According to Kuhnert (1994),

persons who exhibit transformational leadership possess strong values and ideals and function from a premise of working for the greater good versus self-interest.

Four factors make up transformational leadership—idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration.

Idealized Influence—Leader provides the vision and mission for the followers and organization while building trust, modeling integrity setting ethical examples.

Inspirational Motivation—Leader communicates high expectations, inspires through motivation to become committed to a shared vision in the organization via the use of emotional appeals. Team spirit and engagement are usually strengthened organization-wide.

Intellectual Stimulation—Leader supports followers as they try new approaches to problem solving, stimulating creativity, and intellectual development.

Individual Consideration—Leaders provide a positive and supportive environment in which they listen to the needs of each team member, serving as coaches and mentors.

Diverse viewpoints add to understanding transformational leadership. Research by Bennis and Nanus (1985) and Tichy and DeVanna (1990) contributed immeasurably to understanding the depth and breadth of transformational leadership. According to Bennis and Nanus (1985), four common strategies emerged.

1. Transforming leaders had a clear vision of the future state of their organizations. The image was of an attractive, realistic, and believable future that emerged from both the followers and the leaders within the organization (Bennis & Nanus, 1985, p. 89).

2. Transforming leaders were social architects for their organizations. Through communication, they articulated a direction that positively impacted and transformed the organization's values and norms (Northouse, 2004, p. 180).

3. Transforming leaders created trust in their organizations by making their positions clearly known and standing by them. Research by Bennis and Nanus (1985) affirmed that leaders who established trust in an organization imbued it with integrity and credibility.

4. Transforming leaders used creative deployment of self through positive self-regard. Knowing their strengths and weaknesses enabled them to emphasize the positive, creating a trickledown-effect that resulted in higher levels of confidence organization-wide.

Tichy and DeVanna (1990) studied how organizations changed within the framework of leader carrying out the transformation. They were intrigued by how the leaders managed in less than favorable conditions impacted by various change factors (technological, social, cultural, competitive-based, and economic interdependencies). The results provided a view of how leaders managed change via a three-act process.

- Act 1—recognizing the need for change. There were tendencies to resist change and willingness to sustain the present system. Communicating the need for change and encouraging healthy dialogue opened avenues for assessment and buy-in.

- Act 2—create a vision. Tichy and DeVanna (1990) determined that vision had to act as an atlas, mapping the direction for the organization.

- Act 3—institutionalize changes. Dismantling the old and bringing in the new

    was crucial, including team formations and processes.

According to Yukl (1999), empirical research corroborates the effectiveness of

transformational leadership. Results from studies that used the Multifactor Leadership

Questionnaire to appraise leaders showed positive correlations related to subordinate

satisfaction, motivation, and performance. While there are criticisms related to

conceptual clarity and precise measurements, an analysis of articles published in the

Leadership Quarterly during the last decade showed that 34% were about

transformational-charismatic leadership, affirming the increase in interest and further

research.

   Transactional leadership. Transactional leadership is focused on achieving

results. Kuhnert (1994) notes that transactional leaders are more likely to exchange things

of value with subordinates for the advancement of their own agendas as well as the

agendas of subordinates. Kuhnert and Lewis (1987) suggest that their influence derives

from subordinates' collective belief that is in their best interest to do what the leader

wants. The author has witnessed outcomes that often translate into performance that

exceeds expectations at the expense of the subordinates whose individual needs and

personal development are not recognized or prioritized. Two factors are attributed to

transactional leadership—contingent reward and management-by-exception.

- *Contingent Reward*—refers to an exchange process between leaders and

    followers in which effort by followers is exchanged for specified rewards. The

    leader seeks to obtain agreement from followers on what needs to be done and

    what the reward will be for those completing the tasks (Northouse, 2004).

- *Management-by-Exception*—refers to leadership that involves corrective criticism, negative feedback, and negative reinforcement from active and passive standpoints. Active management-by-exception is synonymous with micromanagement while passive management-by-exception is akin to a leader who disciplines an employee after poor performance occurs (Northouse, 2004).

Servant leadership. Retired AT&T executive Greenleaf (1970) launched a quiet revolution in the way we view and practice leadership when he coined the following definition of servant-leadership:

> The servant leader is servant first.…It begins with the natural feeling that one wants to serve, to serve first. Then conscious choice brings one to aspire to lead.…The difference manifests itself in the care taken by the servant—first to make sure that other people's needs are being served. The best test, and difficult to administer, is: do those being served, become healthier, wiser, freer, more autonomous, more likely themselves to become servants? And, what is the effect on the least privileged in society: will they benefit, or at least, not be further deprived? (p. 13)

From its origin nearly 4 decades earlier to the present, servant-leadership champions engagement and inclusion in decision making, anchored in behaviors that are ethically and compassionately grounded. The outcome is a workforce that is personally and professionally empowered and organizations that are productive and healthy. Some of the most respected advocates for excellence and change espouse servant-leadership as an emerging leadership paradigm for this century and beyond, including James Autry, Warren Bennis, Peter Block, John Carver, Stephen Covey, Max DePree, Joseph Jaworski, James Kouzes, Lorraine Matusak, Peter Senge, Margaret Wheatley, and M. Scott Peck (Spears, 1995). Zohar (1997) asserts, "Servant-leadership is the essence of quantum thinking and quantum leadership" (p. 146). Spears (1995) identified a set of 10

characteristics of the servant-leader that he views as being of critical importance and central to the development of servant-leaders: listening, empathy, healing, awareness, persuasion, conceptualization, foresight, stewardship, commitment to the growth of people, and building community.

Critics view servant-leadership as an oxymoron, yet a leader who serves and a servant who leads is, in the purest form, the quintessential embodiment of the aforementioned characteristics. Terry (1993) states, "Leadership is not a means to another end. It is not instrumental. Leadership is the action itself, and it is in the action that the many become one" (p. 273).

Ethics. Leaders who are committed to achieving transformative change in complex organizations must place a high priority on integrity. This includes the incorporation of organizational ethics as a vehicle for impacting cultural transformation and making effective decisions. For the purpose of this discussion, a definition of ethics from the Ethics and Policy Integration Center (n.d.) will be used: "a set of rules to guide the human actions of an individual human being so that they are consistent with his or her values" (p. 1). Wheatley (2006) noted:

> Organizations with integrity have truly learned that there is no choice but to walk their talk. Their values are truthful representations of how they want to conduct themselves; everyone feels deeply accountable to them and…ethical behavior emerges. (p. 129)

Organizational ethics is more than an integral part of a group's culture; it affirms a shared sense of values and establishes moral principles critical for decision making (Northouse, 2004; Smith, 2005). While most persons would agree that using common sense to discern right from wrong is elementary, understanding the role ethics plays in decision making isn't as automatic. One must take it a step further and recognize those

components critical to effective decision making. Lepper (1996) states ethical sensitivity as a concept was "developed in the field of moral psychology" (p. 2) and is defined as, "the ability to recognize the ethical and moral implications of situations" (p. 2).

Historically, ethical sensitivity is linked to research by Piaget and Kohlberg who focused on it as a construct of moral development in children (as cited in Lepper, 1996). Subsequent research and studies included emphasis on interrelationships within social systems and the effect on moral reasoning development (Rest, 1983; Walker, 1986). Based on this research, Lepper (1996) notes five components of ethical sensitivity that emerged: (a) perception of the special characteristics of the situation, (b) the issues present, (c) stakeholders to the action, (d) consequences for stakeholders, and (e) connections among the categories. This literature review is presented as a foundation for viewing the diverse aspects of work-family conflict as articulated in the following study commissioned by the Center for Women Policy Studies. Additionally, ethics-based concepts are discussed in literature related to womanist theory in a subsequent section of this chapter.

Research by the Center for Women Policy Studies in 1999, focused on how women of color in corporate America (52% of the 1562 respondents were African American), experienced work-life conflict and the balancing act (Tucker & Wolfe, 2002). The findings discussed in this section follow results attained from a study conducted by the center that addressed how women of color defined and experienced work and personal issues.

Tucker and Wolfe (2002) note despite the implementation of workplace diversity and work-life programs at major corporations within the last 3 decades, these

organizations struggle to recruit and retain the fastest growing segment of the work force—women of color. The study, *No More Business As Usual, Women of Color in Corporate America*, was commissioned by the Center for Women Policy Studies in 1999. Demographics of the study included 1,562 women of which 52% were African American, 24% were Asian American, 16% were Latina, and 4% were Native American. Of those, 5% described themselves as white with 7% self-identifying as other. More than half of the respondents were married, with 5% living with a partner and 27% were single. Among the participants, 43% had at least one child younger than the age of 18 and 94% reported that their children lived with them full time. The participant responses indicated 47% were responsible for care of a dependent adult as well as children younger than the age of 18.

Tucker and Wolfe (2002) state, "The survey results revealed the extent to which women of color believe their sex and their race/ethnicity affect their treatment in the workplace, affect job productivity, commitment to their employers and quality of family life" (p. 1). Following is a summary of the findings of the study, which is divided into five categories: (a) workplace cultures, (b) workplace cultures and work-life balance, (c) stress and work-life balance, (d) coping strategies, and (e) supportive workplace cultures.

Finding 1: Workplace cultures. While respondents identified themselves as full partners on business teams (67%), they felt pressured to work long hours (47%); faced limited opportunities for promotion (42%); had little faith in networking (60%); doubted the company's commitment to diversity (44%); heard sexist, racist, and homophobic jokes in the workplace (61%); and played down their race-ethnicity and gender to succeed (63%; Center for Women Policy Studies, 1999).

Finding 2: Workplace cultures and work-life balance. How women of color are treated in the workplace has a profound effect on women's ability to strike a balance between fulfilling work responsibilities and satisfying personal obligations and needs. Women of color reported that limited career advancement opportunities (62%) and perceived discrimination based on race and gender (41%), as well as excessive workloads (99%) and management expectations (63%), had a negative impact on their work and family balancing act (Center for Women Policy Studies, 1999).

Finding 3: Stress and work-life balance. The majority of respondents experienced stress as a result of conflict between their work and family responsibilities. Workplace stress took a toll on personal lives (73%), hampered personal development opportunities (72%), negatively impacted relationships with family and loved ones (67%), and limited their health and wellness maintenance activities (47%); (Center for Women Policy Studies, 1999).

Finding 4: Coping strategies. Instead of asking for more flexibility at work and risking losing out on chances for advancement, respondents handled workplace stress and pressures by using burnout strategies at work (e.g., talking with friends, e-mailing, eating, and leaving temporarily—69%), and relying on strategies they could control at home (waking up earlier to do house work or skimping on tasks, delegating chores to family members—59%). Women reported using these strategies versus asking for decreased responsibilities or reduced hours at work (3%; Center for Women Policy Studies, 1999).

Finding 5: Supportive workplace cultures. Participants stated they would remain at companies that create supportive workplace cultures where they are treated fairly, and receive assistance and support with work-life balance needs, career advancement

opportunities, and inclusion via diversity programs. The majority (84%) reported that the ability to balance work and personal responsibilities was a factor in their decision to remain with current employers (Center for Women Policy Studies, 1999).

Family: Motherhood, Feminism, and Womanism

Significant research affirms the connection between and among work and family issues with that of culture, norms, values, and beliefs (Eby, Casper, Lockwood, Bordeaux, & Brinkley, 2005; Lobel, 1991; Mortazavi, Pedhiwala, Shariro, & Hammer, 2009; Schein, 1984). Studies on this subject further assert that one of the keys to understanding this link resides within a more detailed analysis of the impact of culture on diversified workforces in which women are playing more prominent roles. Global companies with multicultural workforces are the norm, not the exception in a world where more women are entering the world of work. The growth in these multinational organizations is contributing to increased research on the topics of issues related to work life balance and acknowledgement of the impact of "broader life circumstances in relation to their family, culture and religion" (Kamenou, 2008, p. 100).

Changes in the demographic makeup of the workforce since the early 1990s corroborate studies that point to an increase in the number of women, dual-income couples, and work-family conflict that evolved. In particular, social scientists devoted significant attention to research focused on the relationship of women to paid work versus volunteer work and motherhood. Landry's (2000) research documented how middle-class white women were affected when they made the transition from volunteering to the world of paid work. The gap between working mothers and stay-at-home mothers widened, creating a schism undergirded by cultural dichotomies that pitted

motherhood against career goals. Finding the time and energy to manage both was a source of frustration and stress, leaving some career mothers feeling guilty about their decisions to choose full-time employment over traditional views of motherhood. Research suggests that the conflict that centered on finding solutions included identifying ways to juggle, manage, and balance work and family priorities, recognizing that these were both full-time pursuits (Garey, 1999; Gerson, 1985; Hays, 1996; Hochschild, 1997; Moen & Sweet, 2003; Presser, 2003).

Studies documented a myriad of solutions to this dilemma that included women who decided to work fewer hours, less desirable shifts, and temporary assignments while others vacillated between full- and part-time employments (Garey, 1999; Presser, 2003). It should be noted that aforementioned studies, which focused without exception on white women, were at the time, believed to be synonymous with women of color, since no research made delineation across racial or cultural demographics (Barnett & Rivers, 1996; Gerson, 1985; Hochschild, 1997; Moen & Sweet, 2003; Perry-Jenkins, Repetti, & Crouter, 2000). Consequently, widely accepted notions of motherhood were associated with stay-at-home moms who were predominately white or those working mothers who had the flexibility to be engaged in their children's lives. In spite of a 2003 report by the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission that showed African American women represent the largest share of minority women's employment during the decade (1990–2001) with 7.6% and a rate of change in that same decade of 43%, existing literature on their experiences is scarce, providing limited platforms for defining or identifying diverse ideologies of motherhood from Black perspectives (U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, 2003). However, a Collins (1994) study asserted that "black women have

included being financial providers in their definitions and ideologies of motherhood for quite some time" (p. 168). Further research maintained that such long-standing employment history among African American women accounted for their separation from domestic categories synonymous with white counterparts.

Concomitantly, from a cultural perspective they viewed and understood their roles as mothers and workers as simultaneous realities, creating their own meanings of womanhood and motherhood with an ideology that diverged from white cultures (Collins, 1994; Dill, 2000; Landry, 2000). Historically, the impact of slavery profoundly influences the thinking of African American women. For working women of color, the dynamics of balancing work with family and personal life require them to learn how to function in two different settings. In many cases, this requires them to adopt a myriad of values and customs based on their work and personal lives. Researchers suggest that this is unique to women of color, requiring them to manage life demands from bicultural viewpoints (Bell, Denton, & Nkomo, 1993). These long-standing cultural premises explain, in part, the separation between white women and African American women, as it relates to ideological contexts regarding motherhood, further corroborating the need for more definitive research. The following literature review pertinent to feminism is an important component of this research.

Sociological and philosophical perspectives on feminism are historically grounded in suppositions that white males dominated societal culture. From the genesis of this movement advocated by Sojourner Truth in 1851 via her speech, *Ain't I a Woman?* to well-known activists Gloria Steinem, Bella Abzug, and Betty Friedan among others, feminism continues to evolve, recognizing the impact of race, class, and gender

on societal oppression (Collins, 1994). White and Klein (2002) proffered the following theorems regarding feminism and the influence of gender: (a) our experiences and societies are influenced by gender; (b) as a class, women are oppressed by dominant males; (c) female-centric cultures emerged in response to the male dominance; (d) the family is generally at the center of female oppression and consequently most affected by such pressures.

Noted African American feminists such as Mary Church Terrell, bell hooks, Anna Julia Cooper, Mary McLeod Bethune, Fannie Lou Hamer, Vashti McKenzie, Nannie Helen Burroughs, Angela Davis, Dorothy I. Height, and Barbara Jordan worked tirelessly in diverse fields, including education, civil rights, health and welfare, and government (Jones & Shorter-Gooden, 2003; Height, 2010). They were cognizant of the fact that African American women were more likely to experience discrimination in addition to being denied access to venues where their voices and thoughts would be equitably received. Despite these limitations, African American women's points of view continued to ascend throughout history, giving rise to womanism, a term used to refer to a specific global view espoused by women from the African Diaspora and America. Influences from slavery to post colonialism gave it shape and context, from which this theoretical perspective emerged.

Originally adapted from Alice Walker's use of the term in her book, *In Search of Our Mother's Gardens: Womanist Prose*, this theory is based in large part on the bond between African American women and men, in stark contrast to feminism as espoused by white women. Through an appreciation for the interconnectedness of life experiences, self-awareness, and advocacy, womanist epistemology draws on daily lessons of African

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American women while addressing with resolve those challenges as synonymous with embracing truth and knowledge (Banks-Wallace, 2000; Height, 2010). The core message from African American feminists who were the forerunners of womanism was simple but profound, as articulated by the Height (2010), Presidential Medal of Freedom and Congressional Gold Medal recipient who stated:

> It becomes easier for other people to manipulate you and almost destroy you if you do not have a solid base for your own values and self-esteem. Conversely, once you are clear on the meaning, you are on to the next thing. That meaning sustains you and keeps you moving forward with clear direction. (p. 5)

The literature espouses four components of womanist epistemology: (a) solid life lessons as a source of understanding and meaning making, (b) intellectual debate and dialogue to affirm knowledge-based assertions, (c) an ethos of compassion, and (d) an onus of ethics. Womanists suggest that with rare exceptions, African American women view life experiences as the threads that connect knowledge with values while distinguishing them from vision. Connections and relationships are grounded in sharing and perpetuating channels for disseminating knowledge with the ethos of compassion depicted in three measures: (a) personal expressions, (b) feelings and emotions, and (c) empathy (Banks-Wallace, 2000; Height, 2010).

Personal expressions come from African traditions and practices that value individual worth and one's evolution from a divine source that sustains life and well-being. Feelings and emotions are associated with honest expressions of truth and knowledge. Empathy implies that there are shared commitments to ensure that the well-being of others is a collective priority. As cultural dimensions, Hofstede (1984) affirms the value of individualism and collectivism in facilitating an understanding of the link between culture and work-family issues. Womanism provides another forum for viewing

the uniqueness of African American women's life experience within the context of managing competing priorities as they strive to achieve work-life balance.

Work-Life Balance

The term work-life balance gained widespread acceptance and use in studies as early as the 1960s when the linkages between work and family roles focused primarily on women and work-family conflict (Gregory & Milner, 2009). Other terms and concepts evolved including work-family balance, work-family interference, work-family segmentation, and work-family expansion (Burke, 2004; Greenhaus & Singh, 2003). As defined by Felstead, Jewson, Phizacklea, and Walters (2002), work-life balance is "the relationship between the institutional and cultural times and spaces of work and non-work in societies where income is predominately generated and distributed through labor markets" (p. 56). This definition suggests possibilities for levels of flexibility and autonomy despite the reality being otherwise.

Recent studies argue for a broader more diverse approach to the life component in this equation (Kamenou, 2008), while other colleagues contest the term and any current definitions, suggesting the complexities inherent within the term balance preclude one from arriving at an all-encompassing definition. The debate over a definition is undergirded by multifaceted assertions that the term balance implies that work is not integral to life and implies instead that a simple tradeoff is desirable. The drawback is the tendency within this school of thought to ignore fundamental inequities in lieu of quick fixes that are not sustainable. The outcome is more often than not a transfer of the onus for achieving work-life balance to individuals versus using a holistic approach to view all

of the components within this dynamic (Burke, 2004; Felstead et al., 2002; Gregory & Milner, 2009; Lewis & Cooper, 2005).

Additionally, critical discussions of work-life balance center around assumptions that a balance can be achieved between paid work and personal lives outside of work. Aforementioned tradeoffs associated with balance are disputed further based on a belief that overlap exists between the two worlds. The presence of this overlap and widespread debate present new opportunities to expand the parameters within which work-life balance is currently viewed; most notably from perspectives of ethnicity, culture, and religion. This is particularly important because, to date and with rare exceptions, issues around ethnicity, culture, and religion have been absent from major discourses, debates, and workplace initiatives (Bradley et al., 2005; Kamenou, 2008).

Pertinent literature discusses work-life interface in terms of three issues: (a) time management, (b) interrole conflict, and (c) care arrangements for dependents. Employee work life-balance priorities are categorized as follows: (a) working time arrangements, including flexibility; (b) parenting and other care-related responsibilities, such as maternity or parental leave issues; and (c) childcare (Kamenou, 2008; McDonald, Brown, & Bradley, 2005). Literature further suggests that benefits to organizations for implementing work-life balance programs include improvement in attendance and productivity, retention of key talent, and operational efficiency (Lee, MacDermid, & Buck, 2000; Lewis & Cooper, 2005).

Despite improvement in the availability of work-life programs in organizations, many women are hesitant to take advantage of these opportunities. Several reasons are corroborated via research that affirms disconnects between manager and coworker

support, career consequences, organizational time expectations, and gendered perceptions of policy use are key detractors (Kamenou, 2008; McDonald et al., 2005). Ultimately, the onus rests on the individual to get the job done, and as Gregory and Milner (2009) state, without regard for the issue of achieving balance, "raising questions about structure and agency that highlights the relationship between formal and informal routes to power" (p. 6). The literature review and summary of survey findings underscore the need for a phenomenological study of competing priorities focused within the context of African American women's experiences of balancing their work and personal lives.

Theoretical Model: Social Identity Theory

Social identity theory can facilitate an understanding of positive and negative outcomes from the interactions of divergent identity groups. As posited by Tajfel and Turner (1986), social identity theory relates to the psychological and sociological aspects of group behaviors and interactions. Social identity theory has four elements:

- *Categorization or labeling*: putting ourselves and others into categories;

- *Identification*: associating with certain groups that bolster self-esteem;

- *Comparison*: comparing our groups with other groups and attributing a favorable bias to the group to which we belong; and

- *Psychological distinctiveness*: desiring to be both distinct from and positively compared with other groups.

Social identity theory presumes that psychological value and emotional significance are associated with these affiliations as members continually evaluate the groups to which they belong and are motivated to maintain this perceived status (Chrobot-Mason, Ruderman, Weber, Ohlott, & Dalton, 2007).

Social identity conflicts and categorization strategies. A review of the literature on social identity theory underscores the importance of the distinction between social identity conflicts and disagreements and suggests that there are diverse groups within social power constructs (Friedman & Davidson, 2001; Simon & Klandermans, 2001). The key differentiator in conflicts is the attribution of causality. If one party attributes causality to a cultural mosaic (race, gender, religion, etc.) and takes sides based on that premise, this creates a social identity conflict. In aforementioned situations, understanding the social power construct is critical because inequity is often a consideration within the groups. Research suggests that inclusion and cultural distinctiveness are both desirable and accomplished via memberships in groups (Brewer & Brown, 1998), which adds a complex nuance to the challenges that face leaders of diverse organizations. Chrobot-Mason et al. (2007) state, "A leader's reaction to identity-based conflicts can potentially de-escalate the conflict situation or polarize social identity groups even further" (p. 2016).

The following definitions of individualism and collectivism are intended to establish a premise for a review of the impact of the categorization strategies for identity-based conflict resolution. Su et al., (1999) and Tsui and Gutek (1999) asserted that collectivist societies identify with fewer social identity groups and group memberships are likely to be prominent and structured, with clearer distinctions between in-group and out-group members (Triandis, 1986). Chen, Brockner, and Katz's (1998) research revealed a tendency of individualist cultures to be more concerned with enhancing their personal sense of self. This also applied to their bias for their respective in-group. Chrobot-Mason et al. (2007) wrote:

Societal-level cultural values reflect human issues that all societies must confront in order to regulate human activity—the relationship of the individual to the group, the response to uncertainty, the response to social inequality; the need to assure responsible social behavior; the balance between competition and action versus cooperation and adaptation in response to the natural and social world, and the orientation to time—the short-term present versus the long-term future. (p. 2021)

Research suggests that converse approaches to categorization could provide an alternative means to minimize conflict. Four categorization strategies postulated by Brown (2000) include:

- *Decategorization*: posits that contact will be most effective when interactions between individuals are person-based versus category-based (Brewer & Miller, 1984). In essence, the emphasis is on personal identity as opposed to group identity, which facilitates one-on-one interrelations. This removes the in-group and out-group dynamics.

- *Recategorization*: focuses on the creation of a new group, thereby minimizing separate group categories. The team embraces a new umbrella group, replacing the separate categories to which each person subscribed.

- *Subcategorization*: requires structure to ensure that groups work together but also have opportunities to exhibit their uniqueness. Research has indicated that conflict can be minimized when groups are equal and have opportunities to make personalized contributions based on their distinctiveness.

- *Cross-cutting*: engages members in a broad-based strategy that encourages cross-identity participation. The task orientation among the group at large allows for a mix of skills without giving preferential treatment to a specific group.

The aforementioned theoretical framework can be used in concert with systems theory to expand understandings of competing priorities impacting African American women's ability to achieve work-life balance. Specifically using this framework not only facilitates understanding but also acknowledge the importance of valuing the interactions among structure, culture, and agency. The intent is to employ the aforementioned categorization strategies in concert with the social identity theoretical framework and systems theory discussed in the first chapter.

Summary

This chapter provided an in-depth literature review related to culture, leadership and ethics, family, motherhood, feminism, and womanism. Work-life balance literature was examined and the chapter concluded with views of the life-story method, and applications to systems theory and social identity theory as principal frameworks for the theoretical model.

Chapter 3: Methodology and Procedures

Managing work and personal responsibilities is a challenge for women in the workforce. While significant research and findings on middle class white women are readily available on the topic of work-life balance, there remains a dearth of studies related specifically to African American women. To gain a greater understanding of competing priorities that impact their ability to achieve work-life balance, a qualitative phenomenological study was undertaken. This chapter discusses the research design and appropriateness, population sample, instrument, interviews, and analysis.

Research Design and Appropriateness

The research design for this phenomenological study was qualitative, using the life-story method following the Giele (2008) study that employed this method in interviewing 48 women who were alumnae of selected universities, along with women from a homemaker's organization. Creswell (2009) defines qualitative research as "a means for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem" (p. 4). The process for this type of research "involves emerging questions and procedures, data typically collected in the participant's setting, data analysis inductively building from particulars to general themes, and the researcher making interpretations of the meaning of the data" (p. 4).

In this study, four periods in the subject's lives were probed: childhood and adolescence, early adulthood, their current life, and future plans. The individual interviews lasted approximately 1 hour and were conducted in person or by telephone. Since these subjects were busy women, the data collection was determined by their schedule. This proposed study is similar to the Giele (2008) study. A pilot test was

conducted prior to the commencement of the full study. This qualitative study utilized narratives and subscribed to a social constructivist perspective that is synonymous with phenomenology.

Social constructivist perspective. Creswell (2009) states that social constructivism postulates an assumption that "individuals seek understandings of the world in which they live and work" (p. 8). It is synonymous with qualitative phenomenological studies that use open ended, semi structured interviewing approaches to create a private setting within which participants can share life experiences. This enables them to focus on the specific historical or cultural contexts in which the information is framed. As opposed to starting with a theory (via a post positivism viewpoint), researchers from this realm ideally develop patterns of meaning and understanding inductively.

Crotty's (1998) identification of several assumptions in discussing constructivism offers a basis for understanding its relevance and appropriateness for this proposed study.

- Meanings are constructed by human beings as they engage with the world they are interpreting. Qualitative researchers tend to use open-ended questions so that the participants can share their views.

- Human beings engage with their world and make sense of it based on their historical and social perspectives—we are all born into a world of meaning bestowed upon us by our culture. Thus, qualitative researchers seek to understand the context or setting of the participants through visiting this context and gathering information personally. They also interpret what they

find, an interpretation shaped by the researcher's own experiences and

background.

- The basic generation of meaning is always social, arising in and out of

   interaction with a human community. The process of qualitative research is

   largely inductive, with the inquirer generating meaning from the data

   collected in the field.

In addition, the following information excerpted from a study led by Margaret

Weber (personal communication, December 21, 2010) underscores the value of this

design and approach. This study was an extension of her research. Narrative accounts are

superior to quantitative survey methods. The narrative allows for a deeper understanding

of the dynamics that shape the life course (Giele, in press). Life stories are useful because

of their comprehensiveness that covers social aspects within the individual's life; the

subjectivity gives a view of life from within and the narrative form adds the dimension of

change over time (Kohli, 1981). Surveys take a fragmented approach that examines the

effects of variables on outcomes of a specific population, while life histories reveal

patterns. These individual case studies treat differences from the norm as interesting to

explore (Giele, in press). Gathering information that the respondent deems important

allows the research to be framed as a series of case studies.

Singer (2004) suggests that the life-story method is a new subdiscipline in

personality psychology known as narrative identity research. The concern is with

individuals and the way in which they employ narratives to develop a sense of personal

unity and purpose across their lives.

Population Sample

The population sample was diverse, including broad-based representation from the African American community. In addition, female leaders identified in media stories, as well as those participating in women-related organizations (i.e., Plano North Metroplex Chapter members of The Links, local members of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, and Jack and Jill of America), were among the 30 subjects invited to participate in the study. The following background of the aforementioned groups provides a contextual view of a portion of the population sample.

- Plano North Metroplex Chapter, The Links—Effecting meaningful change via program delivery is synonymous with the philosophy of The Links, an international, not-for-profit corporation composed of 273 chapters worldwide. The Plano North Metroplex Chapter of The Links is responsible for implementing community outreach programs targeting African Americans in the North Texas communities of Plano, Carrollton, Garland, Richardson, and the Colony. Programming foci include services to youth, national trends and services, the arts, international trends and services, educational, and health and wellness linkages.

- Delta Sigma Theta Sorority—Delta Sigma Theta is a nonprofit Greek-lettered organization of college-educated women who perform public service and place emphasis on the African American community. It was founded on January 13, 1913 by 22 collegiate women at Howard University who wanted to use their collective strength to promote academic excellence and provide assistance to persons in need. The first public act performed by the Delta

founders involved their participation in the Women's Suffrage March in

Washington, D.C., March 1913.

- Jack and Jill of America—Jack and Jill of America is a predominately African

    American organization formed during the late 1930s by 20 mothers in

    Philadelphia who wanted their children to have cultural opportunities, develop

    leadership skills, and form social networks. Jack and Jill of America publishes

    a national journal and has more than 200 local chapters in the United States.

    Mothers of children between the ages of 2 and 19 compose the membership

    and are required to plan and host monthly activities for the children, who are

    the focus of the program.

Subjects were selected via purposive and respondent-driven sampling.

Respondent-driven sampling, sometimes referred to as snowball sampling, is a technique

for developing a sample from existing study participants who help recruit future subjects

from their acquaintances. Thus, the sample appears to grow like a rolling snowball. As

the sample grows, data are gathered to be useful for the research. This sampling

technique is often used in populations where a unique sample is difficult to identify. This

variation of snowball sampling—respondent-driven sampling—has been shown to allow

researchers to make asymptotically unbiased estimates from snowball samples under

certain conditions. It also allows researchers to make estimates about the social network

connecting the population. As a complement to snowballing, purposive sampling was

used because it allowed the researcher to choose participants based on their unique

characteristics, experiences, attitudes, and perceptions. Furthermore, the use of these

sampling techniques in this qualitative research study allowed the researcher to obtain

rich descriptions of the phenomenon under investigation and make estimates about the social network connecting the population. An example of the invitation letter is included in Appendix A.

Instrument

The individual interviews with the subjects were semi structured interviews that followed the four questions from the Giele (2008) study, along with a sociodemographic set. An additional set of questions focused on strategies for coping with balancing life activities, workplace culture, and leadership. Further corroboration of the validity of this instrument and research approach for the study is that previous research examining work-life balance successfully used qualitative phenomenology (Damiano-Teixeira, 2006). The interview questions follow:

Question 1 (Early adulthood). About the period in your life immediately after college or your early 20s. What was your major, name of your college, and year of graduation, what about graduate education? What did you think you would like to become in terms of occupation and type of lifestyle or family life…What were you thinking then and how did things actually turn out.

Question 2 (Childhood and adolescence). Thinking of the period in your life before college and the goals that you and your family held for you, what was your family's attitude toward women's education and you going to college and what you would become? What was the effect of your parents' education, presence of brothers and sisters, family finances, involvement in a faith community, family expectations? How was your education different from or similar to that of your parents and brothers and sisters?

Question 3 (Adulthood—Current). Since college, what kinds of achievement and frustration have you experienced? What type of mentors have you had? What has happened that you didn't expect—in employment, family, faith, further education? Has there been job discrimination, children, a separation or divorce, health problems for you or a family member? What about moves, membership in the community, faith community, housing problems, racial integration, job loss? And feelings about yourself? Have there been good things such as particular rewards, satisfaction, or recognition?

Question 4 (Adulthood—Future). Looking back at your life from this vantage point, and ahead to the future, what are your main concerns? What are your goals, hopes, and dreams for the next few years? What problems do you hope to solve? Looking further out, where do you hope to be a few years from now with respect to work or finishing graduate school, family, faith, community, mentors, health, finances, etc.?

Question 5 (Strategies for balancing life). What coping strategies do you use to respond to concerns related to the plurality of roles? Have you ever felt pressured to choose between work and home? What made you think that you could do both successfully? Do you feel that your family life or work life have suffered because of your involvement in work or family? Have you felt any guilt related to either family or work? Are there times that you felt particularly successful at juggling the demands of both work and home? Why? Were you prepared for the demands of work and life balance? Why or why not? What strategies do you implement in your own life in order to remain balanced?

Question 6 (Networking—Leader and follower relationships). What experiences as a leader and or follower impacted your life? Is there anything in those

relationships that you would do differently? Why or why not? Please share some thoughts on those instances.

Question 7 (Workplace culture). What impact, if any, have the following had on your ability to achieve balance? Excessive workloads, management expectations, career advancement opportunities, and perceptions of discrimination.

Interviews and Procedures

The interview questions centered on various life periods, including early adulthood, childhood and adolescence, adulthood—current, and adulthood—future. Basic sociodemographic data were collected to provide a context for the data analysis and to place the subject in the life-story framework. An additional set of questions focused on strategies for coping with balancing life activities, workplace culture, and leadership.

The interviews were audiotaped to provide for consistent review and transcription of the interview. To maintain the anonymity of each subject, a pseudonym was assigned to each subject for coding purposes. The matrix listed the pseudonym and assigned a numerical value for each subject. The numerical value was used in coding the data. Once data were entered for the interview, the matrix using the pseudonym and assigned numerical value data were destroyed. This allows for complete confidentiality of responses. The one-on-one interviews lasted approximately 1 hour and were scheduled at the convenience of the subject.

Examples of the instrument with socio-demographic questions, informed consent form, interview protocol and thank you letter are included in Appendices B, C, D and E respectively.

Analysis

From the breadth of the questions, a variety of themes emerged. The analysis for

this study utilized the theoretical framework from the four life-course dimensions:

identity, relational style, level and type of motivation, and adaptive style. The researcher

reviewed each of the interviews to identify passages that related to each of these

dimensions. In addition, an analysis of the themes was reviewed for internal consistency.

The following guidelines were used for identifying the themes following the Giele

(2008) study:

> Identity: How does A see herself? Who does she identify with as being like
> herself? Does she mention her race, ethnicity, social class, [religion], or how she
> is different or similar to her family? What qualities does she mention that
> distinguish her—intelligence, being quiet, likeable, innovative, outstanding, a
> good mother, lawyer, wife, etc.?
>
> Relational style: What is A's typical way of relating to others? As a leader,
> follower, negotiator, equal colleague? Taking charge: Is she independent, very
> reliant on others for company and support, has a lot of friends, is lonely? Nature
> of the relationship with her husband or significant other [and her children]?
>
> Goals e and motivation: Need for achievement, affiliation, power. Is A ambitious
> and driven or relaxed and easy going? Is she concerned to make a name for
> herself? Focused more on helping her husband and children than on her own
> needs (nurturance vs. personal achievement)? Mentions enjoying life and wanting
> to have time for other things besides work. Enjoys being with children, doing
> volunteer work, seeing friends. A desire to be in control of her own schedule, to
> be in charge rather than to take orders.
>
> Adaptive style: What is her energy level? Is A an innovator and a risk taker or
> conventional and uncomfortable with change and new experience? Does A like to
> manage change, think of new ways of doing things? Is she self-confident or
> cautious? Used to a slow or fast pace, to routine and having plenty of time, or to
> doing several things at once. (p. 401)

Following the transcription of all of the data and the completion of the coding, the

researcher developed a composite profile of the themes that characterized the women.

The findings considered the similarities and differences by age, race, family background,

current family, education, and career. Nvivo9 was used to analyze the qualitative histories of each of the subjects. It was an excellent source for correlating the sociodemographic data with the qualitative data. The analysis through this process was compared with Giele's themes for similarities and differences.

Summary

This chapter provided the methodology for a qualitative phenomenological study to explore and gain an understanding of competing priorities impacting African American women striving to achieve work-life balance. Specific components include research design and appropriateness, social constructivist perspective, population, instruments, interview process, and analysis.

Chapter 4: Data Analysis and Findings

Historical antecedents affirm the multicentury presence of African American women in the world of work, dating back to slavery. The significance of the aforementioned presence notwithstanding, research to date on work-life balance and family issues remains grounded primarily on the experiences of middle-class white women, contributing to the marginalization of African American women without regard for the depth, breadth, and impact of their life experiences. The three-fold purpose of this phenomenological study was to challenge previously accepted discourses of work and scholarship related to this topic that were based on one demographic perspective, to incorporate new thinking and understanding of the historical and socioeconomic impact of balancing work and family from an African American view point, and to contribute to a significant knowledge gap in research related to work-life balance in diverse families.

While Chapter 4 presents results from interviews conducted with 30 African American women regarding the phenomenon of competing priorities that impact their ability to achieve work life balance, it also reports major themes that emerged from the data. Via interviews that utilized the life-story method, these women shared life experiences that underscored complexities inherent within their personal and professional lives. The study revealed a myriad of competing priorities and factors that are simultaneously convergent and divergent. While all women struggle at some point with work-life balance issues, collective and individual viewpoints of these women corroborate the influence of culture and ethnicity.

At the core of the study, which utilizes Giele's (2008) life-story method, social constructivist correlations (both collective and individual) affirm the relevance of such

research. This is, in large part, a result of the poignant and revealing responses from the study participants. The results discussed in this chapter suggest the potential for in-depth dialogue and new ways of understanding these issues. In tandem with this phenomenological study, the qualitative research and social constructivist perspective affirm Creswell's (2009) postulation that "individuals seek understandings of the world in which they live and work" (p. 8). The use of an open-ended, semi structured interviewing approach created a setting within which the subjects could share personal reflections. Further, it enabled them to focus specifically on historical and cultural contexts within the interview framework. Concomitantly, several of Crotty's (1998) assumptions related to phenomenology underscore the relevance and appropriateness for this study in addition to sharing an ideological basis.

- Meanings are constructed by human beings as they engage with the world they are interpreting. Qualitative researchers tend to use open-ended questions so that the participants can share their views.

- Human beings engage with their world and make sense of it based on their historical and social perspectives—we are all born into a world of meaning bestowed upon us by our culture. Thus, qualitative researchers seek to understand the context or setting of the participants through visiting this context and gathering information personally. They also interpret what they find, an interpretation shaped by the researcher's own experiences and background.

- The basic generation of meaning is always social, arising in and out of interaction with a human community. The process of qualitative research is

largely inductive, with the inquirer generating meaning from the data collected in the field.

The research questions noted below guided this study, establishing a platform for the inculcation of social constructivism and phenomenological study.

1. How do competing priorities impact the lives of African American women who are striving to achieve work-life balance?

2. What experiences (identity, relationship style, goals and motivation, and adaptive) shape the life course of African American women that impact work-family life balance decisions?

3. How do sociodemographic variables (education, age, ethnicity, family composition, profession, marital status, spouse education, and profession) influence work-family life decisions?

4. What are the relationships among influencers (family background, mentoring, and faith) and career goals on work-family life balance decisions?

Data Collection Procedures

The data collection process included selection of subjects via purposive and respondent-driven sampling. Respondent-driven sampling, sometimes referred to as snowball sampling, is a technique for developing a sample from existing study participants who help recruit future subjects from their acquaintances. Thus, the sample appears to grow like a rolling snowball. As the sample grows, data are gathered to be useful for the research. This sampling technique is often used in populations in which a unique sample is difficult to identify. This variation of snowball sampling—respondent-driven sampling—has been shown to allow researchers to make asymptotically unbiased

estimates from snowball samples under certain conditions. It also allows researchers to make estimates about the social network connecting the population. As a complement to snowballing, purposive sampling was used because it allowed the researcher to choose participants based on their unique characteristics, experiences, attitudes, and perceptions. Furthermore, the use of these sampling techniques in this qualitative research study allowed the researcher to obtain rich descriptions of the phenomena under investigation.

Population Descriptions and Selection Criteria

A diverse group of 30 African American women participated in the research study. Ranging in age from 28 to 86, with an average of 46, they were a cultural mosaic of similarities and differences: from a cashier to a corporate executive. Marital status categories included 16 who are married, six who are divorced, five who are single, and two widows, and one separated. All are mothers with an average of two children and two siblings. Two thirds of their families were coparented. Their lives were connected across cultural avenues intersected by socioeconomic differences. Salaries ranged from $15,000 to more than $250,000, averaging $70,000. Individually and collectively, their life experiences intoned moments of success and frustration as they strived to be present at home and work. Selections of participants were based on the following criteria: (a) must be an African American woman, and (b) either employed outside of the home in paid work or as a volunteer. Thirty interviews, with pseudonyms to ensure confidentiality, were completed with participants whose demographics are presented in Table 2.

Table 2

Population Demographics

Participant	Age	Education	Profession	Marital Status
Elise	28	Bachelor/Journalism	Insurance Manager	Divorced
Marlena	39	Bachelor/Education	Educator	Married
Shana	42	Doctorate	Chiropractor	Single
Darla	47	Masters/Media	Journalist	Single
Camile	40	Masters/Business	Executive	Divorced
Portia	35	J.D.	Attorney	Single
Phyllis	42	J.D.	Attorney	Divorced
Delia	37	Masters/Education	Administrator	Married
Polly	50	Bachelor/Nursing	Executive	Married
Susan	35	Masters/Business	Self-employed	Married
Marla	38	Masters/Education	Administrator	Married
Dolly	40	Masters/Management	Admin. Executive	Married
Trudy	49	Bachelor	Executive	Married
Helen	48	Associate Degree	Vice President	Married
Debby	36	Bachelor/Marketing	Manager	Married
Charlotte	36	High school diploma	Clerk	Married
Kendra	45	10th grade	Cafeteria worker	Separated
Bonnie	43	High school diploma	Cashier	Single
Camila	42	D.C.	Chiropractor	Single
Laura	86	Ph.D.	College educator	Widowed
Tammy	63	Bachelor/Design	Retired educator	Married
Ruby	47	Bachelor	Real estate owner	Divorced
Margaret	84	Masters/Education	Retired professor	Widowed
Jillian	50	Masters/Education	Educator	Married
Wanda	29	D.C.	Chiropractor	Married
Barbara	41	Masters/Education	Educator	Married
Gretchen	40	Bachelors/Marketing	Executive	Married
Sophia	46	Masters/Business	Manager	Married
Ellen	60	Bachelor/Education	Retired	Divorced
Elizabeth	61	Masters/Education	Administrator	Divorced

The Interview Process

The individual interviews with the subjects were semi structured, averaged

between 45 minutes to 1 hour, and were conducted in person or via telephone. The

interviews were audiotaped to provide for consistent review and transcription of the

interview. To maintain confidentiality of each subject, a pseudonym was attributed to

each interviewee. The matrix listed the pseudonym and assigned a numerical value for each subject. The numerical value was used in coding the data which were kept confidential. Once data were entered into Nvivo software for the interview, the matrix using the pseudonym and assigned numerical value data was destroyed. This allowed for complete confidentiality of responses. The researcher conducted and coded every interview.

The interviews followed the general four questions from the Giele (2008) study, along with a sociodemographic set. An additional set of questions focused on strategies for coping with balancing life activities, workplace culture, and leadership. At the onset of the interview, participants were assured that their participation in the interview was strictly voluntary with the option of not answering any of the questions. At the conclusion of the study, the researcher agreed to mail a summary of the study to participants who requested it.

Data Analysis

The interviews were audiotaped and downloaded into the NVivo9 qualitative analysis software. This software was utilized to analyze the qualitative histories of each participant, including developing linkages between sociodemographic data and the qualitative data. The analysis was compared and contrasted with Giele's (2008) themes for similarities and differences, using the theoretical framework from the four life-course dimensions.

Giele's (2008) study provided guidelines using the four life-course dimensions that served as the overarching themes:

Identity: How does A see herself? Who does she identify with as being like herself? Does she mention her race, ethnicity, social class, [religion], or how she

is different or similar to her family? What qualities does she mention that distinguish her—intelligence, being quiet, likeable, innovative, outstanding, a good mother, lawyer, wife, etc.?

Relational style: What is A's typical way of relating to others? As a leader, follower, negotiator, equal colleague? Taking charge: Is she independent, very reliant on others for company and support, has a lot of friends, is lonely? Nature of the relationship with her husband or significant other [and her children]?

Goals and motivation: Need for achievement, affiliation, power. Is A ambitious and driven or relaxed and easy going? Is she concerned to make a name for herself? Focused more on helping her husband and children than on her own needs (nurturance vs. personal achievement)? Mentions enjoying life and wanting to have time for other things besides work. Enjoys being with children, doing volunteer work, seeing friends. A desire to be in control of her own schedule, to be in charge rather than to take orders.

Adaptive mode: What is her energy level? Is A an innovator and a risk taker or conventional and uncomfortable with change and new experience? Does A like to manage change, think of new ways of doing things? Is she self-confident or cautious? Used to a slow or fast pace, to routine and having plenty of time, or to doing several things at once. (p. 401)

The composite profile of the themes that characterize the participants is presented throughout the thematic analysis.

     Thematic analysis. In addition to the themes that emerged as a result of the qualitative analysis, key influencers undergirded the thematic analysis and are discussed from individual and collective viewpoints.

     Identity. The participants tended to view themselves in a positive manner. Their educational background was a significant aspect and identifier for the interviewees along with their ethnicity, which is African American. The overwhelming majority, 87%, had college degrees with 33% holding bachelor's degrees, 37% holding master's degrees, and 17% holding terminal degrees. Education levels varied with the remaining four participants who finished the 10th grade, graduated from high school, and attended college for 2 years, respectively. With the exception of two participants, all of the women

viewed themselves as successful and expressed satisfaction with their lives overall.

Figure 1 illustrates the Identity theme.

Figure 1. Identity theme and influencers.

Two of the participants stated with certainty that the lack of support from family members impacted their self-esteem and interest in attending college. Quotations from participants are all based on personal communications with the researcher. According to Charlotte:

> My life didn't turn out as I hoped. I got pregnant—couldn't go to school. When you don't have anyone to help you, it's hard. My parents and siblings didn't graduate from high school; I'm the only one. Education is important to me but my parents weren't interested. They didn't help me.

> Kendra added:

> I didn't finish high school but the local college extension program enabled me to teach nutrition. I and my siblings wanted to go to college but education wasn't a priority.

Of the 28 respondents who were satisfied with their lives, 30% said their lives turned out differently. In each instance, the change was a result of a shift in career focus. Laura hoped to be a doctor; Tammy dreamed of being an interior designer; and Delia

wanted to be a lawyer. They each chose education as careers based in part on the opportunity to have a high quality of life. In Laura's case, she noted that as the granddaughter of slaves, she was not afforded as many opportunities, though her family believed in education. Another participant, Darla, stated:

> I thought I would have gotten married and had a lot of children. I never wanted to be in the field I am in. In some ways I am disappointed but overall I have to say I am still blessed.

Familial similarities were more often associated with participants who graduated from college. Throughout the study, they made references and comparisons with family members from parents and siblings to grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins, etc. There was a collective sense of pride in the examples set for them; a built-in reinforcement of what their future portended.

Debby said:

> My parents have been strong proponents of education—advance degrees and graduate school. My dad would have probably preferred that we went on to get our doctorate or law degrees. My parents did not pressure us regarding education. My sister is a strong student and I struggled to get a B. They were both very understanding. I knew early on that school beyond undergraduate was not for me. They let me be me. My sister went on to law school and I found my niche in a field I love. Definitely my parents' patience and understanding and no-nonsense approach of loving and supporting us gave my sister and me a really strong balance and foundation. I definitely think I exceeded their expectations and continue to exceed their expectations.

Jillian shared:

> As a child, all I heard was education. My grandmother was from Mississippi and had an eighth grade education. My grandfather, also from Mississippi, had a fifth grade education. They settled in Arkansas and purchased a 200-acre farm where they raised their family. All of their five children graduated from college. I don't know how they did it because he was a farmer and she stayed home to raise the children. In order to be successful, education was a priority. I am from the civil rights era and Dr. King was stressing education.

Elise noted:

I wanted to go to college but it was mandatory. I wanted to pursue some of my dreams. I attended the college that both my parents and other family members attended; there was an implied pressure. I have the credits to graduate but haven't finished because it is not in the field of my passion. I went to college to pacify my parents. Some frustrations are in the lack of mentoring from my family.

Delia remarked:

I come from a family of educators. My dad was in the military. My mother was my kindergarten teacher. My aunt and uncle were all educators. My father had a lot of training in the military. My grandmother attended college in the 1920s. My grandfather was a landscaper. Education was important; on my father's side, everyone had a college degree. College was expected. Two-parent homes were the norm. Subsequent generations are achieving graduate and terminal degrees. We are creating an expectation of education in our family.

Jones and Shorter-Gooden's (2003) research affirms the importance African American women attribute to religion, noting, "For many it has been crucial for their very survival" (p. 259). Faith was a major theme throughout the study, with faith communities playing significant roles in not only shaping the intellect and character of many of the participants, but also encouraging them to purse higher education.

Gretchen stated:

College was not optional; college was expected. We were always pressed to do our best. All my aunts, uncles, and cousins were college educated. That's the direction we always pursued. I can remember as a 9 and 10 year old, my uncles who were attending college would ask me when they came home for the holidays, "So where do you want to go to school?" I grew up in the Baptist church and I always saw the rewards of education. The kids that went away to college were the ones you saw the leadership acknowledging and praising. As a kid, you knew from a spiritual standpoint that this was something important as African Americans to pursue higher education. From a spiritual standpoint, that was always a forum for conversations about achievement and education.

Polly affirmed:

I lived in a family that valued education. Education was expected. My church community encouraged education and set a standard for the youth to follow.

Conversely, participants from backgrounds where education was not a priority tended to compare themselves less to family members. Rather, they articulated new hopes and dreams for themselves and their children. It should be noted that they were not harboring ill will toward family members who didn't encourage them to pursue an education; they were taking the initiative to shift the paradigm—to create new ways of viewing a future where education would be the order of the day among generations to come.

Charlotte said:

I didn't have a mentor as a young person; no one encouraged or helped me. If someone had helped me, who knows where I could have been? I know education is important. That's why I am sharing with my family the importance of reaching for more, getting an education. It was hard coming up with my parents who were more focused on their own needs. My daughter is listening to me and working hard in school; that makes me proud to see her looking to be more than I am.

Kendra added:

Education wasn't a priority in my family growing up but it is for me and my siblings. We all survived Katrina and feel blessed. We are so serious about college that we are working together to make sure our children have that opportunity. We don't make a lot of money, but we started a family savings account for our children's education. Each pay period, I and my siblings put $20 in to this account. I was not taught to save, so I am not usually real good at it, but this money none of us touch. It feels good because all our kids are going to go to college. One of my kids started this year.

Relational style. An overwhelming majority of the families of the participants encouraged their daughters to pursue college educations, accounting for 90% of all respondents. The majority of the participants, 60%, viewed themselves as leaders and stated that mentors had a positive impact on their lives and careers. Of the respondents, 25% believe followership is an important element of being a good leader while one respondent stated that she tries "never to be a follower." More than 30% named family

members as mentors and role models for balancing work and life. Figure 2 illustrates the
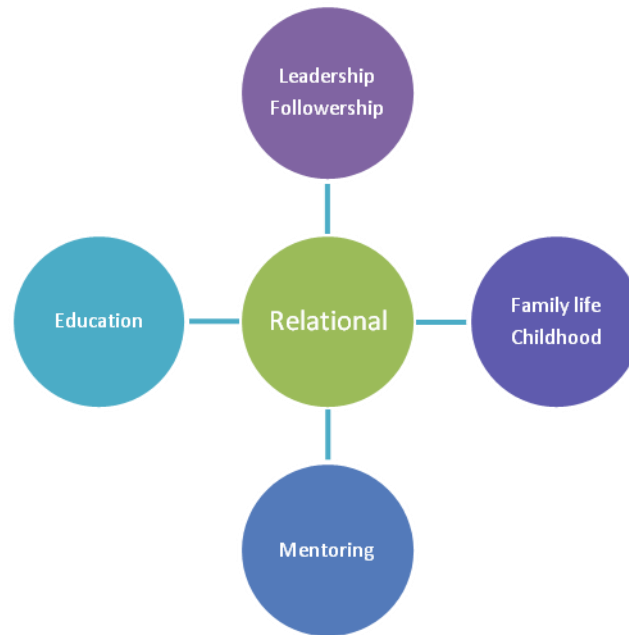
Relational theme.

Figure 2. Relational theme and influencers.

Regarding the impact of mentoring, Portia stated:

I've done a lot of mentoring that impacts my life in a positive way that enabled me to be aware of the needs of others. It allows me to give a helping hand. My mom and aunts have been role models throughout the years, as well as some judges who are moms balancing life and work.

Phyllis expressed the following views of followership and leadership:

The wisdom comes from the ability to allow people to reach me. Being a follower allows me to do this. A lot of people like to lead who were not meant to lead. I have learned that when you lead, it's a very humble place to be. And I'm not sure people decide to be leaders. Leaders are chosen.

Tammy concurred with this view noting:

I never thought of myself as a leader. I am not a group person or joiner. I have never enjoyed being in a large-group setting. I tend to lose my focus in a big group. I do better with one-on-one relationships. It's not my intention to be the leader. I am perfectly happy being the Indian and not the chief.

One respondent, Trudy, didn't take on leadership roles in the community because at the time she didn't see the benefit. Now she does and stated if she could do something differently, she would have networked earlier. Despite 60% viewing themselves as leaders, it is important to note that 40% had the opposite perception.

Delia stated:

> I have learned I am still a follower in different areas. Being a follower teaches you how to serve others. It is biblical in many ways, following and serving others. I focus on how I can serve. That is in my job, community and church. I feel that being a follower enables me to lead.

Family life and relationships were significant priorities discussed by the participants with more than 85% specifically referring to how their parents' work ethic and education impacted their future. College was an expectation for 87% of participants, and in each instance, the average educational level for their parents and siblings was a master's degree. Participants reflected on childhoods that were affirming, positive, and nurturing with college at the forefront of family communication. These early experiences shaped their sense of self, image, and relationship dynamics in the community. Dolly noted that pursuing an education was mandatory with generations of college-educated relatives serving as role models. She said:

> Bottom line, the women in the family were entrepreneurial, too. They may have been taught to be aggressive, but always lady like and lovable. All of the women were impeccable dressers who never once let a hair get out of place (that I saw!).

Phyllis remarked,

> My mother and father built a foundation around me. I had a wonderful childhood. Both of my parents believe in education. My father worked two jobs and helped his siblings. My mother was a second-generation college graduate. Both of my parents were educators. My dad always said, "Your full time job is to be well educated and to prepare yourself to make a contribution to society." College was an expectation not an option regardless of gender. We are a family of learners. It continues with my daughter.

In other settings where participants were not encouraged to get an education, they made commitments to shift the paradigm for future generations. Other respondents were the first on their families to attend college, assuming the position of role model. Marla was raised by her grandmother after losing her mother at age 12. She recalled afternoons sitting at the kitchen table under the watchful eye of her late mother, who despite graduating from high school at the age of 16, did not have an opportunity to attend college because it was not a family priority. The juxtaposition of thinking manifested when her maternal grandmother raised her and insisted that she and five other cousins complete college. To date, five of the six attained college degrees and two received master's degrees.

Participants overwhelmingly affirmed that the importance of attending college started during grade school, with extended family members joining with their parents to reinforce this expectation. More than 87% stated that gender was not an issue regarding educational pursuit. Wanda stated:

> My family members are educators who taught us that knowledge is the key to power and success. My church community supported my educational endeavors. My education was different because I was able to go away to college while my mother commuted.

Portia reiterated:

> Everyone in my family is very focused on education regardless of gender. College was an expectation, not an option. Both of my parents have undergraduate degrees; my father is a doctor. We always aimed high.

Goals and motivation. Relationships with spouses were positive for the majority of the married respondents and those who were widowed. More than 60% of the respondents described their relationships in terms of partnerships with shared responsibilities both at home and with their children's extracurricular activities. More

than 50% noted that support from family members enabled them to have quality time together as couples apart from their children. Managing competing priorities between time and attention for spouses versus their children were topics of concern with several of the participants. One respondent expressed concern that her spouse felt she was competing with him for visibility in community settings.

Divorced participants recalled frustrations related not only to being single parents, but also having to assume both roles in situations in which the ex-husband was disengaged from the children. Two participants, Phyllis and Elise, opted for divorce as a way of modeling the difference between being in an unhealthy relationship and maintaining a sense of self that affirmed the importance of self-respect and self-assurance. Elise noted that being a single parent was challenging because her ultimate goal is to remarry someday. In the interim, she replied, "I am working on falling in love with myself again."

Overall, the participants were independent, take-charge mothers who were comfortable requesting and receiving support from friends and family members. Equity in their relationships was the norm rather than the exception, with 25% earning more than their spouses. Figure 3 illustrates the Goals and Motivation theme.

Figure 3. Goals and motivation theme and influencers.

Jones and Shorter-Gooden (2003) postulate researchers have determined that, overall, African American women tend to minimize experiences of bias and discrimination, further suggesting they are "subconsciously denying or knowingly ignoring it" (p. 74). Nonetheless, discrimination, perceived or experienced, is a reality. While 47% of participants expressed an awareness of discrimination in the work place, 21% of these respondents experienced ageism; 36% attributed it to racism; and 43% say they have not experienced it personally. Tammy, who owned a business in a predominately white neighborhood, expressed concern initially about letting the surrounding community know that she was the owner because she was afraid that they would not send their children. She noted:

> At first, I said, "God, why am I here?" Then a light bulb went on. You are not here to teach them art, you are here to teach them about people.

Camile said:

> Without hesitation, I have not experienced discrimination in my career. I hear it from other people but have not experienced it.

Ellen stated:

I was in a position where I was discriminated against. I was very uncomfortable. It wasn't that long ago. I ultimately left because it was affecting my life and my health.

Elise noted:

While I don't feel discriminated against, I don't currently see a lot of color in the faces of those who have the top leadership roles. It makes me wonder how receptive the organization will be to someone like me.

Using shifting as a strategy for assessing prejudice and bias enables African American women to survey the workplace landscape and decide how to proceed. Several of the participants said that sometimes it comes down to a last-minute decision. "Do I work late to be seen or attend a happy hour versus going home to spend a relaxing evening with my family?"

Collectively, the participants are goal oriented, in tune with their historical and cultural strengths, and cognizant of the demands on them and management expectations to outperform the status quo. Phyllis stated:

I don't get stressed in the workplace; when I leave it and go home, that is it. My boss once said, "It just disturbs me that you're never disturbed." I problem solve, I strategize so I will have the ability to think effectively.

Portia noted:

Sometimes there's an expectation that as a female or a minority that you don't work as hard. You feel you have to be better than everybody else. If someone does the bare minimum, I have to do more than that. I think there is an expectation that you are not going to perform as your male counterparts because of the expectations outside of the job.

Gretchen remarked:

Some frustrations can be self-inflicted and some of it what you experience in the workplace. As a military child, I was mostly in integrated situations, but I did notice the difference. I knew that African American women were treated differently. During my adult life, especially in corporate settings, those things are

quite blatant. They may be hooded or shaded, but they are still there. Knowing that you have got to be the best or you have got to be better or you have to take two extra steps. Being what I call a "double minority," African American and woman take extra effort. Those are frustrations, but those are things that I keep in the back of my mind because those kinds of things will stop you. If you dwell on frustration, you will never get anywhere.

Darla said:

I didn't expect to be a mother to four nephews and nieces, but I am glad that I accepted this responsibility. There was a time when I was working four jobs to provide for them. I never thought I would be out in the community, celebrated like I am.

Adaptive mode. The participants are collectively open to change and new ways of thinking while negotiating the complexities inherent within today's workplace. Their view of the future is a combination of new ideas anchored by a need for predictability and consistency. In the midst of change, they are committed to finding their voice and their purpose. More than 40% of the participants are planning to make career changes; 30% are pursuing additional degrees; 20% are planning for retirement; and 10% are undecided. Their life experiences attest to the idea that valuing differences is crucial and that life is short.

Two of the participants are currently dealing with chronic illnesses that precipitated their willingness to ensure that their voices were heard via this study. There is an overall spirit of optimism tempered with skepticism given the current economic era and ongoing life experiences. It should be noted that this theme had a high level of resonance. In particular, the focus on health and family was articulated as a primary hope and dream by 55% of the women. These women individually and collectively affirm their gifts and follow the beat of their own drummers. They are making time to heal and be whole. Figure 4 illustrates the Adaptive Mode theme.
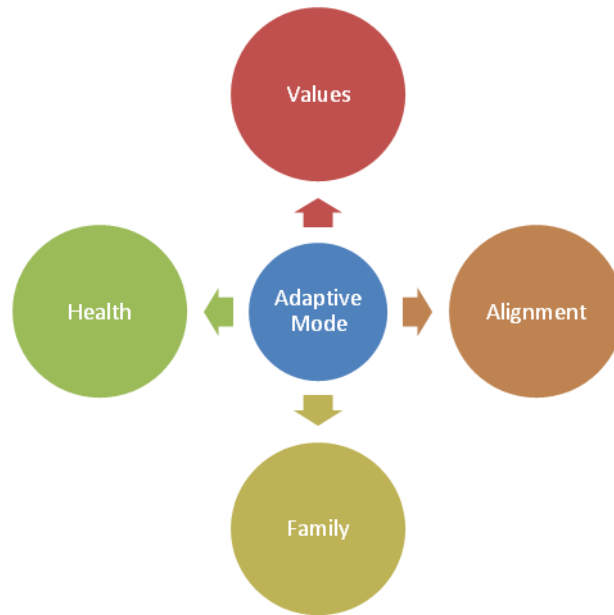
Figure 4. Adaptive style theme and influencers.

Susan stated:

I have a group of girlfriends and we started a tradition. Every December we get together and do what we call a burning bowl and vision boards. We write down bad things or the negative things that either we've done or we've observed. We burn it up in a bowl and we go through magazine and create a collage for our vision for the next year. My theme for the next few years is evolution. This year has made me highly reflective. For the first time in my recent recollection, I don't know what is next because a lot of my perceived self-identity was caught up in what I wanted to be since sixth grade. Now I don't know what I want to be. In my career life, I was the business woman at major corporations, so I've checked that box. So now I'm trying to explore other interests like writing. I always thought of myself as a corporate chick, but now I realize that what I liked about corporations was an illusion.

Participants are prioritizing, thoughtfully determining what matters most to them and those they cherish. They are reexamining their values and assessing how they align with their workplace culture. More than 25% are concerned about quality of life, health, and wellness and the state of the nation as a future provider for their heirs. Volunteering and serving the needs of others emerged as a theme that resonated with the majority of the respondents.

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Jillian noted:

Future dreams include enjoying our second home in East Texas, relaxing, and enjoying my family. Volunteering is important to me; leaving this world a little better than I found it.

Barbara said:

In the future, I want to write some books and see the kids grown and successful. I want to be healthy and free to enjoy life and have someone to share my life with. Health needs to be a priority. Balance is important. I have made some of the biggest mistakes of my life when I was out of alignment. You are only here for a short time.

Ruby added:

I decided I needed to love myself more and loving myself means taking better care of myself and start saying no. I cannot make everybody happy.

Marla said:

I believe that God set me up and put me here. I took advantage of the opportunity to see excessive workloads as a chance to help someone. No one has higher expectations of me than I have of myself. Aligning the workplace culture with my values has been very important as I work to achieve balance. I work from the bid IDEA—inclusion, diversity, equity, and access. If we can look at those elements across the board, no one will be left behind.

Collectively, the participants brought to the interviews an understanding of the struggle and a desire to see a new day dawn where there is concurrence to support each other during times of challenge. The village that has raised so many children has a new opportunity to renew and refresh the matriarchs of the African American family. Marla is, in her words, "on a mission to pave the way for others." She stated:

Discrimination is real; it is a fact of life. We as African American women have to have the philosophy that "she ain't heavy." We have to have the mentality akin to the African proverb: "If I stand tall it is because I stand on the shoulders of those who came before me." Someone paved the way for me, so it is my job to leave a legacy for someone else. I want my grandchildren to be able to say some one is standing on my grandmother's back; that I did something along this road to make it better for others. These factors impact our ability to achieve balance but because

of our determination and perseverance as African American women, we've been doing it since the slave ships and the cotton patches. We're not running around.

As granddaughters of slaves, Laura and Margaret reflected individually on their own struggles as young women in the segregated South where each aspired to different career paths. Laura wanted to be a doctor and Margaret had minimal input regarding where she would attend college or her first teaching assignment. Their era was a time period of when honoring traditions and respecting the status quo was expected. Their familiarity with that school of thought, life lessons, and wisdom bridged the gap between new avenues of thought and conventionalism.

Elise seemed to mirror their thoughts, marrying the new with the established, when she said:

> Specifically, I want to figure out how to balance finances with quality of life. I'm trying to get to a place where compensation is about more than money. I really want to be married and have a family; there is a sense of urgency about that. I want the best of both worlds: independence and conventionalism.

Camila recently graduated from chiropractic school, and as a new wellness doctor, she is excited about educating the African American community about her profession. Like Wanda, she is a leader and trailblazer in a field unknown to many in her community. As with more than 50% of the participants, she accepts the challenge to embrace change with a spirit of optimism, anxious to usher in new paradigms of thought. She stated:

> I know I will be successful in the future, but I want to build a practice, reduce college loan debt, and work in the African America community to help it be healthier. I want to get stronger and grounded in my faith.

Phyllis said:

> You hit a place of happiness where you are comfortable, but that is not a great place to stay. You need to have a plan for the future. I am thinking about either

being a judge, school board member, or lobbyist. Looking ahead, I will consider my future with family members in mind.

Strategies for achieving work-life balance. The plurality of roles facing African American women make achieving balance in their personal and professional lives a challenge. The pressures to choose between work and home are continuous, with more stress associated with families raising children. Involvement in work and family creates a dichotomy as they try to manage the increasingly inflexible demands between the two responsibilities. Guilt is often an undesirable outcome as the majority of the respondents affirmed. There were times, they noted, when they felt successful at juggling the demands, but those were rare occurrences. Regarding balancing the myriad of roles, more than 80% noted the importance of doing what they enjoyed and learning how and when to say no; choosing their battles along the way. Faith and God were articulated by 90% of participants as both a key element in balancing and developing coping strategies. Culturally and historically, faith and religion have been at the heart of the African American family.

Helen stated:

Balancing life and work flowed for me because I was doing what I enjoyed. There was a lot of prayer.

Portia noted:

Coping strategies are honestly putting it in God's hands a lot of the time. When I was younger, I wanted to be in control of everything and have it all line up perfectly. As I have gotten older and raised kids, I have learned there are some things I can control and some things I need to leave in God's hands. That's how I find balance. I go to church regularly; it is a huge center in my life. I just try to live every day for Him and I believe He gives me the strength and wisdom to do things in a way that I don't get stressed or worried about what is going to happen next. Specific strategies are going to church, volunteering, and outings with other single church members.

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Marlena remarked:

Coping strategies are based on prayer and faith. I don't do anything without putting Christ first. I ask Him to give me the words to say; to give me the attitude. I know I am standing on the shoulders of some very strong women and men who have been dedicated to their families. My faith gets me through, that's it.

Some of the respondents expressed frustration with the process of achieving balance, reiterating a responsibility to live up to the standards set by their mothers and grandmothers.

Susan stated:

I am working on developing coping strategies because that is an area where I struggle. I think that I struggle because I had taken a great amount of pride in juggling those balls, but there is never a pride in taking time for you. Downtime is a curse word and all of your free time should be spent doing something productive whether it is for your husband, kids, community organization. You should always be on. I'm not good at this; some of this is societal. Black women are pulled in so many directions; we are reminded of our grandmothers who worked as maids and sewed holes in clothing. We are made to feel like we should handle everything. When I don't handle all of it, I feel like a loser. In my mental construct, I have grades in all the aspects of my life. My grades as a wife, mother, employee, volunteer are not all As and that is so frustrating. My generation (25 to 40s) has been programmed to show our mothers that we appreciate the barriers they overcame. We are trying to succeed and demonstrate that we can have it all, but we were never taught how to cope.

Marla replied:

I am flunking balancing life. My life changes were so intense. I dated, got married, got pregnant, and then adopted my nephew. All this with my job. Now I am trying to make changes. I try to leave early each week at least 2 nights. I believe that I can do it successfully because I believe the Bible verse, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me." It's a process; I believe that all things are possible. I am learning how to be flexible with my family that has suffered the most. I give 110% to my job, but now that I have found the value of being flexible, it's getting better. I do have a lot of guilt and really feel I need to spend more time with my father and godparents. I absolutely was not prepared for the demands of work-life balance. My children and husband demand a lot from me. I had no clue. My husband is not as understanding as I think he should be.

Phyllis said:

I rarely bring work home because that is where I need my personal downtime. I set boundaries; there are times when I don't answer the phone. I don't have a problem locking out technology. I put things in pockets, schedule things, make time to pray, and listen to worship music. This is one way I create balance. As a Black female, it is hard to feel downtrodden and burdened when trying to achieve balance. We have learned to keep going.

Throughout the interviews with the 30 participants, a myriad of central themes and key influencers emerged that affirmed both the purpose and relevance of this phenomenological study. The aforementioned topics were presented in the first section of this chapter. The next section focuses specifically on the research questions.

Research Questions

Research Question 1. How do competing priorities impact the lives of African American women who are striving to achieve work-life balance?

The genesis of this phenomenon is how African American women define priorities and the notion of work-life balance. Respondents in the study articulated three messages and themes related to this question.

1. Priorities are fluid to a great extent, shifting based on the needs of family members and the expectations of the organizations with which they are associated. Throughout the study, participants discussed the demands of family, community, and work as interrelated components that were often out of alignment and yet required to attain any semblance of order. Maintaining a spirit of flexibility was a mandate, as they sought to be present and responsive to the various parts of their multifaceted lives.

2. At the center of work-life balance resides workplace culture and all the pressures associated with job performance and organizational relationships.

To this component, African American women add their ethnicity because this is not something they leave at home with the family. In a Center for Women Policy Studies study, Tucker and Wolfe (2002) stated, "Women of color do not experience their workplace cultures with their race/ethnicity and gender neatly compartmentalized as two separate facts of life" (p. 3). Therefore, they bring to the game a holistic perspective of what it takes to be successful while maintaining their self-respect as women of color, often in a workplace culture that neither values nor understands their uniqueness. They know they have to do more and be more than their peers.

3. Competing for one's own attention is a part of the equation. African American women understand that they have to set aside time for themselves. Placing themselves at the top of the list rarely occurs, as articulated by the majority of the participants, but they each recognize that is important to make that commitment. Some respondents discussed self-love and giving themselves permission to dream, plan, and hope for a happier life while others were still evolving to a place of unconditional love for themselves. Relationships with spouses or children often siphoned off the time they needed to engage fully in a space that seemed selfish to some and obligatory to others who were in self-cherishment mode.

Research Question 2. What experiences (identity, relationship style, drive and motivation, and adaptive style) shape the life course of African American women that impact work-family life balance decisions?

The 30 women who participated in the study modeled the way by sharing not only their life experiences, but also communicating future plans to impact positively the overall quality of life for their families and generations to come. Their life courses were shaped personally and professionally by each of the following dimensions.

1. *Identity*—The participants tended to view themselves in a positive manner. They were self-assured, well-educate, and grounded in the daily demands of life, both personally and professionally. Their educational background was a significant aspect and identifier along with their ethnicity, which is African American. More than 93% described themselves as successful and satisfied with their lives overall. As decision makers, the African American women in this study were strengthened by their ethnicity, educational preparation, faith community, and family relationships.

2. *Relational*—The majority of the women in this study were from families that encouraged them to attend college and pursue advance degrees. Consequently, the majority of them—60%—viewed themselves as leaders and stated that mentors had a positive impact on their lives and careers. They articulated the impact of positive influences from family members who served as mentors and modeled how to balance work and life. Family life and relationships were significant priorities discussed by the participants, with more than 85% specifically referring to how their parents' work ethic and education impacted their future. Participants reflected on childhoods that were affirming, positive, and nurturing. These life experiences prepared them to assume leadership

roles within their families, shaped their sense of self-image, and taught them how to manage meaningfully interrelationship dynamics.

3. *Drive and Motivation*—Relationships with spouses were positive for the majority of the married respondents and those who were widowed. More than 60% of the respondents described their relationships in terms of partnerships with shared responsibilities both at home and with their children's extracurricular activities. Overall, the participants were independent, take-charge mothers who were comfortable requesting and receiving support from friends and family members. Equity in their relationships was the norm rather than the exception, with 25% earning more than their spouses. Handling the pressures of demanding careers prepared them to be adept at decision making in diverse settings.

4. *Adaptive Style*—The participants expressed an openness and willingness to embrace change in the work place and at home. This included new ways of thinking and problem solving while being flexible. Navigating the complexities that reside in their diverse environments required skill sets grounded in leadership, creativity, risk taking, and multitasking. These women who embraced early on a form of renaissance thinking, bracketed by consistency and an excitement about the unknown, are uniquely qualified to make decisions in any setting. They are fortified by optimism, a sense of duty to serve the needs of others, and a commitment to remain aligned with their personal values.

Research Question 3. How do sociodemographic variables (education, age, ethnicity, family composition, profession, marital status, spouse education, and profession) influence work-family life decisions?

Aside from the challenges African Americans have from perspectives of discrimination and socioeconomic disparities, the influence of the aforementioned variables is weighted depending on timing and life stages. Equity within the marriage or relationship is either a benefit or a reason for discord. Respondents in the study included every marital status, from single women to widows. Their life experiences were different. Single mothers were committed to modeling loving relationships from a leadership position as the matriarch, while two-parent families were striving to keep communication and flexibility at the forefront. The journeys of women who were widowed and divorced were diverse based, in part, on whether they were employed or retired. All of the participants had children, with the general consensus being a commitment to be present and engaged in the decisions that affected the well-being of the family. There was no indication of abdicating these responsibilities to a spouse or other family member. Finances were stated as an issue in less than 15% of the respondents. More than 20% of the participants expressed a reluctance to accept positions that would negatively impact their time with their family.

Research Question 4. What are the relationships between influencers (family background, mentoring, and faith) and career goals on work-family life balance decisions?

An overwhelming majority of the participants—90%—mentioned faith and faith community as key influencers, particularly as they applied to work-life balance and the

decisions they were required to make. Family background was also a major factor. Many of the familial influencers were based on having mothers and grandmothers as role models who balanced work and life while doing more strenuous jobs. In some instances, family members provided consistent support, and in others, little to no support. Women in families that provided support had more flexibility to accept special assignments that required business travel or opportunities for advancement. Conversely, those with minimal support felt left behind and often frustrated that they were not in a position to be considered for career promotions. A sense of abandonment and disappointment were communicated by several of the participants. This was in contrast to others who, by design, preferred to stay in positions that gave them the flexibility to participate in their children's activities. Looking to the future, their discernment process included reconciling career moves with family priorities. Participants with and without mentors noted the assistance they saw other nonminority peers receive regarding family issues but were hesitant to ask for flexibility when they had a commitment. This was based, in part, on a concern that they would be considered inflexible when future career opportunities were available. The aforementioned statement underscores an environment where lack of trust facilitates an unwillingness to seek guidance and support from organizational leadership.

Summary

This chapter presented qualitative research data from a phenomenological study conducted via interviews with 30 African American women. Utilizing the life-story method, the participants shared life stories and personal experiences of their journey to achieve work-life balance, including competing priorities. Collective and individual

viewpoints of these women corroborate the influence of ethnicity and culture, education,

family, discrimination, faith, and community. Findings challenged previously accepted

discourses of work that were based on one demographic, providing a more diverse

perspective corroborated by measurable data.

Chapter 5: Summary, Conclusions, and Recommendations

The purpose of the qualitative phenomenological study was to explore, via narratives and the life-story method, a more diverse approach to understanding competing priorities that impact African American women striving to achieve work-life balance. Thirty African American women shared personal and professional life experiences via interviews that chronicled, in their words, literal expressions of how they navigate the complexities of a multitude of roles in the workplace, family, and community. Chapter 5 presents the summary, conclusions, and recommendations of the study, including pertinent theoretical applications. Additionally key findings and limitations are included with this chapter formatted, in part, for future publication consideration.

Summary of the Study

African American women have historically been marginalized by societal stereotypes and bias. In *Shifting*, Jones and Shorter-Gooden (2003) assert, "As a society, we know very little about the psychology of Black women, a group of 19 million—seven percent of the US population" (p. 2). It is, on many levels, incredulous that such blatant inattention to this significant demographic has been acceptable for such a substantial timeframe. While all women struggle with issues related to work-life conflict, missing from this dialogue are the voices of African American women who compose one of the largest demographic groups in organizations. Despite evidence that work is a significant domain in their lives, researchers have limited information about their career experiences or how they integrate the world of work with their personal lives (Blair-Loy, 2003). This affirms why a phenomenological study on competing priorities that impact African

American women's ability to achieve work-life balance was not only relevant, but also appropriate.

A multifaceted approach was used to guide the research study. Four themes espoused by Elder per M. Weber, (personal communication, December 21, 2010) are lives and historical times, the timing of lives, linked lives, and human agency. These postulations were linked to Giele's life-story method comprised of four dimensions: identity, relational, goals and motivation, and adaptive mode. Utilizing a systems theoretical framework and employing systems thinking, the researcher viewed cause and effect via the interviews of the 30 women who participated in the study. The multidisciplinary perspective facilitated the identification of correlations between the life-story dimensions employed in the study and Capra's (1996) five basic principles of ecology: "interdependence, recycling, partnership, flexibility, and diversity" (p. 304). The linkages among these dimensions and the following themes that emerged provide the foundation for elevating this topic within organizations in the public and private sectors.

In concert with this phenomenological study, the qualitative research and social constructivist perspective affirmed Creswell's (2009) premise that "individuals seek understandings of the world in which they live and work" (p. 8). The participants' responses affirmed the relevance of the researcher's decision to create an environment in which they could share poignant life stories and the researcher could make meaning using cultural and historical frameworks. It further enabled the researcher to interpret the findings, shaped in part by her own experiences and background as an African American woman and in concurrence with Crotty's (1998) assumptions related to phenomenology.

The research questions addressed by the study were:

1. How do competing priorities impact the lives of African American women who are striving to achieve work-life balance?

2. What experiences (identity, relational, goals and motivation, and adaptive mode) shape the life course of African American women that impact work-family life balance decisions?

3. How do sociodemographic variables (education, age, ethnicity, family composition, profession, marital status, spouse education, and profession) influence work-family life decisions?

4. What are the relationships between influencers (family background, mentoring, and faith) and career goals on work-family life balance decisions?

Demographics and findings. The subjects who participated in the study constitute a diverse, cross-generational representation of African American women, ranging in age from 28 to 86, with an average of 46. Employed in the public and private sectors, they were educators, journalists, cashiers, attorneys, chiropractors, business owners, health care and insurance managers, cafeteria workers, and vice presidents of major companies.

In addition to themes that emerged as a result of the qualitative analysis, key influencers undergirded the thematic analysis. The participants tended to view themselves in a positive manner with high levels of self-confidence. Their educational background and ethnicity were significant identifiers with which they strongly associated. The majority, 87%, had college degrees with the following categorizations: bachelor's degrees—33%; master's degrees—37%; and terminal degrees—17%. Of the 30

participants, 28 viewed themselves as successful and expressed satisfaction with their

lives overall. These statistics correlated to an overwhelming majority of the families,

90%, who encouraged their daughters to attend college. Of the participants, 60% viewed

themselves as leaders, noting the positive impact of mentors. Among the participants,

25% believed followership was an important element of being a good leader and one

participant responded that she tries "never to be a follower." More than 30% named

family members as role models for balancing work and life, with the group citing their

faith communities as influencers.

Family life and relationships emerged as significant priorities in 85% of the

interviews. College was an expectation for 87% of the participants who reflected on

childhoods that were affirming, with college at the forefront of family communication.

Their parents and siblings not only graduated from college, but also held master's

degrees, with seven of these family members attaining terminal degrees. Early

experiences shaped their sense of self. Conversely, of the 13% for whom college was not

an expectation, they expressed disappointment at not having the support and did not

attend. However, the majority of participants affirmed the importance of getting a college

education.

Relationships with spouses and significant others were positive for the majority of

the married and widowed respondents. Of the 16 married participants, 60% described

their relationships in terms of partnerships with shared responsibilities at home and with

their children's extracurricular activities. Among the participants, 50% collectively

remarked that support from family members enabled them to have quality time together

as couples apart from their children. Managing competing priorities between time and

attention for spouses versus their children were topics of concern with several of the women. Divorced participants shared frustrations related to being single parents who had to assume both roles when ex-spouses were disengaged from their children. Overall, the participants were independent, take-charge mothers who were comfortable requesting, providing, and receiving support from and for family members and friends. Equity in their relationships was the norm rather than the exception, with 25% earning more than their spouses.

Research indicates that African American women tend to minimize experiences of bias and discrimination, further suggesting, as Jones and Shorter-Gooden (2003) state, that they are "subconsciously denying or knowingly ignoring it" (p. 74). Of the participants, 47% expressed an awareness of discrimination in the workplace and 21% of these experienced ageism. Among the participants, 36% attributed it to racism and 43% said they have not personally experienced it. One respondent admitted initially pretending not to own a business was located in an upscale area out of fear that the parents would not send their children.

There were feelings of having to do more work to be appreciated or respected. Among the women, 55% mentioned struggling with balancing their family time after work with social gatherings such as happy hours or dinners. Research shows that African American women use shifting as a strategy for assessing prejudice and bias as well as surveying the workplace landscape to decide how to handle these types of occurrences. However, collectively, the participants were goal oriented and grounded in historical and cultural strengths while remaining cognizant of the demands on them to over perform.

Collectively open to change and shifting paradigms within their organizations, the majority of the women were committed to finding their voices and their purpose. They understand the importance of staying connected to their African ancestry. Just as womanism defined on a broader ideological basis the experiences of African American women internal and external to the world of work, the life experiences of these 30 women continue that sojourn in a way that is deferent and cohesive, affirming the presence of collectivism and individualism. The diverse perspectives of the participants incorporated a myriad of common threads. The influence of ethnicity, culture, education, family, discrimination, faith, and community were evident throughout their interviews with education and family attributed to numerous themes. They cited personal and general experiences that further defined themselves and others with whom they interacted or were affiliated. Specifically, family, faith and community were associative cultural influencers that resonated collectively. Many of the women reflected on the influence of church communities and family members as elements within networking and mentoring respectively.

Individually, the participants discussed perceptions of demands at home and work, but reiterated collectively that they felt a responsibility to balance competing priorities akin to previous generations of women in their immediate and extended families. Individually at work, they felt compelled to be proactive and assertive with a focus on fitting in to be successful and get promoted. At home, dealing with additional cultural, familial or faith-based demands was considered a part of daily life with individuals managing those responsibilities. Collectively, a broader view of their lives in both settings underscores the complexities of their balancing acts. The acknowledgement

and enhanced understanding of the polarities between individualism and collectivism can potentially inform organizational development practice in public and private sectors. Further, the life experiences of these respondents, with historical connections to slavery and post colonialism, corroborate the relevance of this study and why in the future, the dialogue must continue.

Viewing the future with a sense of optimism while negotiating the complexities within their workplace cultures, these women also expressed a need for a balance of renaissance thinking and conventionalism. This perspective notwithstanding, more than 40% were planning to make career changes, with 30% pursuing additional degrees and 20% anticipating retirement. Volunteering and serving the needs of others also emerged as an important theme. Their life experiences were profoundly influenced by aligning personal values with their family and wellness, with more than 25% concerned with the quality of life and state of our nation as a future provider for their heirs.

Whether a cafeteria worker who someday dreams of attending college or an attorney who aspires to the judiciary, each hears a similar song, a tune that beckons them to live life on their terms, understanding that life is not a dress rehearsal. They share a sense of community and family in which they have roles to play roles that may or may not transfer seamlessly into the workplace. Grounded in faith, they draw on historical and cultural legacies to retain their sense of self, while honing a surety of purpose that enables them to excel and succeed.

Implications, comparisons, and contrasts. Findings from this cross-generational study have implications for younger African American women, particularly those in college or entering postgraduate study. Viewing from the onset and embracing the

importance of networking and mentoring could enable them to sidestep some of the barriers that affected participants. Understanding the pros and cons of shifting in their personal and professional lives could be the difference between mental wellness and bicultural stress, thereby managing the double-jeopardy roles of being a minority and a woman. Many unspoken messages throughout these interviews need to be communicated. Grasping the rules of the game in workplace cultures from performance expectations to social networking will facilitate their abilities to be accepted and considered for career promotion opportunities.

Finding and creating places of solace for their wellness and peace of mind will give them an advantage over predecessors who evolved via trial and error. Putting themselves first, learning at an early age how to say no, and being happy from within will sustain them during times of frustration. Embracing faith communities as more than places to worship is another opportunity for self-renewal. The researcher hopes the voices of these women will be joined by African American women from Generations X and Y to expand further opportunities for knowledge sharing and learning.

From professional perspectives, those organizations that are committed to diversity will include the voices and concerns of African American women as they develop work-life balance initiatives. Changing demographics are no longer cliché terms within organizational development training programs and workshops. Returns on investment in talent and resources will be minimized as long as the value of contributions by African American women is marginalized.

Comparisons and contrasts between this study and Giele's (2008) point to three key areas: faith as a major influence in managing work-life balance was identified by

90% of respondents, the impact of discrimination and pressures to over perform, and the influence of womanism versus feminism on self-perceptions of African American women. She references broad-based exposure and career options being open to middle class educated women, while such opportunities are often unavailable for African American woman. Discrimination has precluded them from having the access she postulates.

An example is a statement from one of the respondents, a MBA graduate of one of the nation's prominent business schools. She said:

> I always thought I would end up in corporate America with the perfect career opportunity but after having my baby, a manager suggested that I consider a position elsewhere that would afford me more flexibility. That was the beginning of the end of my fast track.

Further, the study appears to track more closely with the Center for Women Policy Studies research in 1999 that affirms three crosscutting themes: links between workplace culture and work-life balance, the impact of workplace stress in personal lives, and balance and coping strategies.

Limitations of the Study

This qualitative research study was limited to 30 participants in addition to two pilot tests that were conducted. Despite utilizing purposive sampling and snowballing as techniques for recruitment, the majority of the respondents were a more success-based representation of African American women in general. The researcher did, to the best of her ability, strive to include a diverse group of women in the study and feels to a great extent that was achieved. However, it is her hope that future studies over a longer time frame (at least 9 months) will result in a larger, socioeconomically diverse group of interviewees.

Recommendations for Future Research

As noted in the aforementioned limitations section, opportunities abound to broaden the study by conducting it over a longer timeframe. In addition, with Hispanic women constituting the fastest growing segment of women of color in the workforce, a parallel study could generate rich data with which to compare and contrast these two significant groups. Identifying organizations currently engaged in creative work-life balance programming could be another avenue for case study research. Further subject considerations could include global research comparing and contrasting women of African descent residing in the United States with women residing in Africa and the Caribbean.

Conclusions

While all women struggle with issues related to work-life conflict, missing from this dialogue were the voices of African American women who constitute 7% of the U.S. population and one of the largest demographic groups in organizations. Their life experiences and cultural dynamics inherent within historical antecedents of slavery and oppression are significant points of reference that must be added not only to topical debates, but also to diversity initiatives implemented by organizations within every business and industry.

Giddings (2006) reiterates, "Black women survived the rigors of slavery to demand the rights of their race and of their sex. Black women forged humane communities out of rough settlements. They converted the rock of double oppression into a steppingstone" (p. 357). The aforementioned steppingstone metaphorically and historically affirms the basis for in-depth analysis that confirmed not only the qualitative

distinctiveness of individualism and collectivism but also opportunities for further research that can potentially open new avenues for systems thinking that is socially reconstructive and innovative. Cross-generational responses suggested a shift in such thinking regarding how younger participants viewed and experienced discrimination from ageism lenses versus racism as articulated by older respondents. Intrinsically linking individual and collective stances further corroborated the significance of adding the voices of African American women to this timely topic. Further research that explores the divergence and convergence of individualism and collectivism will add immeasurably to this topic.

This phenomenological study argued in favor of research that would challenge previously accepted discourses of work and scholarship related to this topic that were based on demographic perspective, incorporate new thinking and understanding of the historical and socioeconomic impact of balancing work and family from an African American view point, and contribute to a significant knowledge gap in research related to work-life balance in diverse families.

Utilizing the life-course method, 30 African American women shared personal and professional experiences that affirmed their uniqueness, rich cultural and historical perspectives, and commitment to bring their voices to a dialogue that previously marginalized the relevance and importance of their journey. From these rich, poignant, and telling messages, 30 women dared to be heard. They discussed coping strategies, relationships, discrimination and ageism, workplace dynamics, education, families, parents, siblings, and wellness. Summarily, they collectively and individually affirmed that these diverse competing priorities are most certainly impacting their abilities to

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achieve sustainable balance at home and work. Theirs is a different journey and experience.

In conclusion, the researcher recalls an instance during an interview with Marla, one of the participants. She was moved by an excerpt this participant shared from Mary McLeod Bethune's *Last Will and Testament*. It aptly describes the depth and breadth of the African American woman's journey for equity, respect, and acceptance as well as the onus on her to pay forward—all of which are critical to remaining in balance and alignment with one's roles and values. Marla said:

> True leaders go outside the norm. They push the envelope. I believe we are supposed to pave the way. Mary McLeod Bethune in her Last Will and Testament said in part, "I leave you love, hope, and the challenge of developing confidence in one another. I leave you a thirst for education. I leave you a respect for the use of power. I leave you faith. I leave you racial dignity. I leave you a desire to live in harmony with your fellow men. I leave you finally a responsibility to our young people." Someday, I hope my legacy will include some of these expressions of service.

These 30 life experiences as caregivers, mothers, sisters, daughters, wives, and coworkers remind each of us that regardless of ethnicity or gender, the world deserves our best; anything less is not an option. Their frustrations and joys will continue. It is the hope of this researcher that their voices will also continue to resonate beyond the parameters of this study.

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APPENDIX A

Invitation Letter to Participate

The purpose of this letter is to invite you to participate in a doctoral research study I am conducting at the Graduate School of Education and Psychology, Pepperdine University. The title of the study is – "A Phenomenological Study of Competing Priorities and African American Women Striving to Achieve Work-Life Balance.

My academic and scholarly commitment is based on over two decades of leadership and advocacy for the empowerment of women, diversity and leadership within public and private sector organizations. In particular, discussions and research on the topic of work-life balance are gaining momentum and a prominent place on the national agenda of key thought leaders including First Lady Michelle Obama who identified it as a priority during her husband's administration.

While all women struggle with issues related to work-life conflict, missing from this dialogue are the voices of African American women who comprise one of the largest demographic groups in organizations today. Despite evidence that work is a significant domain in their loves, researchers have limited information about their career experiences or how they integrate the world of work with their personal lives. The study of work-life balance among African American women is important for three primary reasons; to challenge previously accepted discourses of work and scholarship related to this topic that were based on one demographic perspective; to incorporate new thinking and understanding of the historical and socio-economic impact of balancing work and family from an African American view point and to contribute to a significant knowledge gap in research related to work-life balance in diverse families.

My research study will follow the life story method. I shall conduct personal interviews with female subjects that are serving in leadership roles in an array of organizations. It is anticipated that the interview will require about 60 minutes of your time. I will personally do all of the interviews and your name will be coded so that your responses will be confidential and anonymous. The timeframe for this study to begin is April 2011. All individuals that participate in this study will receive a copy of the findings if interested.

I hope you will consider this invitation to participate in the study and please know that your participation is completely voluntary. You are free to decide not to participate or to withdraw at any time without affecting your relationship with any other entity. Thank you in advance for your help. If you have any questions or concerns about this study, please do not hesitate to contact me by phone ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮ or by email at ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮.

Sincerely,

Gayle Colston Barge, Doctoral Candidate - Organization Change
Graduate School of Education and Psychology
Pepperdine University

Instrument

Maiden name _____

Socio-demographic Questions:

Birth date _____Place of birth _____

Education level _____

Occupation _____ Employer_____

Marital Status _____Year _____Spouse (partner) birth date _____

Husband's (partner's) education and occupation

_____

Children (gender and year of birth)

_____

Mother's education and occupation

_____

Father's education and occupation

_____

Siblings (gender and year of birth)

_____

Total Household income in 2010 _____Own earnings _____

Health, illness, accidents, disability

_____

Religious background

_____

Second language(s)

_____

Lived in foreign country (name of
country(ies))_____

Travel outside of the US (name of country(ies))

_____

Instrument Interview:

Interviewee's mother's maiden name: _____

Time of Interview: _____

Date of Interview: _____

Interviewer: _____

Question #1. [Early adulthood]

About the period in your life immediately after college or your early twenties. What was your major, name of your college, and year of graduation, what about graduate

education? What did you think you would like to become in terms of occupation and type of lifestyle or family life.…What were you thinking then and how did things actually turn out.

Question #2 [Childhood and adolescence]

Thinking of the period in your life before college and the goals that you and your family held for you, what was your family's attitude toward women's education and you going to college and what you would become? What was the effect of your parents' education, presence of brothers and sisters, family finances, involvement in a faith community, family expectations? How was your education different from or similar to that of your parents and brothers and sisters?

Question #3 [Adulthood – current]

Since college, what kinds of achievement and frustration have you experienced? What type of mentors have you had? What has happened that you didn't expect-in employment, family, faith, further education? Has there been job discrimination, children, a separation or divorce, health problems of yourself or a family member? What about moves, membership in the community, faith community, housing problems, racial integration, job loss? And feelings about yourself? Have there been good things such as particular rewards, satisfaction, or recognition?

Question #4 [Adulthood-future]

Looking back at your life from this vantage point, and ahead to the future, what are your main concerns? What are your goals, hopes and dreams for the next few years? What problems do you hope to solve? Looking further out, where do you hope to be a few years from now with respect to work or finishing graduate school, family, faith, community, mentors, health, finances, etc.?

Question #5 [Strategies for balancing life]

What coping strategies do you use to respond to concerns related to the plurality of roles? Have you ever felt pressured to choose between work and home? What made you think that you could do both successfully? Do you feel that your family life or work life have suffered because of your involvement in work or family? Have you felt any guilt related to either family or work? Are there times that you felt particularly successful at juggling the demands of both work and home? Why? Were you prepared for the demands of work and life balance? Why or why not? What strategies do you implement in your own life in

order to remain balanced?

Question #6 [Networking/Leader and Follower Relationships]

What experiences as a leader and or follower impacted your life? Is there anything in those relationships that you would do differently? Why or why not? Please share some thoughts on those instances.
Question #7 [Workplace Culture]

What impact if any have the following had on your ability to achieve balance? Excessive workloads; management expectations; career advancement opportunities; and perceptions of discrimination.

APPENDIX C

Informed Consent Form

Participant: _____

Principal Investigator: Gayle Colston Barge, Doctoral Candidate
Pepperdine University
Graduate School of Education and Psychology

Title of Project: A Phenomenological Study of Competing Priorities and
African American Women Striving to Achieve Work-Life
Balance

1. I _____ , agree to participate in the research study
being conducted by Gayle Colston Barge under the direction of Dr. Margaret
Weber, Dissertation Chairperson. This research study is being conducted for the
requirements of a doctoral degree and Pepperdine University, Graduate School of
Education and Psychology.

2. The overall purpose of this research is:
The study of work-life balance among African American women is important for
three primary reasons; to challenge previously accepted discourses of work and
scholarship related to this topic that were based on one demographic perspective;
to incorporate new thinking and understanding of the historical and socio-
economic impact of balancing work and family from an African American view
point and to contribute to a significant knowledge gap in research related to work-
life balance in diverse families.

3. My participation will involve the following:
The completion of a demographic data sheet and participation in a face-to-face or
phone interview that will last between 45 and 60 minutes. The study is expected
to begin in May 2011 and conclude in July 2011. The study shall be conducted
either in person or via phone.

4. I understand that the possible benefits to myself or society from this research are:
My participation in the study will further explore the impact of life experiences
and how they have impacted African American women's ability to achieve
balance in their personal and professional lives. In particular, my responses via
narratives will provide a broader, more diverse view of how African American
women conceptualize and balance work and family. Such analysis can potentially
inform organizational policy and practice in public and private sectors.

5. I understand that there are certain risks and discomforts that might be associated

with this research. These risks include:
Inconvenience regarding time taken away from my schedule to participate in a 45 to 60 minute interview. Additionally, I will be asked to respond to questions regarding aspects of my personal and professional life experiences. If at any time I am uncomfortable answering these questions, I can choose to not participate.

6.   I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I may refuse to participate and/or withdraw my consent and discontinue participation in the project or activity at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which I am otherwise entitled.

7.   I understand that the investigator will take all reasonable measures to protect the confidentiality of my records and my identity will not be revealed in any publication that may result from this project. The confidentiality of my records will be maintained in accordance with applicable state and federal laws. Under California law, there are exceptions to confidentiality, including suspicion that a child, elder, or dependent adult is being abused, or if an individual discloses an intent to harm him/herself or others.

8.   I understand that the investigator is willing to answer any inquiries I may have concerning the research herein described. The investigator, Gayle C. Barge can be contacted via phone at ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮ or email at ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮. I understand that I may contact Dr. Margaret Weber at 310-568-5600 if I have other questions or concerns about this research. If I have questions about my rights as a research participant, I understand that I can contact Ms. Jean Kang, IRB Manager at the Graduate School of Education and Psychology at Pepperdine University, via phone at 310.568.5753 or by email at jean.kang@pepperdine,edu.

9.   I understand to my satisfaction the information regarding participation in the research project. All my questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I have received a copy of this informed consent form which I have read and understand. I hereby consent to participate in the research described above.

_____   _____
  Participant's Signature   Date

I have explained and defined in detail the research procedure in which the subject has consented to participate. Having explained this and answered any questions, I am cosigning this form and accepting this person's consent.

_____   _____
Principal Investigator   Date

APPENDIX D

Interview Protocol

Brief Introduction of the research study
The purpose of this study is to explore the narratives of African American women's lives as they balance their work activities with the demands of motherhood and or marriage/relationships. It is to understand how professional career women's lives are changing. To accomplish this, we are interviewing females in leadership roles in an array of organizations.
This interview will take about an hour. We will begin with reading the consent form and obtaining your signature that you wish to participate in the study. The questions at the beginning are very brief to get a snapshot of you, your present work, your education, and your living arrangements. Then I will ask four big questions that are designed to help you recall several different periods of your life. I would like for you to tell me what stands out as being significant about them. Most people find this an interesting and enjoyable conversation. If, however, at any time you would rather not answer, you are free to decline.
Administration of the consent form
In order to continue with the interview, we need your written consent on this form, which has been approved by the IRB at Pepperdine University, and which assures you that there is no major risk to you in answering any of the questions. If you are uncomfortable with any question, you may decline to answer it, and you may terminate the interview at any time for any reason."
        The interviewer goes over the form with the respondent and answers any questions.
        Interviewer collects the form and leaves a copy with the interviewee.

Background questions
I would like for you to fill out some basic information about yourself on this form that will accompany the interview. It includes information about occupation, marital status, age, etc. The interview instrument [turn on tape]

Question 1. [Early adulthood]

About the period in your life immediately after college or.. your early twenties. What was your major, name of your college, and year of graduation, what about graduate education? What did you think you would like to become in terms of occupation and type of lifestyle or family life. …What were you thinking then and how did things actually turn out.

Question 2 [Childhood and adolescence]

Thinking of the period in your life before college and the goals that you and your family held for you, what was your family's attitude toward women's education and you going to college and what you would become? What was the effect of your parents' education,

presence of brothers and sisters, family finances, involvement in a faith community, family expectations? How was your education different from or similar to that of your parents and brothers and sisters?

Question 3 [Adulthood–current]

Since college, what kinds of achievement and frustration have you experienced? What type of mentors have you had? What has happened that you didn't expect-in employment, family, faith, further education? Has there been job discrimination, children, a separation or divorce, health problems of yourself or a family member? What about moves, membership in the community, faith community, housing problems, racial integration, job loss? And feelings about yourself? Have there been good things such as particular rewards, satisfaction, or recognition?

Question 4 [Adulthood-future]

Looking back at your life from this vantage point, and ahead to the future, what are your main concerns? What are your goals, hopes and dreams for the next few years? What problems do you hope to solve? Looking further out, where do you hope to be a few years from now with respect to work or finishing graduate school, family, faith, community, mentors, health, finances, etc.?

Question 5 [Strategies for balancing life]

What coping strategies do you use to respond to concerns related to the plurality of roles? Have you ever felt pressured to choose between work and home? What made you think that you could do both successfully? Do you feel that your family life or work life have suffered because of your involvement in work or family? Have you felt any guilt related to either family or work? Are there times that you felt particularly successful at juggling the demands of both work and home? Why? Were you prepared for the demands of work and life balance? Why or why not? What strategies do you implement in your own life in order to remain balanced?

Question 6 [Networking/Leader and Follower Relationships]

What experiences as a leader and or follower impacted your life? Is there anything in those relationships that you would do differently? Why or why not? Please share some thoughts on those instances.

Question 7 [Workplace Culture]

What impact if any have the following had on your ability to achieve balance? Excessive workloads; management expectations; career advancement opportunities; and perceptions of discrimination.

Conclusion [turn off tape]

Do you have anything to change or add, or any questions or suggestions that you would like to offer? If something comes to mind later on, we would be glad to hear from you. You can find a mailing address, phone number and email address on the initial letter and on your copy of the consent form.

Thank you so much for your time. I appreciate very much what you have told me and your valuable contribution to this research.

APPENDIX E

Thank You Letter to be Sent After Initial Interest in the Study

Dear

Thank you for expressing interest as a potential participant in the study on Work-family life balance issues for women that I am conducting as a part of my doctoral research study at the Graduate School of Education and Psychology at Pepperdine University.

The study of work-life balance among African American women is important for three primary reasons; to challenge previously accepted discourses of work and scholarship related to this topic that were based on one demographic perspective; to incorporate new thinking and understanding of the historical and socio-economic impact of balancing work and family from an African American view point and to contribute to a significant knowledge gap in research related to work-life balance in diverse families.

I shall be contacting you shortly to schedule a date and time to conduct an in-person interview which will take approximately 60 minutes.

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. You are free to decide not to participate or to withdraw at any time without it affecting your relationship with any other entity.

Thank you again in advance for your interest. If you have questions or concerns about the study, please feel free to contact me by telephone at ████████ or by email at ████████████████.

If you would like to receive verification of your participation in the study, I am happy to provide that upon request.

Sincerely,

Gayle Colston Barge
Doctoral Candidate and Researcher
Pepperdine University
Graduate School of Education and Psychology