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Forty-three African American women executives' perceptions of challenges and required capabilities to become a leader

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FORTY-THREE AFRICAN AMERICAN WOMEN EXECUTIVES' PERCEPTIONS OF

CHALLENGES AND REQUIRED CAPABILITIES TO BECOME A LEADER

A dissertation proposal submitted in partial satisfaction

of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Education in Organizational Leadership

by

Lysa Liggins-Moore

October, 2016

Diana B. Hiatt-Michael, Ed.D. - Dissertation Chairperson

This dissertation, written by

Lysa Lynnette Liggins-Moore

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

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DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this dissertation to my mom Faye, my daughter Alexyz Joi, and my little sister Nevaeh Saimone.

Mom, this dissertation has MANY words in it, but if I were to take the entire word count and say THANK YOU, it still would not tell you how much I truly , from the bottom of my heart appreciate all that you have done to support me. You raised me as a single mother and you have always been there for me since day one. When I said I wanted to continue my education and I had an infant daughter, you said GO. When I said I wanted to go back to school and get MORE education, and I had an elementary school aged daughter, you said GO. You never complained about my random trips to the library to study but you cared for Alexyz through it all and supported my efforts tirelessly and for THAT I say THANK YOU. I am so proud of the relationship we have, you are my very best friend. You always tell me how proud you are of me, I am even MORE proud to be your daughter - I love you!

Alexyz – Who knew that my having a baby at the age of 18 would allow this moment to arrive? From my Bachelor's degree, to my Master's degree to me running from work to see you run your 100 yard dash, and then pop in at your basketball games THEN, running to school. All the times I drug you to the library with me so I could finish an assignment, to your understanding that my first day of this doctoral journey would be the SAME DAY as your first day of college, so I had to leave you at school while I dashed down the freeway to make it back. For supporting my desire to achieve this educational goal. For all of these things I say THANK YOU. Thank you for being YOU. Thank you for pushing forward and achieving your OWN educational goals, thank you for being my reason WHY. Why I want to do better, why I want to accomplish more, why I want to leave a legacy of love, perseverance, achievement, integrity, and success for your children's children. You have inspired me to be a better person, a better mom, and a better daughter. I love you! Liggins Girls forever!

 Nevaeh Saimone –Thank you for being such a proud sister. You have always helped me with your encouraging reminders that you want to be a doctor "Like my big sister Lysa." Please keep striving for your educational goals. I will be here to support you!
 I love you!

Love Always,
 Bug, Mommy, and Yaya

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To my West Angles Church family, Thank you for your continued prayers and support. To my sisters, Chara, La Shawn, Yolanda, Janique, and Monique, without even realizing it, you have helped me laugh my way through some of the toughest times on this journey. Your continued support and unfailing friendship has seen me through some of the hardest times. I appreciate you all. Thank you!

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VITA

Lysa Lynnette Liggins-Moore

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2013	New Direction Ministries Presenter – Aligning your Career, Young Adult Leadership Summit
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ABSTRACT

The percentage of African American women in leadership roles has not increased as significantly as women in general. This exploratory qualitative study examined African American leaders' perceptions of their common challenges as they advance to executive leadership and their personal capabilities required to attain leadership. The intent was to understand the factors that contribute to their rise to executive leadership.

Forty-three African American leaders secured through universities, sorority, church, and work in greater Los Angeles met the study's criteria to be at the senior management level for more than two years, have over five direct reports, and born in the United States of America. The researcher followed Trochim's steps, creating and pilot- testing the protocol for a long interview. Seventy percent were married, and 30% were either single, divorced or widowed. All women stated that they worked more than 40 hours a week, and 95% had children. These leaders, all college educated, represented a wide variety of industries including law, military, healthcare, education, and finance.

After following Moustakas' coding procedure, the most significant findings focused on the importance of spiritualty, mentorship, and reflective assertiveness. All participants described how spirituality lay at the core of their leadership. They relied heavily upon spirituality as a means to cope with work challenges and to meet controversy. The participants mentioned various ways that mentorship was part of leadership. Thirty percent had a mentor pre-college, 40% remarked about mentors during college, and 30% noted the importance of a mentor on the job. All participants mentored others in either a formal or informal way during some part of their life. At present, all mentor an individual or a group of individuals. Reflective assertiveness was coined to depict balance in voice

tone that an African American woman in leadership must find that will convey assertiveness rather than that of an attitude or an *Angry Black woman* stereotype. Participants mentioned the benefits of being African American in their position but also concerns regarding how others perceived them. They described the need to develop an authoritative yet reflective manner to act in a diverse organization.

Chapter 1: Introduction

Historically, Black woman have stood at the forefront of the struggle for civil and human rights striving for the goal of sustaining their communities, raising their families, and to be a part of the foundation upon which the United States was built. The history of African American feminism in the United States is directly connected to two movements that established certain freedom for African Americans. The first was the abolitionist movement, which ended the African slave trade and secured the passage of the 19th Amendment in 1920, and the second was the modern civil rights movement, which peaked in the 1960s and legally secured equal access to all African Americans, giving them opportunities for basic privileges and rights of U.S. citizenship (Rosser-Mims, 2010).

Whether it is a question of successful employment, access to finance, or pay, there is a tremendous amount of work that to do to level the playing field for women. Since the passage of the 1963 Equal Pay Act that prohibited wage variances based on gender, women of all races have made significant strides thriving and gaining positions within the workforce. According to the White House National Equal Pay Task Force, women's labor force participation rate was 57.7% in 2012, which is 50% higher than at the act's inception in 1963. The ratio of men's to women's annual earnings has notably narrowed from 59 cents for every dollar paid to men in 1963 to 77 cents in 2011 (National Equal Pay Task Force, 2013).

In 1963, only 15% of managers were women; however, since the 1970s, the subject of women in leadership has made constant progression. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, by 2009, the percentage of women managers doubled at almost 40%, and in 2011, women comprised 51.4% of management-related positions. Yet, of all people

employed in management, professional, and related occupations, African American women only comprised 5.3%. A study on the intersection of African American women in leadership used the metaphor of the *glass ceiling* to outline one of many challenges faced by this group of women. This term suggests that although the civil rights movement and Equal Pay Act enforced the ending of racial and gender inequalities and allowed women into managerial hierarchies, at some point vertical mobility would be hindered from reaching top executive positions, due to an impermeable barrier, simply because they are women (Baxter & Wright, 2000; Merchant, 2012).

Recent studies have closely examined common dilemmas of women in the workplace regarding how from a cultural perspective, femininity has been judged incompatible with traditionally-conceptualized leadership traits (Lips, 2009). Lips (2009) affirms women leaders walk a fine line in terms of bias and discrimination and are often criticized for being too accommodating or too clamorous. She suggests that they are expected to conform simultaneously to two conflicting sets of expectations: either behaving as a leader (dominant) or as a woman (deferring to males). Whereas assertive men are viewed positively, women who exhibit dominant behavior are viewed negatively (Ifeanyi, 2012). Contrastingly, to gain respect and acknowledgement as a leader, women are expected to behave in an assertive and openly democratic manner. This has consequences, as it often violates the traditional gender standards, penalizing women in their roles and evoking negative reactions for behaving in an agentic manner (Eagly, Makhijani, & Klonsky, 1992). Women aspiring to be a leaders appear to be pulled between the two extremes of employing enough dominance to be an effective leader while behaving somewhat within the stereotypical female role expected of them (Merchant, 2012).

When race is added to the equation, research suggests different findings. There ensues an interesting phenomenon, a shifting of the conventional perception of gender-driven leadership styles into racially driven stereotypical roles (Ifeanyi, 2012). Ifeanyi notes that when people think of leadership and race, they think of a Black male, and when people think of women leaders, they think of a White female, essentially disallowing the Black woman to be seen as qualified (Ifeanyi, 2012). Typical leadership traits seem to be socially prohibited for both Black men and White women. Such behavior is looked upon as aggressive or unfitting. However, for Black women, a dominant, aggressive, assertive, self-assured woman may be perceived as a so-called angry Black woman, even though these traits are congruent with typical leadership characteristics.

When hired into leadership roles, African American women are perceived to encounter immediate conflict, as most leadership models are aligned with that of masculine characteristics (Sanchez-Hucles & Sanchez, 2007). Despite current research that states effective leadership should encompass feminine interpersonal qualities such as collaboration and cooperation, Black women still face a double jeopardy, the product of being neither White or male ("Black women leaders," 2012). Although considerable research has examined gender-based inequities in leadership advancement, much prior research has ignored the combined demographic differences of race and gender (Chemers, 1997). Crenshaw (1989) outlines the theory of *intersectionality*. Intersectionality is defined as Black feminist exploration that provides an acknowledgement of the hardship of African American women due to gender, racial, and economic inequalities. Intersectionality adds a level of adversity to the leadership experience for African American women (Hackman & Johnson, 2004; Stanley, 2009).

According to Collins (2003), social science research outlines social class as a static system of individual classifications deeply woven into the tapestry of American women's lives, resulting in a large disparity of inequality and oppression. Propensities of leadership associated with African American women have customarily been looked upon as incompatible with decision-making and other managerial responsibilities, based on the assumption that their leadership was more transformational than transactional (Parker & Ogilvie, 1996). Parker and Ogilvie suggest that "African American women executives' leadership strategies and tactics may be conceptualized as a function of their (a) socialized traits, behaviors, ad styles; and (b) their distinct social location within dominant culture organizations" (p. 192).

Statement of the Problem

The lives of professional Black women in America have seemingly been understudied and their contributions as leaders devalued, therefore, it is perceived that a more focused research on the experiences of these women is necessary (Parker, 2005). In 1970, *The League of Black Women* was founded to be the preeminent expert on the important aspects of maturing Black women for professional leadership. The use of survey data captured the experiences of these women and identified that due to the underrepresentation of Black women, there is a diminished sense of comfort with power. It was also acknowledged that Black women feel pressure to compromise or conform to fit the expectations of the larger society, which lessens their sense of wholeness. Although many research findings have acknowledged the perceived ongoing challenges, additional research is required that may provide insights into positive leadership strategies, which may be helpful to young African American females aspiring to become executive leaders.

Such research is important to understand the factors that contribute to the experiences and success of African American women during their rise to executive leadership.

Purpose of This Study

The purpose of this study is to examine what, if any, common challenges and problem-solving capabilities African American women experience as they advance to executive leadership in their careers. This study will (a) address the capabilities required by African American women to overcome the perceived obstacles and (b) disclose an understanding of how African American women leaders made meaning out of their perceived barriers on their rise to executive leadership. In order to have a full understanding of how an individual has arrived at their current situation, there is a need to understand the history of the journey and how economic and social forces presently act on those individuals (Morris & Bunjun, 2007). The researcher intends to clarify (a) the relationship between experiencing hardship and acquiring an authentic leadership and (b) to examine the elements that impacted achievement and advancement into high-ranking executive positions. An additional intent of this study was to acquire information that could serve as a blueprint for future studies on leadership development and intersectionality.

Research Questions

This study poses the following questions to examine the challenges faced by African American women in executive leadership and the capabilities that they utilized to overcome these challenges:

1. What are the perceived obstacles to leadership that African American female leaders have experienced?

2. What capabilities have African American women demonstrated to overcome these obstacles in their careers?

3. What advice do African American women leaders suggest to other African American women who desire to be in a leadership position?

Theoretical Basis of the study

This phenomenological study developed a model that emerged from a review of existing literature. This model, created by the author, details the intersection of the numerous *challenges* faced by African American women leaders and encompasses the personal *capabilities* needed for successful leadership development. The factors are derived from the research summarized in Chapter 2. Figure 1 displays the initial model of the intersection of leadership development related to challenges and personal capabilities. The factors presented in this figure will be discussed in Chapter 2. The intent of this study is to revise this model based upon information gathered from current Black American female executive leaders.

Figure 1. An emergent model of African American women in leadership detailing challenges faced and necessary personal capabilities.

Definitions of Terms

This section provides a list of key terms used in the study to convey a common understanding.

- African American or Black: The U.S. Census defines *African American* as a person having origins in any of the Black or racial groups of Africa (Rastogi, Johnson, Hoeffel, Drewery, 2011, p. 2). For the purposes of this research, African American women are those who identify themselves as such and were born in the United States of America (Stanley, 2009).

- C-suite: A term used to refer collectively to corporations' most important senior executive offices. Acquiring its name because top senior executives' titles tend to begin wit the letter C for chief as in chief executive officer, chief operating officer, and chief information officer. This term is somewhat synonymous with *C-level executives* (C-suite, n.d.).

- Capabilities: In this study, this term refers to desirable capacities, such as being efficient, proficient, qualified, experienced, or effectual (Capabilities, n.d.).

- Challenges: Demanding or difficult tasks (Challenge, n.d.). For the purposes of this research, *challenge* will be defined as any barrier that prevents upward mobility.

- Discrimination: The unjust or prejudicial treatment of different categories of persons or things. In this study, discrimination will be defined as it pertains to the workplace, meaning a practice of partiality by employers based on race, sex, religion, national origin, physical ability, and age (Discrimination, n.d., sec. 1).

- Ethnicity: The fact or state of belonging to a social group that has a common national or cultural tradition (Ethnicity, n.d., sec. 1).

- Female Gender: The state of being female typically used with reference to social and cultural differences rather than biological ones (Gender, n.d., sec. 1).

- Gender stereotype: Designated differences in how women and men collectively *are* and norms about how men and women should *behave* or should *be* (Eagly & Karau, 2002).

- Intersectionality: Signifies the numerous ways in which race, gender, and social class interact to form the multiple dimensions of the everyday lived experiences of marginalized individuals (Crenshaw, 1989).

- Leadership : Individuals who inspire others to follow and cultivate an environment of teamwork, trust, and collaboration (Bass, 1990). For the purpose of this research, leader will be defined as one who has made a substantial impact in a leadership role within an organization or business. For the purpose of this research, leadership will be defined as a process by which an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal (Hackman & Johnson, 2004, p. 3).

- Leadership development: Kouzes and Posner (2007) define leadership development as *self-development,* stating, "Leaders only have themselves" (p. 344). The instrument of leadership is the self, and mastery of the art of leadership comes from the mastery of the self. It's about leading what is already in your soul.

- Mentoring: The developmental assistance provided by a more senior individual within an organization (Higgins & Kram, 2001).

- Phenomenological - A study as a strategy of inquiry in which the research identifies the essence of human experiences about a phenomenon as described by participants Creswell (2009, p. 13).

- Resilience: Herrman et al. (2001) define resilience as "positive adaption, or the ability to maintain or regain mental health, despite experiencing adversity" (p. 260). Resilience is studied by numerous disciplines ranging from biology, sociology, neuroscience, and genetics; however, there has been no consensus on an operational definition. For the purpose of this research, resilience is defined by Wagnild and Collins (2009) as the ability to adapt or bounce back, so-to-speak, subsequent to adversity and challenge. The term connotes inner strength, competence, optimism, flexibility, and the ability to cope effectively when faced with adversity (p. 29).

- Social Class: A status hierarchy in which individuals and groups are classified on the basis of esteem and prestige acquired mainly through economic success and accumulation of wealth.

- Stereotypes: A set of beliefs about the characteristics presumed to be typical of members of a group (Aries, 1996, p. 163). For the purpose of this study, stereotypes will usually reference the set of beliefs about the characteristics presumed to be typical of African American women.

Significance of the Study

While there has been considerable research examining gender-based effects on women in leadership, there is a marginal amount of research on gender in conjunction with race (Livingston, Rosette, & Washington, 2012). Therefore, the significance of this study is to offer practical strategies to assist women of color in leadership roles, as well as those who aspire to rise to executive leadership positions. This study explored the intersection of race and gender for African American women in executive leadership and how their

experiences contributed to their leadership development. Identification of the obstacles faced will herald a research that offers strategies to conquer these obstacles despite noted hardships and challenges. Ultimately, this exploration may reveal how effectively using the observed strategies can assist in overcoming the obstacles. The goal of this research is two-fold, first to offer a proposal of sustainability and succession to women presently working in executive leadership. In addition, this study will provide a design matrix that will assist women who desire to attain executive leaderships and to assist organizations in successfully offering opportunities for advancement for female leaders. The collective experiences of the African American women displayed in this study are aimed to guide future leaders on their journey to leadership.

Assumptions

Creswell (2009) acknowledges a phenomenological study as a strategy of inquiry in which the research identifies the essence of human experiences about a phenomenon as described by participants (p. 13). In the present study, the phenomenon of interest is the experience of executive leadership by Black females in the United States. A researcher is granted privileged access to the lived world of the subjects. Therefore, understanding the lived experiences involves studying through extensive and prolonged engagement in an attempt to develop understanding of patterns and meaningful relationships (Moustakas, 1994). Moreover, it is assumed that in a phenomenological study, the researcher was an active participant.

During the course of this study, the researcher had no governance over the credibility or fidelity of the participant's responses to the interview questions. Although the researcher assumed the participants would offer candid responses and understand the

level of confidentiality kept, the assumption could not be made that participants would answer honestly and candidly.

Research Limitations

According to Creswell (1998), "defining limitations of a study establishes the boundaries, exceptions, reservations, and qualifications inherent in every study" (p. 110). Therefore, below are the limitations documented for the purpose of this study.

1. In a qualitative phenomenological study, research bias can be a limitation as the researcher serves as the primary instrument for the collection of data and analysis. Thus, the researcher's biases may affect the interview process and analysis, even with the researcher's intent to suppress any bias.

2. This study used a convenience sample, which may hinder generalizability of the findings.

3. Participants are comprised of 43 African American women in executive leadership. This is a limited number; therefore, findings may have limited generalizability even among the population represented.

Delimitations

Delimitations are parameters that narrow the scope of a study (Creswell, 2009, p. 147). For the purpose of this study, the researcher was exclusively interested in reviewing African American women's views on their experience as leaders. The assumption of the researcher entailed there being a specifically authentic story to tell of their journey to becoming leaders in organizations with predominantly White male management. Therefore, to gain a better understanding of their trajectory into executive leadership positions, this research solely focused on African American women.

Organization of the Dissertation

This dissertation consists of five chapters. Chapter 1 gives a brief background and introduces the main topic to the reader. Correspondingly, it defines the problem, purpose, and distinguishes significant ideas on African American women in leadership by presenting research questions, definitions of key terms, significance of the study, assumptions, limitations, and delimitations. Chapter 2 is a review of the literature structured to associate interrelated concepts. Included in these concepts are the study of leadership, authenticity, challenges to leadership, resilience, and occurrences that shaped these women's experiences in leadership and within the workplace. Chapter 3 discusses the methods used for this study. This chapter identifies the sampling method, participant inclusion criteria, and data gathering protocols. It gives a description of the role of the researcher and the protection of the contributors. Chapter 4 describes data analysis and resultant findings. Chapter 5 summarizes the study; proposes implications based on findings, and relating findings to the existing literature; and makes recommendations for policy, practices, and future research.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

This literature review describes the written works relevant to current research about African American women in a cross-section of industries and their development on the journey to leadership. The study explores African American women who successfully achieved leadership roles and the strategies used despite encountering documented hardships. Various studies have addressed the challenges confronted by African American women who aspire to obtain executive leadership roles within organizations (Brinson, 2006; Collins, 2000; Parker, 2005; Scales, 2010). However, Byrd (2009a) suggests, "For African American women in predominantly White organizations, race, gender, and social class may restrict the process of leadership" (p. 1). Using a qualitative methodology, this exploration will also link how resilience plays a role in the success of these African American women leaders. Ultimately, in order to understand these women's ascendency to leadership, it is important to understand their lived experiences. Therefore, the analyses will serve as an offering of insight and strategies to African American women presently on a journey to leadership, as well as those desiring to hold executive positions. Findings will correspondingly serve as a blueprint for organizations to assist in maintaining sound diversity practices and effective placement of African American women in leadership.

Historical Background

The history of African American women has added a rich and vibrant voice to the chorus of American freedom and independence, says Dr. Ira B. Jones of Howard University, who wrote and curated an exhibit called *Claiming their Citizenship* in dedication to African American women. He further states African American women are unique in that this gender inhabits a nexus of two factions of marginalized people, women and African

Americans. Although this is an uncommon position, it has granted Black women a peculiar perspective on areas such as labor, politics, entertainment, academics, sports, and religion just to name a few. From the years of enslavement, reconstruction, the progressive era, the great depression, the civil rights movement, women's suffrage, then through the close of the 20th century, Black women have fought sexism, classism, racism, and other obstacles. They yearned to establish citizenship, humanity, and womanhood. A multi-layered story of triumph and travail, African American women were initially imported for labor and reduced to poverty, yet have successfully redefined themselves (Jones, 2009). A noticeable labyrinth or uneven path of progression exists for African American women that is not as noticeable for Black men or White women (Sanchez–Hucles & Davis 2012). In fact, while carrying the burden of race and gender combined, women of color face compounded microaggression and forms of discrimination such as lower pay, lack of mentoring, delayed promotions, covert discrimination practices, and occupational segregation, more than men and White women experience (Holvino & Blake-Beard, 2004). According to Parker and Ogilvie (1996), African American women report that rather than sexism, racism is the greatest barrier to opportunities in dominant cultural organizations. Despite obstacles such as glass ceiling practices, there is no doubt that African American women have sought education, professional careers, and leadership roles. Organizations are adapting to *workforce diversity*, which is the term that acknowledges the equal rights of men, women, racial groups, individuals with a variety of physical and psychological abilities, and people who differ in age and sexual orientation to participate in the workforce (Robbins & Judge, 2012).

There is a favorably recognizable growth in the area of leadership opportunities for African American women in leadership, and there is no doubt that in America, Black women are advancing (Hite, 2004). For example, in 1999, Cathy Liggins-Hughes founded Radio One and became the first African American woman to head a company that would be traded on the New York Stock Exchange. In 2000, Vashti Murphy-McKenzie became the first female bishop of the African Methodist Episcopal Church. In 2003, Oprah Winfrey became the first African American woman to make the list of billionaires in Forbes magazine. In 2009, Ursula Burns became the first African American female CEO of a Fortune 500 company. In politics, Kamala Harris became the first African American female Attorney General, while Condoleezza Rice is the first Black woman to serve as Secretary of State. In 2008, Michelle Obama became the first African American First Lady of the United States of America. According to Catalyst (2004b), a nonprofit organization with a mission to expand opportunities for women in business, there has been an increase of diversity in the U.S. workforce. The perception of the impact of diversity policies, according to African American women, is still that they not wholly effective. A vital disparity still exists within the prospects of leadership advancement for African American women. There are obstacles and challenges that currently limit access to management development, mentoring, and opportunities to gain credibility and visibility within their organizations. Studies of the effect of gender and racial barriers have explored both salary and promotion concerns as additional indicators of organizational injustices (Hite, 2004).

Development of Leadership

Leadership is defined as a process whereby an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal (Northouse, 2010, p. 3). Leadership theorist Warren

Bennis (1989) uses a metaphoric example of *ingredients* to define the qualities that are entrenched in leadership theory. He states leaders come in an array of shapes, sizes, and dispositions, yet they all share three basic ingredients.

The first ingredient a leader possesses is a guiding vision. A leader has a clear idea of what they want to accomplish both personally and professionally. Despite potential failures and unexpected obstacles, they possess the wherewithal to persevere. The second ingredient of leadership is passion. A leader has an underlying passion for a profession, a vocation, or a call to action, enthusiastically honing in on giving hope, promise, and inspiration to other people. The third ingredient of leadership is integrity, defined as moral uprightness and honesty. Integrity embodies candor, maturity, and self-knowledge.

Candor is rooted in the honesty of ones thoughts and actions. It is a fundamental prerequisite to being whole. Leaders who possess candor have a steadfast devotion to principle and professionalism. They are aware that in order to develop a culture of candor, it begins with their own behavior. Candor in leadership enables honesty, straight talk, and the development of more effective business practices (O'Toole & Bennis, 2009). Leadership requires maturity and growth through experiences of learning to be dedicated, observant, and to have acquired the competency of working with others while learning from their experiences. Leadership it is not simply issuing orders, but demonstrating a prototypical example of what followers will do. Bennis also affirms the component of taking risks, which means experimenting with new tactics, embracing error, and being valiant through adversity (Bennis, 1989).

In Proverbs 29:18 (King James Version), King Solomon avows, "Where there is no vision, the people perish." In leadership, continuous improvement to the status quo is

more essential than leading a group to deviate from a working routine. Therefore, crafting

and articulating a vision for the betterment of the organization is an obvious prerequisite

for leadership. Vision embodies the abilities to scaffold the current organizational

practices, deem them as insufficient, produce new ideas for better strategies, communicate

the possibilities, and nurture the sustainability (Ibarra & Obodaru, 2009).

Authentic Leadership

> Authenticity is knowing, and acting on, what is true and real inside yourself, your
>
> team and your organization AND knowing and acting on what is true and real in the
>
> world. It is not enough to walk one's talk if one is headed off—or leading one's
>
> organization, community, or nation—off a cliff! (Terry, 1993)

Authentic leadership focuses on the incorporation of a leader's self-knowledge, self-

regulation, and self-concept (Northouse, 2010). Research indicates that authentic leaders

acquire a personal point of view that reflects clarity about their specific convictions and

values, therefore discussion of authentic leadership, as it is defined in this research, will

focus on the origin and development of the characteristics. There are several approaches

to this leadership style; however, for the purposes of this study, discussion of the practical

approach will be the principal focal point. A practical approach focuses on real-life

examples and is laced with decision-making. Authentic leadership involves knowing and

acting on what is true within yourself, as well as within your organization, and is concerned

with *how* choices are made rather than *what* choices are made (Terry, 1993). The

development of authentic leadership weighs heavily on the life story of the leader and what

the leader attaches to their life experiences. The underpinnings of this leadership style

connect to a meaning system that allows them to be themselves, rather than conforming to

others' expectations. Authentic leadership involves an intra-personal experience and eudaimonic activity. The word *eudaimonic* is derived from a term used by Aristotle that means *being true to ones self*. This state means a leader is working at a fully engaged capacity using their own self-actualization and employing their skills, talents, and convictions to make a difference (Shamir & Eilam, 2005).

Authentic leadership can additionally be outlined from a developmental assessment, meaning that rather than being a fixed trait the leadership style is nurtured (Northouse, 2010). Although this view is skewed toward a theory-based perspective, its meaning still captures the essence of the leadership style and connection to the leaders' experiences. A study was conducted that acknowledged authentic leadership as a core concept, incorporating transformational and ethical leadership. Although within transformational leadership, leaders can be participative, directive, or even authoritarian, the style of behavior is not the defining factor. Alternatively, acting in accordance with deep personal values and convictions, building credibility, and winning the respect of followers by building collaborative relationships is recognized as authentic (Avolio, Walumbwa, & Weber, 2009).

Assessment of Women in Leadership

After more than 50 years of changes and fights to end discrimination on the basis of gender or race, women have been able to successfully emerge into positions of leadership. Rather than being limited to the role of wife and mother, women have extended beyond occupational confines and stretched to attain leadership positions. Many organizations (e.g., Kaiser Permanente, General Electric) have worked to establish initiatives to assist in the advancement of women into leadership roles. Work-life balance benefits, such as

bonding time new mothers have, unquestionably facilitated a greater support system

(Brown, Wyn, Ojeda, & Levan, 2000). However, women still tend to face more obstacles

while climbing up the career ladder than do men. An article based on female Fortune 500

CEO's capitalized on challenges faced by women during their evolution into leaders and

managers, and the struggle with authenticity. Women reported an ongoing struggle with

being able to be themselves in a male dominant work environment, citing instances of

direct conflict when holding onto values such as being compassionate in such a highly

competitive culture (Eagly & Carli, 2007). Women also expressed the difficulty in

maintaining self-clarity. Although women are being promoted to high positions within

organizations, they are penalized in their performance evaluations when they do not put in

extra effort, above that expected from their male colleagues. Contrariwise, their assertive

behavior is condemned, as women are expected to be caring and supportive. This makes it

hard for women to determine their strengths and weaknesses due to not having a clear

sense of what is expected of them (Lyness & Heilman, 2006).

Additionally, women feel dissatisfied with the number of close relationships in their

lives. The desire to feel connected to others is immense; however, within organizational

life, their relationship are often hampered due to the competitive nature that inhabits the

typical business enterprise. A sense of connection to other people is vital to growth in

women, hence the need to feel connected. Feeling a lost sense of relationship deflects the

ability to access the leader-member exchange theory, which proposes that leaders establish

a special relationship with their followers and work effectively and compatibly (Robbins &

Judge, 2012). In this theory, the interactions between a leader and follower increase over

time and a stable relationship is formed. Amidst the challenges for women in leadership

also comes the need for the development and sustainment of balance. The balance women leaders seek goes beyond balancing personal and professional lives and delves into competence and credibility. It requires maintaining a clear understanding that self-confidence and making mistakes are compatible, recognizing when to allow a colleague to try something on their own and when to step in and assist them, and accepting that leadership is inclusive of being lonely as well as receiving praise. Balance becomes a dance of integration and dwelling within the paradox (Hertneky, 2010).

Feminism and Black Feminism

The word *feminism* is derived from the Latin word *femina,* meaning women or female. As an ideology feminism is studied as a perspective on the discrimination and oppression of women. The theories attached to feminism include that of Einstein (2004), who states feminism advances the possibility of theoretically categorizing the connectedness between women and the multiple systems of power that attempt to harness their creativity. The theories include that of hooks (2000b), who offers the theory that feminism is a movement to end sexism, sexist exploitation, and oppression. Both theories acknowledgement the subjugation of women. Feminism ascended because of the need to challenge the belief that the prototypical human is male, and man defines a woman not as herself but as relative to him (de Beauvoir, 1952). According to Harding and Nordberg (2005), "feminist research principles and practices are inclusive of awareness and are sensitive towards underrepresented groups" (p. 2015). Therefore, the study of feminism encompasses the personal experiences women who have been frustrated, humiliated, or made to feel invisible or disempowered due to their gender (Wadsworth, 2001).

Feminist research primarily focuses on White women, with fewer work on African American women; however, hooks (2000b) offers a view of feminism surrounding Black women. She affirms that feminism is a movement that will have a miniscule impact on working class and poor women, yet for White women and middle and upper class groups, the impact would be greater. Hooks further offers that the goal of Black feminism is to recognize the struggle of Black women against multiple oppressions. However, as a point of acknowledgement, Collins (2003) sustains that despite the burden of discrimination, both racial and gender, African American women have developed a rich intellectual custom that is not widely known. Conversely, Collins speaks to the importance of knowledge, acclaiming when it comes to oppressed people, putting Black women's experiences at the center of analysis offers fresh insights to prevailing concepts, thus empowering feminists' knowledge.

Noteworthy African American Women in Leadership

Corporate muscle is defined as owning the ability to have influence on the direction of an organization (Brown, Lundy, Carbon, Robinson, & McRae., 2006). Therefore, since a designated title is not automatically synonymous with power, influence inside the organization is highly dependent on the influence of the leader. Individuals who have direct impact on revenue, profitability, and product development make up the echelon of successful executive leaders. According to Catalyst (2014), a research and advisory firm, of the nations 500 leading industrial companies, 1.6% of corporate officers and top earners are represented by women of color. Similarly, women of color currently hold 3% of board seats at 415 of the nations 500 largest industrial companies; out of 655 seats, 104 are occupied by African American women. Seeing relatively few people who look like them,

climbing the corporate ladder gets discouraging, especially when women of color are

perpetually omitted from opportunities to connect with people who can champion their

careers.

Despite documented hardships, women have made successful strides to establish

themselves within the corporate arena. Below is a list of African American women who

have excelled in politics, entrepreneurship, and business. This list was originated by the

U.S. Department of State (2012) Bureau of Information Programs (BIIP), titled *Making*

Their Mark: Black Women Leaders.

- Mae Jemison (astronaut, doctor, scientist). A mission specialist for the space shuttle

  Endeavour, in 1992 she became the first African American woman in space. As a

  child, growing up in the 1960s, the only astronauts were men, but she knew one day

  she would go into space. She credits her inspiration to Sally Ride, the first woman in

  space, as well as Lieutenant Uhura, the African American crewmember on the

  television series *Star Trek*. Jemison is quoted as saying "sometimes people want you

  to limit you because of their own limited imaginations" (p. 15).

- Madame C.J. Walker (philanthropist). Once an uneducated laundress living in an

  era when women were denied voting rights and excluded from most professions,

  Madame C.J. Walker transformed herself into one of the country's first self-made

  millionaires. Discomfited with a severe scalp disease, she began to experiment with

  formulas, marketed the resulting products, and eventually became the CEO of her

  own brand of hair care and cosmetics. In 1992, she became one of only 21 women

  inducted to the National Business Hall of Fame at the Museum of Science and

Industry in Chicago. She is quoted as saying, "Don't sit down and wait for opportunities to come; you have to get up and make them for yourselves" (p. 5).

- Mary McLeod Bethune (educator and civil rights activist). The first African American woman to have a memorial statue in Washington D.C., she states, "The whole world opened to me when I learned to read" (p. 13). Bethune headed the National Association of colored women in 1935 and founded the National Council of Negro Women, which united Black women's organizations with similar goals. She worked as a social activist for the American Red Cross and was an inspiration to a new generation of women civil rights leaders.

- Ursula Burns (corporate executive). Raised by a single mother in a low-income public housing project, Burns is known for being frank and speaking her mind. She began her career at the Xerox Corporation as an intern and is presently the first and only African American to head a Fortune 500 company. She is quoted as stating "Circumstances don't define you; *where* you are is not *who* you are" (p. 13). She believes diversity is a key factor to success, and the critical component of success is the alignment of people around a common set of objectives.

- Shirley Chisholm (political trailblazer). Known for being an outspoken champion of women's and minority rights, Shirley Chisholm shattered gender and racial barriers by being the first African American woman elected to the U.S. Congress and later running for president. Her life reflected a number of significant themes, among them the importance of education, civil engagement, and great personal determination in surmounting humble origins. She is noted as saying, "You don't make progress by standing on the sidelines, whimpering and complaining. You

make progress by implementing ideas" (p. 14). She explained her presidential candidacy as a necessary catalyst for change.

- Cathy Liggins-Hughes (media leader). A single parent at an early age, Cathy Hughes lived in the radio studio she purchased, due to financial difficulties. However today, Radio One is a multi-billion-dollar enterprise comprised of an estimated 14 million listener-a-week audience. In 1999 Radio One became publicly traded on the NASDAQ stock exchange, making Hughes the first African American woman to own a company of this prominence. She states "Women should create their own business networks" (p. 15). Her commitment to this statement runs deep, as most of the employees in her business are African American and many of the managers are African American women.

- Condoleezza Rice (diplomat and scholar). Presently a professor of political economy at Stanford University, in 2005 Condoleezza Rice became the first African American woman to be nominated and serve as secretary of state. Having lived through the American civil rights movement, she gives credence to the importance of individual freedom. She wrote a memoir of her family life *Extraordinary, Ordinary People,* sharing the sentiments of her parents who always reminded her, "There is nothing like being a helpless victim of your circumstances" (p. 3).

- Leah Ward Sears (lawyer and jurist). Seizing a career of firsts, Sears is the youngest woman appointed to the Georgia Supreme court, the first Black woman to win a statewide election in Georgia and the first Black woman to serve as chief justice of a state supreme court in the United States. Acknowledging that being the first is always a little difficult, Sears had to fight to be accepted. She states, "I just worked

hard. I was reared to get out there and compete in a man's work and not whine" (p. 17).

- Elizabeth Alexander (poet). An accomplished essayist, poet, and educator, Alexander was invited by President Obama to read her work at his presidential inauguration. A Yale graduate, her first collection of poems, giving a voice to African American people, received widespread praise and was nominated for a Pulitzer Prize. One of only four poets to have participated in a presidential inauguration, she delivered her poem, *Praise Song for the Day. A* poem acknowledging the historic nature of the occasion, giving tribute to everyday workers who made it possible to witness a time when African Americans could rise to the highest elected office.

Although not included on the BIIP's list, also noteworthy are Oprah Winfrey and first lady Michelle Obama.

- Oprah Winfrey (leader, entrepreneur). Chairman of the Harpo Group companies, Winfrey is hailed as one of the most successful leaders of her generation. Raised by her grandmother in an impoverished home, she overcame the challenges of childhood and began her career in media by hosting a glorified cooking show. Her first national broadcast show, *The Oprah Winfrey Show,* aired in 1986. She is now documented by Forbes magazine as the most powerful celebrity. Oprah offers insightful missives to aspiring entrepreneurs and affirms that she is open about her challenges, her intentions, and even her mistakes. This makes her the epitome of authenticity. She states that she does not believe in failure, because it is not failure if you enjoyed the process, ("Oprah's Brand of Leadership," 2008).

- Michelle Obama (First Lady of the United States of America). Raised on the south side of Chicago, Michelle Obama is the first African American First Lady of the United States of America. A graduate of Princeton University and Harvard Law School, she is the third first lady to hold a post-graduate degree. Mrs. Obama was initially considered to be a so-called angry Black woman after voicing a comment during the political campaign of her husband, President Barak Obama. However, shortly after becoming first lady, she became favored among Americans and started a campaign that would make her an advocate for poverty awareness, childhood obesity, and healthy eating (McGinley, 2009). Her belief is that one may not always have a comfortable life, and may not always be able to solve all of the world's problems at once, but don't ever underestimate the importance one can have, because history has shown us that courage can be contagious and hope can take on a life of its own.

Barriers to Leadership

Despite the gradual development of leadership opportunities for African American women, there still remains a cultural tendency for lack of recognition and non-inclusion in predominantly White institutions. Black women not only face barriers while working in leadership roles but also bear many struggles with initially owning their influence and accomplishments as leaders (Barnett, 1993; King & Ferguson, 2011). The underlying reluctance to accept leadership roles is directly associated with conventional forms of socialization. Consequently, there is incongruence in their willingness to use the labels of *leader* and *leadership* when speaking of colleagues or even of their mothers, but not when

speaking of themselves. King and Ferguson (2011) identified barriers that keep Black women from laying claim to their leadership styles and identities:

- Gendered projections: The perception of women leaders is that they are frequently viewed as masculine, harsh, and seemingly displaced from and compromised in the appropriate performance of their gender roles. In leadership roles, women are sometimes viewed as easily manipulated *puppets* coopted by male power.

- Cultural and racial projections: Systemic racism dictates an imbalance in the male-female relational dyad. Women have assumed more domestically dominating roles, risking the overshadowing of males in the areas of child discipline and economic support. This subsequently places Black women at risk of being perceived as assuming Black male power and satisfying the stereotypical matriarch role, preventing men from leadership in community, family, and society.

- Negative perceptions of leadership: Women are sometimes perceived as uppity or out of place in leadership roles. Often Black women leaders are either placed on one end of the continuum as being too heartfelt or viewed as leading with brazen passion.

- Socialization to deny or downplay ones contribution: It is customary for Black women to modestly accept affirmations and praise and shrink at acknowledgement for their accomplishments. As a matter of tutelage in humility, Black women are taught that everyone's contribution is vital to the achievement of a venture. Therefore, to bring honor to oneself is not encouraged. Consequently, Black women exhibit leadership roles more often behind the scenes as opposed to outright.

- Contradictions between terminology and action: The perpetuation of oppression is described in the dichotomy between terminology and action. For example, verified daily leadership roles are seldom acknowledged, but rather described as serving, helping, ministering to, or assuming duty and responsibility for. The terms *leader* and *leadership* is reserved for a White male, a body of supreme power, the team captain or upper management.

Corporate America's mantra is playing *team ball*. However, for Black women, the reluctance to participate in the corporate game often predicts challenges to attainment of the C-suite (Lott, 2009). When Black women exceed expectations and are qualified to attain middle management to upper executive leadership roles, these women experience social barriers within organizations that hinder the likelihood of achieving leadership positions. Given these barriers, it is no wonder that women of color are disproportionately under-represented in leadership roles in various industries (Hite, 2004). Despite the difficult expedition to the C-suite, one of the most common trends in the labor market is the growing number of minorities, namely women of color in the work place. These women make up 13.4% of the U.S. labor force and are on the trajectory to compromise more than 15% in coming years (Catalyst, 2004a). One particular barrier to leadership is so ubiquitous that it is well known by a common metaphorical description: the glass ceiling.

Barrier 1: Glass Ceiling

As previously defined, a glass ceiling denotes the unseen, yet unbreachable, barrier based on organizational bias preventing minorities and women from rising to the upper rungs of the corporate ladder, regardless of their qualifications or achievements. White women describe this experience as blocking their career advancement; however, Black

women face an even harder challenge, described as a *concrete ceiling* (Catalyst, 2004a).

The metaphor of a concrete ceiling positions itself in sharp contrast to that of the glass

ceiling which one can actually see through. With a concrete ceiling, these women cannot as

much as get a glimpse of the corner office. In one study, Black women cited the lack of

opportunities, stating the following:

- 47% of over 1,700 women of color have no influential mentor or sponsor

- 40% experience the lack of information and difficulty networking with influential

  colleagues

- 29% note the lack of company role models who are members of their racial or

  ethnic group

- 32% speak of the lack of high visibility assignments (Catalyst, 1999, p. 1)

  In 1995, the Department of Labor conducted an analysis of corporate America's

Federal Glass Ceiling Commission (FGCC). The intent of the study was to examine the glass-

ceiling phenomenon existent in organizations. Examination of this experience targeted

women of all races and ethnicities. As the name implies, a glass ceiling presents an image

whereby individuals have an view of their role or positions, both below and above their

status in an organization (Brinson, 2006). The glass ceiling also bequeaths an image of a

structure that is transparent and can be penetrated or shattered. However, the research

contended that before one can even look up at the glass ceiling, one must get through the

front door and into the building (FGCC, 1995, p. 27). Although groups within African

American, Pacific Islander, and Hispanic American communities are disproportionately

under-represented, a large group of these same individuals are overrepresented in low-

wage occupations, part-time, and seasonal jobs, or are unemployed. Brinson states that the

barriers to women's leadership occur when potentially counterproductive layers of

influence on women—maternity, tradition, socialization—meet management strata

pervaded by largely unconscious perceptions, stereotypes, and expectations of men (p. 68).

The disparities that exist beneath concrete ceilings run both wide and deep. They reveal

obvious barriers of racism, sexism, and discrimination in the workplace (Schwartz, 1989).

Glass ceiling barriers continue to represent perpetual restraint and keep women and

minorities from being contenders for and holding executive leadership positions in all

sectors of the workforce.

Barrier 2: Lack of Mentorship

Researchers have conceptualized mentoring as the developmental assistance

provided by a more senior individual within an organization (Higgins & Kram, 2001).

Mentoring is a tool of professional advancement for individuals and also promotes loyalty

among employees for the purpose of longevity and upward mobility within the

organization (Eisenberger, Armeli, Rexwinkle, Lynch, & Rhoades, 2001). According to

Higgins and Kram (2001), mentoring is a powerful resource that offers the mentor and the

protégé both personal and professional development. It offers insight for the both about

specific skills and duties on the job.

There are two distinct models of mentoring: formal and informal. Though both

models have an initiation of the relationship, the basis on which they are developed is

different (Ragins & Cotton, 1999). Informal mentoring relationships originate on the basis

of interpersonal comfort and a mutual identification from the mentor to the protégé. These

individuals select partners they enjoy working with and have a mutual attraction or

chemistry with. In contrast, formal mentoring relationships are coordinated by a program

or by means of an application process, which means unlike the informal relationship, the

interpersonal comfort and mutual identification do not play a role in selection. Although

mentorship allows the opportunity for advancement within organizations, not all

individuals are able to experience mentoring opportunities whether formal or informal.

According to an article in a premier business news and investment resource, *Black*

Enterprises magazine, for women, mentoring is like oxygen. Mentorship is the component

that uncovers opportunities and possibilities beyond the stratosphere and can allow one to

innovatively maneuver ones way up the corporate ladder. However, women are behind in

owning a network that can provide a connection to decision makers within the workforce

and often have difficulty identifying persons to willing to commit to mentoring them. This

creates a barrier to advancement. This barrier evokes a sense of isolation from corporate

policies, training and career development, and compensation practices. Although some

break through the barrier, they often still face the exclusion of informal networks with

male peers, promotion opportunities, and isolation from possible opportunities for growth

(Lyness & Thompson, 2000; Ragins & Cotton, 1999; Wells, 2001). Though many

organizations have developed mentoring programs, the capacity of these programs to meet

the needs of the employees is lacking. In the long run, this hinders the effectiveness of the

programs and the development of the employees (Ragins & Cotton, 1999).

Barrier 3: Stereotypes

Stereotypes are a set of beliefs about the characteristics presumed to be typical of

members of a group (Aries, 1996, p. 163). The nature of stereotypes can be positive or

negative, accurate or inaccurate, and provide information that is used in forming

expectations of a specific group. Research has concluded that women endure negative

perceptions when their language, behavior, attributes, or roles are not congruent with that of conventional gender stereotypes. Conversely, there is a prevailing notion that women are less likely to be hired than men who are identically qualified because they are assumed to lack the traits associated with the job (Aries, 1996; Heilman, 1983; Livingston et al., 2012; Wirth, 2005). Although a growing number of minorities (specifically women of color) is one of the most common trends among the labor market to date, insofar as they exhibit stereotypical characteristics of a manager, they are seen as breaching the traditional female stereotype. This opens them up to criticism (Wirth, 2005). Additionally, Rudman and Glick (1999) contend that women present themselves as agentic in order to be hired and viewed as competent, but they are likely to be punished for their violation of standards of interpersonal communication and niceness. Therefore, women simultaneously experience increase in perceived competence of their leadership but decrease their likability, causing a backlash effect. This situational predicament has exhibited a reduction in the performance of individuals belonging to a negatively stereotyped group, African Americans being one example.

Accepting a stereotype may create a level of anxiety regarding performance and ultimately hinder them to perform at their highest potential (Steele & Aronson, 1995). For instance, due to the stereotype that African Americans are less intelligent than other groups, an African American taking the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) may have a lower expectation, leading to inhibited intellectual performance compared to a student of another race.

Similar to Hite (2004), Dobbs, Thomas, & Harris, (2008) identifies there are barriers to leadership that Black women experience in the workplace. She contends that the

leadership development of women of color is hindered due to their unique dual status as racial and gender minorities. She highlights that they encounter unique barriers that inhibit their career opportunities, sustain the concrete ceiling, and derail their ability to reach their full potential. Steele (2010) offers a view of the phenomenon he describes as *stereotype threat*. This view espouses the tendency to perceive, be influenced by, or expect negative qualities about a specific social category such as gender, age, ethnicity, profession, political view, nationality, social status, and so on, and to resist information that counters the stereotype. According to Catalyst (2004a), due to the history of Blacks and Whites in the United States, negative stereotypes appear to be a unique barrier faced by some Black women in the workplace. These stereotypes include more frequent questioning of credibility and authority, despite their earned professional academic qualifications (Dobbs et al., 2008). Diverse subset stereotypes have developed, with names like Mammy, Jezebel, Sapphire, crazy Black bitch, and superwoman. Table 1 shows terms of stereotypical images as defined by Dobbs et al. (p. 136).

Table 1

Stereotypical Images of Black Women

Images	Characteristics
Mammy	Motherly, loyal, self-sacrificing, servant, nurturing
Jezebel	Seductive, flirty, promiscuous, hypersexual, manipulative
Sapphire	Loud, overly assertive, talkative, dramatic, bossy, angry, wisecracking
Crazy Black bitch	Crazy, unstable, angry, vindictive, aggressive, defensive, untrusting
Superwoman	Overachiever, intelligent, articulate, professional, assertive

These stereotypical images affect how the general public views all members of these communities. Most stereotypes are not created out of thin air but are given as a result of wide publicity given to the actions of notable examples within a group (Federal Glass Ceiling Commission, 1995, p. 27). Black female professionals who endure these labels feel limited in their potential to demonstrate their leadership capabilities, which often translates into poor performance. Dobbs continues her study by affirming these stereotypes could have an adverse impact on personality, self-esteem, and personal well-being.

Ultimately, to overcome stereotypes in organizations and improve the work environment, it is imperative that Black women in leadership have tangible standards of success with no imposed limitations, understand their own authentic leadership style, and maintain good work-life balance. In making a paradigm shift from the present way to a new way, there must be a re-examination of the fundamental assumptions of the old way, requiring a commitment of working together to dismantle the system that holds these women back (Aries, 1996; Dobbs et al., 2008; Maier, 1997).

Barrier 4: Intersectionality

The term *intersectionality* refers to a feminist sociological theory that focuses on the interlocking structure of social class, gender, and race (Byrd, 2009b). Originally coined by Crenshaw (1989), she uses an analogy of a traffic intersection or a crossroad to concretize the concept. Crenshaw offers that intersectionality is a description of the way multiple oppressions are experienced, yet the impact is greater than the sum of racism and sexism (Smith, 2014). Therefore, because the focal point of this research is the experiences of African American women, in order to sufficiently address the manner in which these

women are subordinated, an analysis of intersectionality must be taken into account. Crenshaw offers that a single-axis view distorts the experience of Black women, in that often these women are omitted from feminist theory and anti-racist policy discourse, because both are predicated on a discrete set of experiences that do not accurately define the interaction of race and gender. Moreover, these women's claims are precluded and experienced unnoticed, due to others' failure of grasping the unique multifactorial variables of their situation. Below is an excerpt from her insightful essay, wherein Crenshaw (1989) conceptualizes the term *intersectionality*:

> Black women can experience discrimination in ways that are both similar to and different from those experienced by White women and Black men. Black women sometimes experience discrimination in ways similar to White women's experiences; sometimes they share very similar experiences with Black men. Yet often they experiences double discrimination—the combined effects of practices that discriminate on the basis of race, and on the basis of sex. And sometimes they experience discrimination as Black women—not the sum of race and sex discrimination, but as a Black woman. (p. 44)

Intersectionality challenges the possibility of taking into consideration how individuals possess multiple identities simultaneously, how these identities relate to one another, and how these identities may take shape in different social contexts (Dill, McLaughlin, & Neives, 2007). This theory confronts a linear theory that recognizes the importance of how social and cultural (i.e., race and gender) concepts interact. Conversely, it is beneficial to gain a better understanding of intersectionality so as to identify the

complexities that African American female leaders contend with in the workplace (Lloyd-Jones, 2009).

Crenshaw (1989) asserts that often Black women do not fit neatly into the categories of racism or sexism, but as a combination of the two. Yet, the legal system has generally defined *sexism* as based upon unspoken reference to the biases confronted by all women (including White), while defining *racism* to refer to those faced by all Blacks (including male), rendering Black women's greater burden of discrimination invisible and deprived of legal recourse. Therefore, the value of feminist theory to Black women is diminished because it evolves from a White racial context that is seldom acknowledged. The experiences of Black women can be distinct from that of White women, but that fact is often overlooked. Their exclusion is reinforced when White women speak for and as women-in-general. Figure 2 illustrates intersectionality.
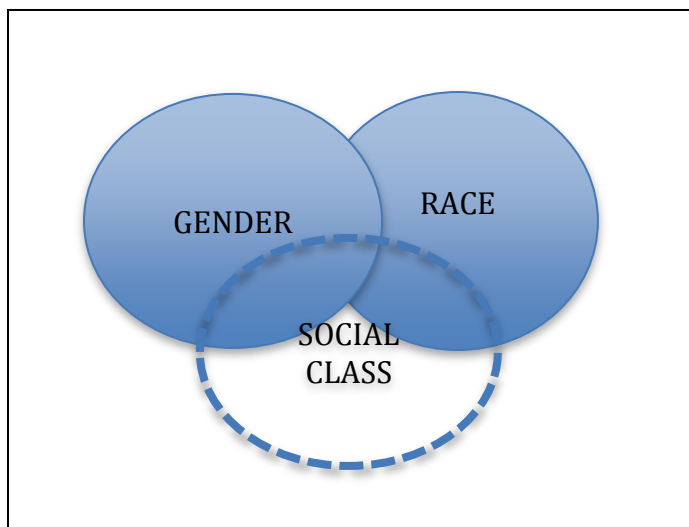
Figure 2. Illustration of intersectionality.

Although there is a plethora of existing literature researching intersectionality (Byrd 2009a; Crenshaw, 1989; Lloyd-Jones, 2009; Smith, 2014), very few have addressed

the subject from a perspective of the leadership development of African American women. The examination of intersectionality in the leadership experiences of African American women suggests opportunity for new perspectives to be heard and for progressive workplace values to be implemented. For the purposes of social change, emancipation, and transformation, research from this paradigm seeks to explore the scientific study of the struggle of alienation, oppression, and domination within institutions, organizations, and social groups (Creswell, 1998).

Barrier 5: Discrimination

"I think there's just one kind of folks. Folks." – *To Kill a Mockingbird* (Lee, 1960).

As previously defined, discrimination is the unjust or prejudicial treatment of different categories of people or things. Despite laws that condemn discriminatory practices in the workplace, there are still a series of unique problems imposed on African American women. Although some strides have been made to combat discrimination, for decades these women have been excluded from consideration in regards to the most desirable jobs and opportunities. Even when declared unconstitutional, discrimination practices persist (Chima & Wharton, 1999). Affirmative action, introduced in 1961 by President John F. Kennedy, mandated that hiring and employment practices be free from racial bias. McCoy (1995) emphasizes that in the past quarter century Affirmative Action as a policy stance has been a vital component in what is referred to colloquially as *leveling the playing field* by providing equal access to qualified African Americans. However, political traditionalists argue this antidiscrimination practice burdens businesses in that the high cost of compliance undermines the productivity of the American economy by forcing organizations to employ less competent personnel. Contrary to such conservative

critiques, Black workers are still the last hired and first fired. Thus McCoy insists that affirmative action is America's most potent weapon against assiduous and pervasive discrimination.

White male candidates are considered members of the protected class, and the common hiring practice passes over qualified women and minorities for jobs and promotions in favor of less qualified members of the protected class if they are White males. Maier (1997) offers a supportive depiction of the vastly different experiences women of color withstand. This author, a White male, employs the use of a metaphor of a birdcage, offering an excerpt from author Marilyn Frye that states the following:

Cages. Consider a birdcage. If you look very closely at just one wire in that cage, you cannot see the other wires. If your conception of what is before you is determined by this myopic focus, you could look at that one wire, up and down the length of it, and be unable to see why a bird could not just fly around the wire any time it wanted to go somewhere. Furthermore, even if one day at a time, you myopically inspected each wire, you still could not see why a bird would have trouble going past that wire to get anywhere...It is only when you step back and stop looking at the wires one by one microscopically and take a macroscopic view of the whole cage, that you see why the bird does not go anywhere; and then you will see it in a moment. It will require no great subtlety of mental powers. It is perfectly obvious that the bird is surrounded by a network of systematically related barriers, not one of which would be the least hindrance to its flight, but which by their relations to each other are as confining as the solid walls of a dungeon. (Frye, 1983, p. 23)

Maier (1997) considers the notion that White men see the cage of discrimination one wire at a time and are traditionally accustomed to the foundation of a White male system. This system is normed on the experiences of the White male managers, of which most remain oblivious to how their race influences their behavior and relationships. He uses the term *the dirty (two) dozen* to depict the unearned advantages conferred upon White males. The complete list is added in Appendix A.

- 2. If I get a position, people are not likely to assume that I "only" got it on account of my race (or gender) or spontaneously assume (and declare) that I was probably "unqualified."

- 6. I am not likely to be restricted from business-related networking opportunities because of my gender (or race).

- 19. As a man, I can assume that being married and having children will not adversely impact my prospects for advancement, and in fact will probably enhance them.

Once proven worthy of leadership positions and hired, African American women experience segregation and isolation. These women also contend with comments such as, "You're different from the rest of them," or "You're not like the others" and are generally both segregated from their White peers and alienated from members of the African American community. Raised in a culture of resistance, Black women are better prepared than their White counterparts to encounter the perpetual discrimination and charge forward amidst oppression. They accept their roles as outsiders, are vocal about injustices, and develop a different professional identity than other women (Bell & Nkomo, 2001; Dobbs et al., 2008).

Strategies to Overcoming Barriers

Historically, Black women's greatest social currency has been their reputation for

being triumphing through challenges. However, despite significant investments in career

advancement, education, and support for feminine values, the rewards for African

American women and their commitment to hard work has not kept pace with their

ambitions (Taylor & Nivens, 2011). Professional Black women desire a role of leadership

as educated and experienced individuals, yet the perpetual practice of organizations

flouting their qualifications prevails. However, according the Alliance Board for Diversity,

since 2004, there has been a decline in the number of Fortune 500 board seats held by

African Americans. The census report also exhibits the overwhelmingly dominate

leadership within Fortune 500 companies disclosing that males hold three-quarters of all

seats, whereas women hold 15.7%, minorities 12.8%.

Strategy 1: Personal Capabilities

Personal resilience. The definition of resilience has been continually redefined,

igniting disputes among several theorists (Herman et al., 2001; Howard & Irving, 2014;

Martin-Breen & Anderies, 2011). Notwithstanding the numerous meanings, the

overarching implication of resilience identifies with perseverance and the ability to endure

through adversity. While there are noticeable barriers that remain perpetually existent for

African American women in leadership, there are practices that contribute to successfully

withstanding and ultimately overcoming these obstacles. Over the years, theorists and

researchers have identified that obstacles and barriers that serve as an antecedent to

leadership formation. The development of leadership partially resides in acquiring

resilience (Howard & Irving, 2014). As defined, resilience is the ability to positively adapt

or maintain progress despite experiencing adversity (Herman et al., 2001). This term is associated with buoyancy, adaption, and elasticity. It betokens the capacity to speedily recover from misfortune, hardship, and change. Conger (2004) states, "Leaders are born and made" and offers the theory that individuals who contend with numerous elements that structure their individual leadership development, including job experiences, bosses, organizational incentives, and hardships that shape their resilience. Resilience embodies the knowledge of one's self, one's values, and a level of optimism. From professional career development, to leadership opportunities, to the pursuit of personal goals, resilience is the key element that taps into the individual's ability to identify the complexities of experiences and learn from disappointments and success (Pulley & Wakefield, 2001).

Social resilience. Although resilience has been regarded as an individual behavior, the ability to maintain positive social relationships and effectively lead is associated with social resilience. Cacioppo, Reis, and Zautra, (2011) defines social resilience as the capacity to foster, engage in, and sustain positive relationships, and to endure and recover from life stressors (p. 44). This trait emphasizes the transformation of adversity into personal and collective growth of existing relationships and the development of new relationships. Similar to personal resilience, this framework classifies itself among terminologies concerning adapting, transforming, and persistence despite adversity (Keck & Sakdapolrak, 2013). However, distinct from personal resilience, social resilience is intrinsically multilevel and emphasizes on the individual's capacity to work alongside others to attain endpoints and maintain a successful group dynamic. Below is a list of factors that identify social resilience, and the defining attributes of those factors (Cacioppo et al., 2011).

- Characteristic ways of relating: agreeableness, trustworthiness, fairness, compassion, humility

- Interpersonal resources and capacities: sharing, attentive listening, perceiving others empathetically, responsiveness to the needs of others, compassion, and forgiveness of others

- Collective resources and capacities: group identity, centrality, cohesiveness, tolerance, openness, rules for governance (Cacioppo et al., 2011).

Strategy 2: Resilience in Leadership Development

While there is vast research surrounding the phenomenon of resilience, its main exploratory focus emphasizes individual and socioeconomic resilience, rarely linking it to leadership. However, Pulley and Wakefield (2001) acclaim that as a leader, acquiring resilience is essential to surviving in a current of constant change, affirming that significant lessons in leadership and resilience are learned as a result of foreseeable adversity within organizations. As defined, resilience is the human capacity to deal with, overcome, learn from or even be transformed by the inevitable adversities of life (Grotberg, 2003, p. 1). Therefore, as a leader, becoming familiar with the concept of resilience, its formation, and the ownership of resilient behavior is essential to development as a leader.

According to Zaleznik (2004), taking leadership development into consideration requires examination of two courses of life history: (a) development through socialization, preparing individuals to maintain the existing balance of social relations; and (b) development through personal mastery, impelling individuals to struggle for psychological and social change. Zaleznik (2004) further asserts there are two basic personality types, *once-born* and *twice-born*, identifying once-born individuals as those whom adjustments to

life have been forthright and maintained in a peaceful flow since birth. Once-born personalities possess a sense of harmony with their environment. Albeit similarly originated, twice-born personalities have an equally different view of the world, as their lives are marked by an ongoing struggle to achieve some sense of order. Incongruent with once-borns, these individuals cannot take things for granted. They possess a sense of self that derives from a feeling of profound separateness. Twice-born are more prospective leaders, whose sense of who they are is not reliant upon work roles, membership, or other social indicators of identity. Though numerous antecedents formulate the development of resilience in leadership, the practical significance amid the leadership development of twice born leaders and resilience is inhabited in the magnitude of obstacles faced by the individual. The gift of hardship imposed on twice-born personalities proposes the opportunity to cultivate a stronger sense of resilience (Howard & Irving, 2014).

Strategy 3: Taking Risks

Despite statistics and a recognizable scarcity of leadership, African American women have relentlessly stood on the shoulders of ancestors who have paved the way, "for without their courage and bravery, a great number would us would not be privy to the vast opportunities that we know today" (Nivens, 2008, p. 2). Therefore, triumphing through the barriers of intersectionality, discrimination, stereotyping, and a plethora of other undocumented biases, African American women have been resilient in their pursuit of success. As previously defined, resilience characterizes the ability to endure through adversity. Although the C-suite is not comprised of a large percentage of African American women leaders, it is understood that the beginning of leadership is outlined with both resilience and risk taking (McGowan, 2007; Nivens, 2008; Taylor & Nivens, 2011). Though

risk taking is a defined as one of the hallmarks of leadership, it must be grounded and have a favorable balance of benefits weighed against the potential dangers of taking the risk (McGowan, 2007). Often, for optimum career leverage, Black women have to take high risks. These risks are categorized as asking for larger salaries, taking on new assignments, moving into new careers, and even choosing to resigning from companies to transfer into entrepreneurial opportunities. With the act of taking these high risks comes a litany of responsibilities each individual must take on in order to successfully catapult through the risks. These responsibilities include uplifting yourself by filtering out thoughts of negativity and replacing them with positive ones, allowing yourself the opportunity to resurface your dormant dreams, blasting out of your comfort zone, overcoming the fear of rejection, developing a level of self-efficacy, learning to network, and nurturing (Nivens, 2008). All of these undertakings done dutifully and practiced repetitiously incur the development of habits.

Strategy 4: Developing personal behaviors

Although habits are defined as a regular or settled tendency or practice, for the purposes of this research, habits will be defined as the intersection of knowledge, skill, and desire (Covey, 1989). This paradigm governs ones behavior, which in turn influences what results are obtained. Therefore, knowledge is the theoretical context of how leaders lead. Concurrently, skill is the ability leaders possess, and desire is the inspiration. Effective leaders possess all three. Though leadership hinges on the ability an individual has to accurately analyze a situation and develop a suitable solution, development of habits is essential for upward growth. Covey admonishes individuals to adopt these habits as a catalyst for success.

Be proactive. According to Covey (1989), individuals elect to adopt one of two mindsets: proactive or reactive. Being *reactive* means being affected by what goes on in ones physical environment. Therefore, behavior is contingent on an external source such as circumstance or a condition. This mindset is contrary to being *proactive,* which means taking responsibility for ones life and removing the pattern of blaming specific behavior on genetics, circumstances, or external conditions. Balanced on this axis is the mastery of self-awareness, which enables the ability to think about ones very thought process, evaluate experiences, and learn from them. Without this, leadership is ineffective. In every moment, an individual chooses to be happy, sad, decisive, or ambivalent. They choose to be courageous, or to fail. External forces act as stimuli, which foster a response, amid the stimulus, and one's response is a choice. Every situation begets an opportunity for a new choice.

Begin with the end in mind. Covey tasks this habit with exercising the mind to imagine, and entertaining the ability to envision what one cannot see with the naked eye. He affirms that each day a new task is at hand, developing a clear vision of the desired direction one would like to go. Continually flexing the proactive muscle just built and making a conscious effort helps to visualize what direction one wants to go. Incorporation of this habit includes developing a personal mission statement that focuses on a plan for success, reaffirms who you are, places all goals in focus, and transfers ideas into reality.

Sharpen the saw. Sharpening the saw is a perpetual process of personal change and signifies everything that contributes to the renewal of drive and balance. Taking time to continuously improve oneself both personally and interpersonally restores the physical, social, emotional, spiritual, and mental person. Strategically placing emphasis on this habit

strengthens skills, knowledge, and desire. Ziglar & Ziglar (2012) offers that desire is the

mother of motivation. It is the catalyst that enables an individual with average ability to

compete and win. Therefore, African American women who elect to foster this habit can

rise against the challenges and persevere toward their goals.

In summary, the blueprint for African American women who desire to take on roles

in executive leadership begins with fostering the conviction of enduringly practicing habits.

This practice can exponentially soften the formerly perceived concrete ceiling and widen

the narrow path to the C-Suite. Shifting the paradigm and changing our habits for the sake

of improvement is motivated by a higher purpose. For African American women, *higher*

purpose can be associated with successfully acquiring executive leadership status.

Therefore, before channeling energy on concerns where there is little to no control,

concentrate on being proactive, developing a clear vision of what is desired in the end,

mastering self-awareness, and learning from experiences throughout the journey. Make

continuous personal improvements by conquering fear, taking risks, and proper

management of time. Frequently renewing ones commitment to these habits can have an

enormously beneficial impact on the journey to executive leadership.

Strategy 5: Mentoring

Although it has been stated that there is a lack of mentoring among African

American women leaders, having a mentor is significant to an individual's achievement as

well as their career goals (Johnson, 2002). Mentoring is a form of coaching that has been

given ample attention in training sessions offered by organizations and has been embraced

by the individuals receiving the mentoring (Aamodt, 2007). Mentoring assists individuals

to resolve difficult issues related to the various tasks on their jobs. Although there are

initiatives and public policies designed to help eliminate past and present discrimination based on color, religion, sex or race, or national origin in the work place, there is still a bias (U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, 2007). Therefore, there is a significant need for African American women to have career mentors who will assist them in competing with the majority who are ahead vocationally and socially. Women mentors can provide not only professional advice but understand the social and mental aspect as well (Breakfield, 2010). In the following excerpt, Collins (2000) speaks of the power of African American women listening and being accessible for one another:

> One can write for a nameless faceless audience, but the at of one using one's voice requires a listener and thus establishes a connection. For African American women, the listener most able to pierce the invisibility created by Black women's objectification is another Black woman. This process of trusting one another can seem dangerous because only Black women know what it means to be Black women. But if we will not listen to one another, then who will? (p. 104)

There are numerous types of relationships that personify the elements of mentoring such as friendship, coaching or counseling. Table 2 displays the different types of mentoring.

Table 2

Types of Mentoring

Mentoring type	Description
Educational	Mentors who inspire, encourage, motivate students on the elementary, middle, high and collegiate levels
Career	Mentors who help those in the workplace to compete and strategize to gain upward mobility within the organization

Mentoring type	Description
Psychosocial	Associated with career mentoring but works with an individual's personal skills and development
Formal	Mentors selected through a structured program and placed with the mentee through a formal process
Informal	Mentorship that naturally occurs through friendship or relationship as a result of interaction with one another
Job Shadowing	Mentorship that offers detailed experiences through time spent engaging in activities that another individual working in the same role also engages in.

General Mills Corporation (2009) realized the benefits to having a diverse employee base within the company. Their Diversity and Inclusion program assists minorities and women in being successful by offering a mentoring program that joins middle management with top executives. Understanding that informal mentoring relationships are difficult for minorities to initiate in corporate America, General Mills has established a corporate mentoring program to assist novice minority employees in becoming more familiar with the company. It is their belief that exposure to the company in this manner will retain employees (General Mills, 2009). This infrastructure provides a model for other large organizations. Affirmative Action no longer forces businesses to maintain a certain percentage of minorities in certain states; however, the number of African Americans in this country is growing which makes it more difficult for top executives to be racially exclusive when selecting their employees (Collins, 2000).

Kaiser Permanente, a non-profit healthcare organization has also discovered that providing opportunities for growth and development through mentoring programs helps to retain top performers (Olson & Jackson, 2007). The program, The *Diversity Leadership Development Program,* designed in 2002 specifically to help people of color aspiring to take

on higher-level roles to be connected with mentors and coaches with similar backgrounds.

Prompting of this process was due to a leadership review performed by Kaiser

Permanente, which made the discovery that very few people of color were identified as

candidates for "future" executive and managerial roles. This was viewed as a significant

problem that needed to be addressed in such a way that would not only be the formation

of just another program that would die down years after implementation, but that would

make an impact on the promotion and development of people of color for years to come.

The process began with the selection of top performing people of color selected

based on their performance evaluations and letters of recommendations. These

individuals, *protégés* submitted a resume and summary of their career aspirations and

were matched with mentors who were given the resume information. Mentor-Protégé

training was provided focusing on the mentors' expansion of their cultural competence and

effectiveness as a leadership coach. Training for the protégés included instruction on

collaboration, communication on how to create a meaningful development plan, dialoguing

and exchanging ideas, and giving "upward" feedback ." Ongoing training persisted with

both the mentors and protégés resulting in findings that Kaiser Permanente's Diversity

Leadership Program made a significant impact on both the development of protégés and

the growth of their executive mentors (Olson & Jackson, 2007, pp. 40).

Kouzes and Posner (2007) provide five practices of exemplary leadership that

mirror mentoring. They affirm that mentors *Model the way* by acting with integrity and

understanding who they are. These individuals are aware that they must be the models of

the behavior that is expected of others. In order to effectively model this behavior, these

individuals must find their own voice and clarify their values. They also state that mentors

Inspire a shared vision because their passion is making a difference. They are visionaries who create an ideal and unique image of what others can become, desiring to make something happen and create what has not been seen before. When it comes to process, Kouzes and Posner believe that mentors *Challenge the process* by venturing out and searching for opportunities to think outside of the box and challenge the status quo. These individuals not only take risks, they also experiment through innovation and creativity. Mentors *Enable others to act* by fostering collaboration and building trust among one another acting as mentor and mentee. This makes it possible for others to feel strong, capable and committed. These individuals give power away instead of hoarding it. Conversely, mentors *Encourage the heart* by sustaining hope and determinations among those they are mentoring making sure everyone is recognized for their contributions and accomplishments. This builds a strong sense of collective identity and community that can carry individuals or a group through tough and trying times.

Literature suggests that once African American women obtain leadership roles, it takes a role model or a mentor to maintain them. Three major research studies have examined how the success of African American women is attributed to mentors. Patton (2009) conducted a qualitative study on eight female African American graduate students and the effect mentoring relationships had on them. These women, who matriculated into a variety of graduate school programs, had mentors who were African American women faculty. The others who did not have African American women available to them stated they had friends or family who filled that void.

Jackson, Kite, and Branscombe (1996) conducted a study that determined the connection between self-concepts of African American women and availability of role

models. The research involved 159 African American women who matriculated at Ball State University and the University of Kansas. The study discovered that 76% of the women had a role model. Of these women with role models, 74% of the role models were other African American women, 56% of the role models were the participants' relatives, 18% teachers, and15% were in the media. The results in this research overwhelmingly concluded that African American women prefer African American women role models.

Bova (2000) conducted interviews with 14 African American women who gave in-depth, detailed accounts of their mentoring experiences. These women stated that despite encountering stereotyping and racism in their pursuit of higher-level management, mentoring was critical to their career development. They received formal mentoring in the workplace, however, some also received psychosocial support from other mentoring groups such as sororities or church. The acknowledgment was made that emotional support that was provided from outside entities was necessary because they could not receive this support within the workplace.

Bailey (2001) led a survey examining components that contributed to the success of prominent African American women. This research determined if mentoring was a critical factor in their success. Seven African American women who worked in various career fields were interviewed. The individuals in this group disclosed that they all had the support of an informal mentor throughout their lives. These mentors consisted of friends, co-workers, family members, church members, spouses and members of the African American community. The result f the survey revealed that all of the women interviewed experienced intersectionality, the double jeopardy of sexism and racism. Nevertheless,

through the support from the mentors, their confidence and self worth was heightened, helping the, overcome these challenges.

Mentoring provides a beneficial component to the mentor offering intrinsic rewards such as enhanced professional recognition, greater networking and notoriety when the mentee performs well. The rewards for the mentee can be just as valuable due to the development of core professional skills, enhancement of confidence, satisfaction of achievement, professional identity, and realization of their passion.

Strategy 6: Spirituality

Spirituality has been identified as a fundamental attribute of African American family life and has for years been a considered a vital element of strength in African American communities (Hendricks, Bore, & Waller, 2012). Spirituality is a yearning for universal values that helps individuals rise above their circumstances gives them the ability to strive for deep empathy for people and interconnectivity with God (Bouckaert, 2012). According to Bouckaert, there is a difference between spirituality and religion: Spirituality refers to the soul and the spirit whereas religion is an organized approach to human activities that encompass practices and beliefs that drive supernatural reality (2012). Allison and Broadus (2009) affirm that having a relationship with God offers one peace and comfort. According to Allison and Broadus, it is the belief of African Americans that spirituality and religion are foundational, and though they are aligned and interchangeable in some ways, there is an external discipline, and a system of rites and rituals reflective of spiritual beliefs. Spiritualty gives hope to difficult situations and guides those who trust God to direct them in their personal and professional paths.

In the workplace, African Americans often draw on their spirituality to cope with conflicting emotions and adversaries. They consider this a source of peace and serenity and hail it as the foundation of their lives connecting with other African American women for support (Mirsaleh, Rezai, Kivi, & Ghorbani, 2010). Spirituality is also viewed as a discovery of the essence of ones being promoting mental wellness of the spirit and the mind. Although it has been debated that spirituality is a private matter, having no place in the public intellectual arena, there is a strong arena among African American women (Del Rio & White, 2012). African American women live with the belief of the scripture found in the Holy Bible in the book of Hebrews chapter 11, verse 1 that says, "Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen." This conviction is a strong unwavering belief without proof based upon complete confidence or trust in a person or any set of firmly held doctrines or beliefs united by one commonality. Del Rio and White suggest that this faith, as well as strong social relationships are developed at church, and are especially important due to the involvement of on going social support. According to Krause (2010), social relationships are valuable to personal spiritual growth. Krause affirms that older adults are able to more effectively cope with the adverse effects of stressful life events due to the social support of other church members.

Research has reported the use of spirituality as a way of coping with the complexities of life. Many Presidents of the United States have practiced religious convictions, looking to faith and spiritualty as a form of coping and decision-making. In fact, President Barak Obama frequently studies the bible, particularly the book of Job, which talks about overcoming trials (Dwyer, 2013). The building of strong spiritual leadership has become a key strategy for African Americans. This provides a framework of

meaning and hope and promises a sense of comfort and caring within African American communities (Wielhouwer, 2004). Conger (2004) describes spirituality as personal and affirms that each individual internalizes it because it is about being aware of ourselves at an internal level. Although spirituality may manifest itself in different ways, there are two different levels; organizational and personal (Garcia-Zamor, 2003). As for personal fulfillment, Turner (1999) affirms fostering spirituality will result in individuals feeling complete with coming to work resulting in an increased moral and a higher degree of personal fulfillment. The encouragement of spirituality in the workplace can result beneficial advancement in areas of creativity, process improvement, customer service, personal fulfillment, honesty and trust will ultimately will lead to heightened organizational performance.

Summary

Highlighted in this chapter are some of the challenges African American women are perceived to have had on their journey to executive leadership. Along with these challenges are the personal capabilities that can be pragmatically cultivated while pursuing executive leadership. The purpose of this study is to examine what, if any, common challenges and problem-solving capabilities African American women experience as they advanced to executive leadership in their careers.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Overview of the Research Design

The purpose of this study was to examine what, if any, common challenges and problem-solving capabilities African American women experienced as they advanced to executive leadership in their careers. This study explored the narrative linked to the experiences of 43 African American women, including the challenges, often perceived as barriers, encountered while attaining leadership roles, and their perceptions of personal capabilities that resolved those challenges. Despite adversity, the participants selected for this study have continued to overcome the types of barriers noted in the literature review, and have been successful in leadership roles.

This chapter will state the qualifications of the researcher, present the research design, restate the research questions, describe data collection instruments, identify the target population, outline data gathering procedures, discuss interview techniques, explain protection of human subjects, and present the data analysis plans.

Qualifications of the Researcher

Theoretical sensitivity is significant of a personal quality held by an individual conducting research. Daiute (2014) suggests that the researcher is aware of meaning within the data collected. Although one can approach a research situation with a firm understanding and degrees of sensitivity as a result of literature and relevant data, professional experience brought implicit knowledge *sensitizing* the researcher to the undertakings within the phenomenon.

The researcher in this study is an African American female who has worked in various positions of leadership. She is personally aware of the challenges these women

may have faced, hence her interest in this group of individuals. In addition, the researcher is also a single parent who recognizes the conflicts between work and family life.

The researcher was aware of the need to maintain a trustworthy interaction between researcher and participant in the research process, making it possible for participants to share honestly and openly. It was also important to periodically step back and reflect on the reality of the situation, validate the participants' perspectives that may differ from the researcher's expectations, and use observational skills to further the discussion.

Research Design

The researcher used a qualitative approach to collect data. Qualitative research aimed to recognize the world from the viewpoint of the subjects, revealing the meaning of their experiences and exposing their lived world (Brinkman & Kvale, 2015). Creswell (2013) outlines this method, expressing that it originates with a framework (see Figure 1), rests upon the assumptions that inform the data collection procedure (see Chapter 1, Assumptions section), and utilizes qualitative coding techniques for analysis of the collected data.

The study utilized a structured long interview with four open-ended questions and probes. Participants consisted of 43 African American women leaders who met the inclusion criteria. The qualitative method allowed the researcher to seek out information to explain a social or human difficulty or successful outcomes present among the individuals under study. This method further delineated an evolving approach to inquiry through the use of data collection in a natural setting sensitive to the individuals and locales of the study.

Restatement of Research Questions

1. What are the perceived obstacles to leadership that African American female leaders have experienced?

2. What capabilities have African American women demonstrated to overcome these obstacles in their careers?

3. What advice do African American women in leadership suggest to other African American women who desire to be in a leadership position?

Target Population

In order to sample from as large a pool as the researcher had practical access to, the researcher used several different networks to seek participants. These networks were developed over time by the researcher. Specifically, she tapped into her networks that included local universities, regional sororities, church women's affairs department, and places of employment in the greater Los Angeles area. The leaders of the network groups were targeted for the initial population for this study. This was a convenience sample, based on organizations to which the researcher had access. Although convenience samples have inherent limitations, such as unknown biases that may be present, there are practical benefits. The researcher gained trust with these leaders based on her familiarity or membership with these organizations, and was more adept at interpreting responses, based on her familiarity with the cultures of these organizations. Additional participants were secured by references from these original participants.

Inclusion Criteria for the Sample

Representatives of the target population for this research were required to meet the following criteria:

- U.S.-born African American women

- Held an executive leadership position for more than 2 years

- Had five or more employees directly reporting to them for supervision

The researcher expected that these women would work in a cross-section of industries including education, finance, business, healthcare, law, and military.

Recruitment Procedures

These women were formally petitioned via email, or phone (see Appendix B for the letters planned for recruitment). No candidates had any personal relation to the researcher, yet were personally called upon by the researcher. All were given an explanation for the purpose of the study. Payment was not offered for participation in the study. Snowball sampling occurred as a result of some interviews. This meant the participants were invited to refer any qualifying potential participants to the researcher allowing for even more data to be collected.

Data Collection Instruments

In order to provide for potential replication of this study, a set of open-ended interview questions were developed and included as Appendix C. The processes for the development of these questions were as follows. First, a long set of initial questions were developed as a result of the review of the literature. A time-consuming reflection on those questions led to a series of visual models and ultimately to the model presented as Figure 1 in Chapter 1. The interview questions were further developed with consideration of the components of the theoretical model, highlighting the challenges to leadership as well as the personal capabilities of African American women leaders. This model tightened the focus of the study and led to a short set of open-ended questions, consisting of a main query

and many probes under each question. The open-ended query and probes related to these main topics: career path, leadership roles, beliefs about leadership, challenges overcome, and advice to others based on life lessons.

Career. On this topic, the following questions were asked of the respondents:

- Tell me a little about your career.

- Did you have a mentor?

- What was the ethnicity and gender of your mentor?

Leadership. On this topic, the following questions were asked of the respondents:

- What is your leadership philosophy?

- Has being an African American woman in leadership effected your style of leadership?

- Have you had to change your leadership style at any time?

Challenges and obstacles. The following questions were asked of the respondents:

- What are some major challenges you have had to face, being an African American woman in leadership?

- Have there been any advantages or disadvantages to being an African American woman in leadership?

Life lessons. On this topic, the following questions were asked of the respondents:

- What are some life lessons you have learned as an African American woman in leadership that you can share with other women, specifically African American women who want to be in a leadership role?

- How important is spirituality in your life as an African American woman?

- How important is mentoring future leaders?

The researcher sent the interview questions to a panel of experts, nine persons who were familiar with research protocols, of which four responded. Their responses did not alter the basic questions, but suggested some modifications and additions to the probes. Therefore, the resulting interview instrument established some validity in this process. The resulting interview questions are shown in Appendix C.

In order to establish reliability and further validity, the researcher met with a small focus group of individuals similar to those who were a part of the study. Therefore, the researcher asked the questions and probes and had the interviewees describe how they would answer. She also asked them to confirm any misunderstanding of words and made the revisions to the instrument based upon their responses. This helped identify any ambiguities and solidify the final version of interview questions.

Field notes. At the time of the interview, the researcher recorded face-to-face observations including body language, tone of voice, and non-verbal communication. Researcher also recorded observation of interactions with employees and that of others' present in the office. In all instances, the administrative assistant was very pleasant asking if researcher wanted water or in one case some snacks in the office break room. These field notes helped prompt insights and provided context during the analysis of transcripts.

Data Gathering Procedures

The researcher understood that ethical concerns could arise due to the complexities of researching private lives. Therefore, researcher carefully designed questions that were aligned with ethical guidelines for researchers (Brickman & Kvale, 2015). Potential participants received a formal letter (see Appendix B) soliciting their participation in the study. This letter was followed up by a personal phone call to the leader or their

administrative assistant to determine a convenient date, time, and location. These phone

calls were followed up by reminder email and text messages. This email letter contained an

offering of times and dates for the respondent to select. In an attempt to stay within a

reasonable timeframe, the researcher requested for all respondents to select a meeting day

within 30 days of receipt of the invitation. The researcher informed the participants that

that the interviews could occur in her office unless desired elsewhere. She also informed

them that an interview via telephone could be an option if necessary. Upon receipt of

response from participant with a specific date, the interview questions and consent form

were sent in order for participant to read through the questions prior to the interview.

The intent was to make the interview as comfortable and convenient as possible.

Therefore, at the time of the interview, the researcher followed the interview script in

Appendix D. Each individual also made a verbal agreement to actively participate in the

study. The researcher reviewed the informed consent information along with interview

script and each participant completed these forms prior to being interviewed. After a brief

introduction, the researcher reminded each participant that her interview will be audio-

recorded and asked them each to sign a Permission to Audio-record form (see Appendix E).

To gather socio-economic information, there was a small area on the interview script

outlining each individual's demographics (see Appendix D). The researcher adhered to the

technique developed by Trochim and Donnelly (2008) to conduct interviews (see Appendix

F).

At the official interview, the researcher's thoughts as well as any salient comments

were captured with the use of written notes as well as voice memos immediately after the

interview. In order to capture general information regarding the location, artifacts,

participants, and setting, the researcher used an interview observation record (see

Appendix G). Due to the executive responsibilities of these women, of the 43 interviews, 24

were captured in person, and 19 via telephone. A transcribed document of the interview

was sent to all respondents in order for them to read through and look for any apparent

discrepancy in information gathered. None of the respondents had a discrepancy with the

sent transcriptions. A thank you note was also sent to each respondent at the close of the

interview.

Interview Technique

The researcher was sure to adhere to the technique developed by Trochim and

Donnelly (2008) to conduct interviews with candidates:

1. Initiate the interview: Be courteous and use introductions, explain in brief the

    purpose of the study and why they were chosen.

2. Put respondent at ease: During the exchange of the conversation interviewer should

    act natural and relaxed.

3. Businesslike: Stay concise and on track with questions.

4. Keep interview situation as private as possible: Stay focused and keep the

    interviewee focused even in the case of minor distractions.

5. Avoid stereotyping: For the purpose of influencing the respondent, avoid

    preconceived notions and remain objective.

6. Be thoroughly familiar with the interview instrument: Use frequent eye contact and

    a constant flow of questions directed to the respondent.

7. Ask every question in its proper sequence and exactly as written: This will minimize changes in the wording of the question consequently affecting the response from the subject

8. Do not assume the answer to any question: Respondent may answer differently than assumed.

9. Speak slowly and clearly, with a well-modulated tone: Speaking in this voice tone will improve the sound of communication with the respondent.

10. Do not answer for the respondent: Wait patiently for respondent to answer the question and complete her thoughts; if necessary, repeat the question

11. Use an appropriate probe when necessary: Generate additional discussion by asking for more information if a response is ambiguous or inadequate.

12. Take notes during the interview: This provides an immediate record of each interview conducted. (pp. 115-117)

Protection of Human Participants

The researcher ensured the confidentiality of each participant through the entirety of the research process. A professional demeanor was maintained in order to aid the respondent. On several occasions, the researcher provided a beverage and light snack for the participant. Each respondent understood in advance that they are under no obligation to participate in the research, as indicated in the Consent to Serve as a Human Research Subject agreement form (see Appendix H) and consent for audio recording (Appendix E). Each respondent was aware of the purpose and goal of the research and understood the benefits of their participation in the study. Though there were minimal risks, some respondents were advised that they may experience unpleasant emotions while recounting

past experiences. During two separate interviews, the researcher noted both respondents

becoming emotional; neither was in any distress. These respondents were both asked if

she wanted to break and resume at a later time. One respondent took a moment and

commenced to speak. The other respondent advised the researcher that she was actually

inspired by this study and felt compelled to do more in her career. This was noted by the

researcher.

For purposes of IRB review, Appendix I contains letters of support from three

organizations with names deleted who have agreed to allow the researcher to solicit

participation among employees. Appendix J shows the template provided to the

organization contacts to assist them in understanding the information needed in the letter.

The participants were notified that the researcher would not use names but instead

would employ the use of codes in the researcher's notes and identifying the transcripts to

maintain confidentiality. While not in use, documents with identifying documentation,

such as the list pairing codes with real names and contact information, were kept in a

locked filing cabinet at the researchers home office. Electronic records have been stored on

a USB drive and iPhone that only the researcher has access to. Three years after

publication, paper documents will be shredded and all electronic records of transcripts will

be deleted.

Validity and Reliability

The researcher used trained doctoral students in the Organizational Leadership

program as assistant coders. This helped to eliminate bias by the researcher. Reliability is

the extent to which researchers can replicate the study (Oluwatayo, 2012). For qualitative

studies, reliability is determined through establishing dependability of the researcher

following the protocols and intracoder reliability (van den Hoonaard, 2008). In qualitative studies, validity refers to the results' truthfulness and certainty (Hussein, 2009). According to Hussein (2009), truthfulness is the extent to which the results reflect the true situation studied, while certainty refers to the extent to which the researcher uses empirical evidence to support results, based on how the researcher collected and analyzed the data. The researcher sent the transcribed copy of the interview via email to each participant. The participant was asked to review it and approve or edit as they determine. This part of research design shall secure validity and reliability.

Narrative

Following the coding methods described above, the researcher used narrative inquiry, which is a form of qualitative research that interweaves perspectives of these 43 African American women leaders who may possess varied influence, experiences, and knowledge (Daiute, 2014). This method placed into context the accounts of individuals' daily life stories from both the verbal and nonverbal information gathered. Narratives incorporated the voices of these participants and produced a description of their perceptions of the obstacles faced and capabilities utilized to become a leader. The result of this study lead to a deeper comprehension of the problem. Daiute (2014) affirms that narratives are not only reports of what happened or what one remembers; they are also dynamic means for relating to others and for problem solving (p. 37). Therefore, this study's findings may lead to changes in educational opportunities, equal opportunity policies, laws, and become an aid for solving problems in social matters.

Chapter 4: Results

This exploratory study employed the qualitative research approach of phenomenology to examine African American women's perceptions of their challenges and required capabilities to become a leader. The main focus of the study was to identify the challenges these women faced and to determine what strategies they believed were effective in their success. Forty-three women were interviewed with a standard protocol, and the data was recorded, transcribed, analyzed, and documented. In addition to this qualitative information, demographic data was obtained from each participant. The data analyses included participation of six trained coders and re-iterations of categorizing the data to extract the most significant meanings from the 43 interviews. These interviews ranged in length from 45 to 90 minutes.

Data Analysis and Coding

Due to the phenomenological nature of this study, the researcher followed the process of coding as defined by Creswell (2009). Creswell defines coding as identifying a word or short phrase that represents a salient and essence-capturing attribute for a portion of the data. The researcher used Creswell's process of describing, identifying, and interpreting these codes into themes that would allow further interpretation of the experiences of the 43 respondents. This method was chosen for the purposes of identifying congruent issues within each respondents' individual experiences and extracting any common themes discovered. In this process, the coder listened to all of the audio recorded interviews and sent them to be transcribed by a non biased transcriptionist. Once the transcriptions were completed, the researcher read through them once again for clarity and completeness of understanding. Thereafter, the researcher sent by email each

transcribed interviews back to the respondent for that interview, requesting them to read through their completed transcripts and make any changes they wished to. All respondents accepted the transcriptions as recorded and did not make revisions.

One week prior to meeting for coding, the chair of the dissertation trained the coders for 90 minutes using interview question 1 and six randomly selected transcripts. Following Moustakas' method, the researcher gathered this group of trained coders for a meeting 1 week later. Transcriptions were all printed out and stapled by a respondent who also blacked out the names on all 43 of these transcripts. All transcripts were shuffled and randomly numbered 1 to 43 by a doctoral student not connected to the study.

At the 4-hour coding session, the 43 transcripts were distributed among the six trained doctoral dissertation students. The researcher provided each coder with a set of colored highlighters in order to identify what each considered salient issues related to the research questions. The six coders read their transcriptions independently from one another question by question. The researcher facilitated the discussion by recording comments and quotes found on the transcriptions, connecting them to the research questions.

Researcher used the methods of Moustakas to pinpoint themes. Moustakas affirms that themes are the *textural description* of actual accounts and verbatim examples of what happened, and the textural description Moustakas defines as an integration of the individual interpretations of experiences. After approximately 45 minutes of reading, each coder shared their list of significant statements, and the researcher, using poster paper, identified each coders' list of theme words. The researcher had poster paper and comments around the room. As a group, the list was examined and discussed by all the

coders. Collectively, the group combined the significant statements into units of information or themes that were not overlapping in meaning.

Identified themes were placed at the top of a sheet of poster paper for the sake of visibility and familiarity during the process. Guided by Moustakas' method, the researcher asked the coders to locate the *structural description* of *how* and *where* the experience occurred and was captured, and a reflection of the setting and context of the phenomenon was recorded by the researcher. A composite description of both the *textural* and *structural* components of the phenomenon was developed capturing the essence of the experiences of all participants and ascertaining the culminating aspect of the study.

After the coding session, several coders continued to reflect on the content of the interviews and shared their additional thoughts with the researcher. The qualitative research findings included in this chapter consist of common themes that emerged as a result of the analysis of the responses. After several days of devoting time to the examination and re examination of the coded data, the researcher began to address the connection of the coded data to the proposed research questions.

Profile of Participants

The target population for this study was African American women. There were 43 participants; all lived in the Southern California area. These participants agreed to share their experiences of how they successfully treaded through documented barriers and became executive leaders within their organizations. The results of this study will lead to the development of a resource for other African American women who desire to be in a role of executive leadership. A portion of the interview process included a classification of each respondents' personal demographics. The questions covered demographic

information relating to work industry, number of years in their job role, level of education, marital status, number of children, parent's level of education, and the number of hours each woman worked per week. Together these women represented a cross section of industries including law, education, entertainment, healthcare, and military. See Table 3.

Table 3

Number of Participants by Employment Industry

Employment Industry	No. participants
Education	10
Entrepreneurship	8
Counseling	4
Law	4
Technical	3
Military	1

Of the 43 African American women interviewed, there was an average of 17.8 total years of being employed in a leadership role as defined in this research. All of the leaders had some form of higher education as seven of them had a doctoral degree, one had a Juris Doctorate, and seven were in the last phases of completing their doctoral studies. Eighteen of these women leaders were holders of a masters degree; two of them had two master's degrees and six of the respondents graduated with their bachelor's degree. Two of these women leaders either had an associates degree or a vocational license. Table 4 displays the highest degrees obtained.

Table 4

Number of Participants by Highest Educational Degree

Highest educational degrees obtained by respondents	No. participants
Associates	2
Bachelors	7
Masters	18
Doctorate in progress	7
Doctorate	7
Juris doctorate in progress	1
Juris doctorate	1

When asked if their parents were college educated, of the 43 women, one-fourth had parents who did not have college education, stating the respondents themselves were the first in their family to be afforded the opportunity to earn a degree. One woman, a retired college professor stated when she went to college, she was in a classroom full of men. She stated, "I wasn't afraid; I was ready to learn." The remaining respondents all stated at least one of their parents, if not both, had college degrees.

Work time demands. Over fifty percent of the respondents mentioned they work 40 or more hours per week within their respective roles, averaging a 50-plus hour workweek. One respondent—a single woman with no children—stated, "I work until the job is done and I often take work home with me. I have to do what I have to do to get the results I need." One respondent, a social worker who is married with two children stated,

"Even though I work many hours, I love my job. I have learned how to balance my family with my work hours and I have never really experienced burnout."

      Marital status. Twenty-one of the respondents were married, one stating that her husband was her support system and was the reason she has been so successful in her journey to leadership. Another stated that having a supportive family when in leadership makes all the difference to being a leader who can effectively lead. Another offered that her "motherly" style of leading assists her staff in knowing that she is there for them if they ever need her. This helps her to have great satisfaction in her role as a leader. Seventeen of the women leaders were single, and many affirmed that working long hours was not a detriment to their family life due to their single status. Two of the women were widowed; both stated they lost their husbands suddenly at very young ages and neither have remarried. One respondent was divorced. Table 5 shows the marital status of each respondent.

Table 5

Number of Participants by Marital Status

Marital status	No. participants
Single	17
Married	22
Divorced	1
Widowed	2

      Over half of the women leaders stated they work as long as it takes to get the job done, which sometimes causes them to work more than 50+ hours in one work week.

These women stated their positions were demanding and required time away from their family. However, all of these respondents understood that long hours are part of the role of being a leader.

Of the 43 women interviewed, only three stated they changed their career path due to having children. One respondent stated she originally wanted to become an attorney, but when she conceived her first year of college, she decided it may be too hard to raise a child as a single parent while attending law school. Two other respondents stated they originally wanted to be medical doctors but got married and conceived while in college. Both women stated this changed their career path due to knowledge of the time it would take to successfully complete the coursework for medical school. Therefore, they decided on a different career path that did not take as much time to complete. Both women also affirmed that being a mother took precedence over being in a highly competitive career. Table 6 shows the number of children participants had.

Table 6

Number of Children in Participants' Families

Number of children	No. participants
0 children	13
1 child	16
2 children	5
3 children	8
4 children or more	1

Note. The average is one child per family.

Findings

The results of the interviews will be further delineated by the discussion of the

research questions and the findings categorized by the resultant themes. All of the

interview questions were reflective of the various perceptions noted in regards to the

challenges and obstacles faced by African American women in executive leadership. Based

upon the results of the coding, the participants' responses may be categorized into themes.

These themes were placed under the appropriate research question as subheadings.

Research Question 1: Perceived Obstacles

Research question 1 asked: What are the perceived obstacles to leadership that

African American female leaders have experienced? Interview question 1 sought to answer

this question. The 43 women interviewed easily identified experiences that became

challenges and obstacles to overcome.

Stereotype. Due to the number of times it was articulated during the interview

process, Stereotyping was noted as one of the main findings of tis research. This outcome

supports the research of Aries (1996) who offered that stereotypes are a set of beliefs

about the characteristics presumed to be typical of members of a group. (p.163). One

respondent stated the following:

In my organization, I work in a very diverse department, yet I am the only African

American. We work heavily in the community, and this causes us to travel to

different work sites in the Greater Los Angeles area. Whenever there is a need to

locate a place of business near the South Central Los Angeles area, all of my

colleagues automatically assume I will know where it is located, and I usually do.

Upon starting in this role, I was often offended by how the assumption was 'The

Black girl knows all of the Black places.' Presently, I have been in this role for approximately 3 years and have learned to look on the positive side and realize that I am the SME, the subject matter expert when it comes to the various locales my company frequents. It's all about how you look at it.

All of the women interviewed indicated some type of stereotyping in one form or another throughout their individual interviews. When asked specifically how they felt stereotyped, one woman gave an example that at her workplace, every time an African American person comes in, her colleagues asked if she knew them. She stated that this was always something that made her feel stereotyped, because not only was she the only woman working in her division, she was also the only African American working there. She spoke about how she approached one gentleman about his constant questioning and he commenced to call her "angry." She stated, "I don't know how come every time I say something to defend myself, I have to be called angry. I am simply defending myself against the stereotype that keeps being placed on me." This supports Dobbs' chart shown in Chapter 2 that reflects the stereotypical images of African American women and the crazy Black bitch stereotype that African American women are crazy, unstable, angry, vindictive, or aggressive. Soon after she spoke with the gentleman, she admitted that the questioning did slow down, but she still felt like it was an ongoing joke, which made her feel looked down on by her male colleagues.

Another woman leader shared that in her line of work, real estate and mortgage lending, she was among very few women and even fewer African Americans. As a single, middle-aged woman, she expressed that often she encounters couples who are looking to purchase a home, and upon being introduced to them and becoming acquainted, there

becomes a discussion of her being single. She affirmed that it has happened on several

occasions where the wife has reached out to her and apprised her of the decision of the

husband not to continue with her as their realtor. One wife, an African American woman,

was honest enough to tell her that her husband did not trust the fact that she was a single,

unmarried, African American woman. They found another realtor shortly after. Another

couple, an older Middle Eastern couple, needed assistance with the foreclosure of their

home. The African American respondent was referred to them by a mutual friend, and

upon meeting her and finding out she would be assisting them, the husband, visibly

anxious, began to ask questions of her education and experience, inquiring if there were

other qualified brokers to assist them. Engaging him in a conversation, he immediately cut

her off and unapologetically said "A black woman could not possibly know anything about

saving a home". Unfortunately, she was not able to turn the situation around, and

ultimately ended up passing the couple to another colleague, a White male, to assist them.

Days later, she received a phone call from the wife apologizing and stating her husband is

not fond of women handling their financial affairs, particularly Black women. Though this

respondent was appreciative of the apology, it was still a moment in her career where she

felt she'd been stereotyped. She stated, "I always know when I am being stereotyped by the

line of questioning I am asked, usually by Caucasian men. It is a part of the job I have, so I

am always prepared for it."

Underrepresentation. Underrepresentation was a profound finding, as all of the

women agreed that they had difficulties trying to identify with individuals in their

department due to the lack of representation of African Americans. One respondent stated,

"I have been successful in my journey to leadership. I have been called upon to form

committees, make important decisions, and have even been invited to attend an offsite leadership training at a prestigious university. However, I often see that the higher up I go on the corporate ladder, the fewer people I see who look like me." She offered, "I have had a mentor to assist me in properly aligning myself for upward mobility; however, once successfully achieving this goal, I don't identify with many of my colleagues."

Many of the women interviewed shared that they were one of the only African American women in their divisions, departments, and even organizations. One woman, a top executive at a large healthcare organization, stated that the feelings of separation are always present. She also stated the following:

> Being underrepresented makes it more difficult to feel a part of a network, causing a feeling of isolation. I arrive to work, go to meetings, give my input on various issues going on in the organization. I am always thanked for my input, but then I realize that most of the final decisions were actually made after work, on the golf course, and I was never invited. The first thing I realize is that a new plan has been implemented. I would never know how, but would always simply follow suit. It has always been a tough pill to swallow, but I realize it is all a part of the job role I am in. Do I accept it? Yes. Do I like it? No.

She felt that had she been invited to the final decision making table, she would have felt like her voice was heard, but she was underrepresented and outnumbered. Although she was in the top position, she often felt her voice was never heard.

Communication style. Many of the women interviewed spoke about how much their vernacular mattered when speaking in their respective job roles. They indicated that they always made sure to speak not only in a confident tone, but they were also aware that

in the presence of colleagues, they had to use correct English and speak "proper." One

woman, an assistant principal in the Los Angeles area stated that working in an urban

school for most of her career which spanned over 17 years, her vernacular was comfortable

and her tone was never questioned. She was able to speak in a familiar tone to her

students. However, a week before our interview, she accepted a new position as an

assistant principal at a middle school in the Southern Orange County area. In her interview

she cited that she was aware this would be a different environment for her in regards to the

demographics. She stated, "Although I worked in an urban school district over 17 years, I

was excited to begin my new role . . . both challenging and educational." She spoke about

the first time she met all of her colleagues at a staff meeting. She stated, "The second week

I was at my new school, I'd prepared an introductory speech and took the podium to

introduce myself. When I commenced, in mid speech, my audience was enamored by my

tone." She chuckled during our interview, remembering the looks on most of her new

colleagues' faces when they found that she spoke with such careful articulation and

intelligence. She shared, "After my speech, one of the English teachers walked up and

personally introduced herself saying, 'Welcome. I really enjoyed your speech; you were so

articulate'." Although this leader knew the English teacher was being appreciative, she

shared that often when she speaks up in meetings, people are visibly shocked to hear that

she speaks using correct English and proper dialect.

     Intersectionality. Though the term *Intersectionality* was not specifically

articulated, it was defined by almost all of the respondents and noted as a resounding

finding. This term, originally coined by Kimberle Crenshaw (1989), uses the analogy of a

traffic intersection that depicts multiple oppressions that are experienced. In these cases,

the oppressive forces were race and gender discrimination combined. Upon learning what the term meant, one leader was quoted as saying the following:

> I feel like I am often behind a triple intersection: I am Black, I am a woman, and I am a Black woman. I am trusted to do my job, and have been told I do it well; however, I still always feel like I am being perceived incompetent in some ways first because I am a woman, and then, I am a Black woman. This makes me a BLACK WOMAN.

Unlike being underrepresented, many women stated that while they were highly represented in some areas of their organizations, the shadow of intersectionality was always present, confirming Crenshaw's theory. Although they were in executive leadership, sometimes their ability to lead was questioned, and they felt this was a direct result of intersectionality. One leader, an executive administrator in a large school district in the Los Angeles area stated, "I am not only a woman, I am an African American, AND an African American woman, so technically I am behind a triple barrier." She spoke about a time when was asked to lead a group of women simply because she was Black. Although she was grateful to take on the role, she questioned why she was asked to do it when she was the new person in the division she was working in. She stated the following:

> When I asked why I was selected to work in this particular leadership capacity, my manager, a Hispanic woman, told me that she was not as assertive as I was, and that because I am Black, I would be a better manager due to the fact that I could pose a threat to my staff, resulting in better productivity. Although I was appalled by this confession, I accepted the leadership position and was able to heighten the production of my department. This woman still works in that capacity today.

Super woman. Many of these women shared that they felt the need to be *super woman* in their roles. They expressed how they have to balance their race, their gender, their leadership capabilities, their home life, and make it look easy. Once respondent, a social worker for the Los Angeles Department of Children and Family Services shared, "I am successfully employed, and one of several African American leaders in my organization. I was always told the higher up I go in leadership, the harder it will be to have a family of my own." She believed this and stated that she did not marry until her late 20s. She is now married and has two young children, but stated she feels a perpetual pull from every direction, as director of a division, a wife, a mother, and a foster parent. She said that in everything she does, she fees like she has to overcompensate to be the best at it. She feels she must prove she is the best person for the job, making her identify with the super woman syndrome. Another respondent shared the support of her spouse who is a pastor sharing, "My husband is my support system. I believe you can be a more effective leader if you have a system of support at home. If it was not for him, I am not certain how I would be able to balance my career and my family along with the ministry." All of the respondents shared that they had children. However, few shared concerns about children affecting their career. These three respondents noted how children affected their career. Respondent 15 stated, "I got pregnant in my first year of college at the very end. I had wanted to be a lawyer. A professor later suggested teaching. I began taking classes and ultimately ended up being a substitute teacher and loved it." Respondent 4 stated, "Originally, I wanted to be a doctor. As a single mom, I wasn't sure I wanted to be married to my career. I ended up taking classes in teaching because a friend suggested that I do so." Respondent 26 stated, "I went to law school later because I had the three children. The

hardest challenges were while I was in UCLA Law School, as I was a married woman with three young children, the only African American woman, and older than most of my classmates. It was a trying time, but I come from a long line of people that don't quit." Although there is pressure, she states she would not change any of it for the world.

    Need for mentorship. Congruent with the literature in Chapter 2, respondents echoed the idea that women are behind in owning a network that can provide a connection to decision makers within the workforce and often have difficulty identifying persons willing to commit to mentoring them. This creates a barrier to advancement. Though many organizations have developed mentoring programs, the capacity of these programs to meet the needs of the employees is lacking. In the long run, this hinders the effectiveness of the programs and the development of the employees (Ragins & Cotton, 1999). One respondent maintained she developed a mentoring program as a result of her lack of guidance in the form of mentoring as a teenager and young adult. She stated, "Mentoring is my life's work. Since I did not have one, I will be one." Although 95% of the women stated they had some form of mentoring along the way by mentors other than African American women. They also shared that being mentored by an African American woman was an experience that was priceless. Some wished more African American women would consider mentoring and said that since they don't see it, they offer it more and more. One woman, the founder of a non profit organization for at-risk girls shared, "I have made mentoring my life's work. To have the honor of mentoring young ladies of all races who want to be leaders in their own right makes the challenges I had as a teenager all worth while, because I can now give back." She shared, "If I would have had the opportunity to be exposed to early mentoring, I may not have made many of the mistakes I made in my early

life." Prior to investing in her own organization, she worked in many roles at corporate jobs where she felt she needed more professional leadership and guidance. Due to this, she stated, "I am dedicated to helping these girls who will one day become women, and I want to make sure they can confidently say they were successfully mentored."

The women interviewed all either had a mentor or were presently mentoring someone. Mentoring was a highly acknowledged theme among the respondents. During the interviews, several stated they did not have a mentor on their journey to leadership. As leaders, although these women did not have mentors, they all shared the sentiment that mentoring is a large part of being a leader. Over half of the respondents stated they *did* experience formal mentoring in their careers and in their personal lives. These women shared that it was of utmost importance that one not only *has* a mentor, but that one can also *be* a mentor. The following quote summaries will offer a closer look at how important these leaders said mentoring was in their lives.

Respondent 1 spoke very highly of a mentor she had upon gradating from high school. She was unaware of what industry she wanted to get into and was employed at a bank working part time. It was there she met her mentor, an African American woman who took her under her wing and assisted her in finding a niche. She now works in the mortgage and finance industry. Present day, she has a daughter of her own and stated the following:

> Mentoring is so important to me, I really did not know what career path I wanted to take. I was just going to work until I figured it out. I am grateful I had someone to mentor me. I now mentor several people, and it is my goal to help them and to leave

a legacy for not only my daughter, but other African American women who want to work in this industry.

Respondent 5 stated that mentoring is of major importance to the future leaders. She shared her experience of never having a true forma" mentor. She had more "role models" or people she observed and wanted to emulate. Therefore, she stated the following:

Everyone should find themselves either being mentored or mentoring someone. It takes nothing away from you to take out the time to help another person. No matter their ethnicity, it is important to help guide future leaders down a path that can help them in their future.

Respondent 11 shared that she was a part of many mentoring programs such as *Upward Bound* and *Big Brother / Big Sister* programs as a teen. She stated the following:

Growing up having access to these resources allowed me to be exposed to programs and outlets that I may not have otherwise been exposed to. One of the things I was exposed to was Cornell University. . . . It is typical for a Black girl to attend high school, make decent grades, and fit a stereotype of having a baby as a teen and dropping out. My parents did not want me to fit this stereotype. Due to my experiences in the mentoring programs I was a part of, I was able to apply, get accepted, and attend an ivy league college. At Cornell, I met many people who did not "look like me," and I was exposed to diversity at its best. Now, I have children of my own, and one of my college classmates invited my son to spend a week in Canada. So now, it begins again with my children. I want to expose them to the same things I had the opportunity to be exposed to. Mentoring saved my life.

Respondent 16 discussed the importance of *asking* for a mentor. She stated the following:

> I would always be the only African American woman in many meetings, and
> although my opinion was valued, I often felt like I was alone due to the lack of
> diversity. I had never really had a mentor, but one day, a top executive came for a
> division meeting and we began to engage in a conversation. He was a Caucasian
> male who she highly respected, and in the midst of the conversation, I asked him if
> he would mentor me.

> She stated, "I think it is essential to growth to have a mentor, but if one is not *given*
> to you, it is okay to *ask* someone you respect to mentor you. Because I worked in an
> environment where I was the top manager and the only African American, the chances of
> me having a Black mentor was slim. However, I realized that my mentor does not have to
> look like me in order to give me the tools I need to succeed. I no longer work for Disney. I
> have opened my own franchise of a staffing organization, but many of the tools and
> strategies I use in my company today have come from my mentor at Disney.

Respondent 22 shared her experience as the leader of a mentoring program at a
large hospital in the Los Angeles area. She stated the following:

> In my childhood, I never had a mentor, so it was my goal to be a mentor to youth. I
> formed an alliance with a high school near the hospital where I work, and I, along
> with my team, created a full curriculum for a mentoring program. Eleventh and
> 12th grade students are given the opportunity to work 4 to 6 hours a week in
> different administrative parts of the hospital. I received some funding from the city,
> and although it started out as a program only for the one high school, it has spread

to a full time summer mentoring program for high schools around the Los Angeles area. Mentoring is my life's work, and the epitome of who I am as a leader. The students I mentor deserve the opportunity to grow and develop at a young age, and I will continue to grow and develop these students for as long as I am able.

Respondent 26 shared her experiences of originally wanting to be a doctor. Her mother, a nurse, fully supported her aspirations of becoming one and began mentoring her in preparing for medical school. She began her classes and decided she actually wanted to be a nurse practitioner rather than a doctor. Upon finishing nursing school, she became an intern at a psychiatric private practice working with an African American psychiatrist. She began to be mentored by this doctor of psychiatry, and soon began her studies again. She will soon be graduating with her degree of Doctor of Nursing Practice (DNP). She stated, "I feel very blessed to have had two vital individuals mentor me, my mother and the woman I met in my internship who has become like family. They were very effective in guiding my choices for my career. Now, I am mentoring a young lady who is entering nursing school in the fall. I want to give back to her the same mentoring experience I was able to have. It was everything to me.

Respondent 31 stated she was mentored by a professor of hers, a Hispanic male who assisted her in obtaining several internships in the area of human resources. She successfully completed two internships within a matter of three semesters and was offered a position at the second internship. She is still employed there today. She has moved from an entry level position into middle management, 3 years after getting hired, and was then promoted to executive leadership. She stated the following:

I am so grateful for my mentor. It was a privilege to have had someone in my corner showing me the ropes. I believe when people do not have a mentor, they obviously can achieve success in their career, but when you have a mentor, there is someone who can carve out the way for you, someone who can help you avoid mistakes and going down the wrong path. I feel mentoring is powerful. Now, I mentor several of my staff, and in mentoring them, I always remind them it is my goal to see them become successful professionals and push them forward. If they surpass me, and all I have done in my career, I have done a good job. I have done something right.

Respondent 34 shared her experience of acquiring several mentors upon completing her graduate studies. She was mentored by three African American women who taught her a variety of valuable lessons. These ladies—a business owner, a professor, and a close family friend—all nurtured her in different ways. She stated the following:

I feel very blessed to have these ladies in my life; they are like my family. One of the most important things I learned was etiquette. That may sound funny, but as a tall African American woman who attended all urban schools in South Central Los Angeles, I often was told that I came across as crass, angry, or unapproachable. I really did not want to always walk around with a smile on my face, because quite frankly, that is not my normal disposition. However, these women, my mentors, taught me how to simply keep a pleasant look on my face, not a smile per se, but a pleasant temperament. I was taught to walk into a room and speak first, before anyone speaks to me, be gracious, and to speak in a vernacular that is in accordance with my surroundings. This meant, if I was in a corporate setting, I needed to speak corporately. If I was with my friends, I could be a little more relaxed. These are all

things most take for granted, but I was never truly taught this. Mentoring really did

change my life. I am forever grateful for my mentors, and as a college professor, I

now mentor some of my students. You have to pay it forward.

Respondent 37 spoke of mentoring as a *win-win* situation. She talked of a time

when she was in the beginning of her career in healthcare and wanted to be in an executive

leadership role. She stated the following:

I strategized and began to properly align myself with people who were doing the

same thing I wanted to do. I found myself asking questions and aligning myself with

people who could help me get to where I am today. I guess you can say I did not

have a formal mentor, but I had lead executives who were very happy to show me

how they did things and offer me their knowledge of how the organization was run.

It is so essential as an African American woman to find your passion and look for

people who are just as passionate about the same things. This philosophy helped

me. So now, as an executive manager, I feel obligated as an African American

woman to reach back and pull other African American women into great leadership.

I want to empower them to be even better than I am.

Respondent 43, a retired college professor and aerospace engineer, shared that it is

never too late to have a mentor or to be a mentor. She expressed the following:

In my day, there were not enough women who were in the work force to ask to be a

mentor, and definitely not African American women; therefore, I was mentored by a

man. Growth and development is a part of mentoring; it gives the ability to

empower other people who may walk down the same journey. Mentoring is the

epitome of what I do, it offers a piece of satisfaction in life. It is essential for me as a

leader to pour into someone else's life, and it is never too late.

Research Question 2: Capabilities Used to Overcome Obstacles

Research Question 2 asked: What capabilities have African American women

demonstrated to overcome these obstacles in their careers? Interview question 2A and 2C

were used to elicit answers to this question.

Spirituality. A resounding commonality was discovered when the interview

respondents were asked this question, stating that spirituality was essential to their lives

as leaders. The qualitative analysis of the interview data indicated this to be a major theme

as 100 percent of the women interviewed stated they carry their spirituality with them to

their respective jobs. It was documented in both the field notes and transcriptions that

African American women in leadership used spirituality as a value system and as a means

of coping with the challenges of daily life, both in general and as executive leaders. The

following excerpts from the interviews will provide an understanding of why these women

consider spiritualty to be a significant factor in their role as a leader.

One woman stated the following:

I was raised in a Christian home and we were taught to pray before making a

decision. I not only use that as a wife and mother with my own family, I also use it

on my job. I pray before my meetings; I pray before I make a major decision about

my staff. I truly believe God gives my guidance and allows me to make the best

decision for everyone.

All of the women stated that spirituality was their foundation and was what helped them

on their journey to leadership. Most stated that they were raised in a Christian home or a

home that was grounded in faith and belief in God. One woman, a human resources

executive, stated the following:

> I always observe the difference between myself and my colleagues and how we
>
> handle stress. I work with an agnostic male who is always worried about an account
>
> or how he will complete a challenging task. I always look at him and shake my head,
>
> because for me, I look at a challenging tasks and automatically know that I can say a
>
> prayer about it and have faith that this task will not be as challenging as it looks.
>
> With the help of God, I can accomplish it. My spirituality makes all the difference in
>
> the world to me.

Respondent 4 spoke of a very difficult time when she was informed by her manager

that she was going to be training another person for the job she'd also applied for. She

declared the following:

> Spirituality is my life, my air, my everything. It keeps me level headed, rooted and
>
> grounded, and also allows me to see people in a different way. Had it not been for
>
> the prayers I prayed while training this individual, I am not sure I would have been
>
> able to make it though that entire 6 weeks. My spirituality helped me see things
>
> from a different perspective. It wasn't easy, but now I know prayer works. It gives
>
> you patience and understanding.

Respondent 11 reminisced about a specific time when she was overlooked for a

promotional opportunity. She candidly expressed her emotion about how it felt initially

when she was not offered the position, stating that she felt helpless and that she had been

stifled by a glass ceiling. She also shared that she was upset for several weeks. However,

she affirmed that her faith was what helped her through. She stated the following:

I am a woman of faith. My sense of spirituality helps me remember that whatever

God has for me is for me, and no one can take that away. Whatever is in his plan for

me, that is what will happen. Once I remembered that and was able to accept it, I

was able to move forward. I was soon after offered another position. Prayer really

does work.

Respondent 15 declared that she was raised in a Christian home; therefore, her faith

in God was strong even as a child and has always been present. She talked about the

beginning of her journey, expressing how hard it was for her being the only African

American woman in her department for over 30 years. She stated that if it was not for God

and her faith, she would have lost her job years ago. God gave her strength to charge

through those tough times. She was quoted as saying, "I pray every day for strength and

patience to deal with the various obstacles and barriers that go along with being a

professional woman."

Respondent 19 shared that her spirituality was needed in her line of work as a

psychiatric nurse practitioner. She stated that her line of work was a ministry, both for her

as well as for her patients. She was quoted as saying the following:

Due to my spiritual alignment, I can easily channel the negativity I often face due to

the environment I work in, not only from being an African American woman, but in

general everyday life. My spirituality also allows me to stay humble.

Respondent 22 expressed her feelings about a time when she was told that she was

not educated enough to complete a challenging task. She shared that one of her colleagues

questioned her education and her experience. She stated this:

I was raised as a Christian, and I remember certain scriptures that I rely on to help

me. One of my favorite scriptures is Philippians 4:13 that says, 'I can do all things

through Christ who strengthens me.' This is one of many scriptures that I rely on

when faced with any challenge in my daily life.

Respondent 24 reminisced about a time while on her journey to executive

leadership. She had just accepted a position as a manager and was also going through a

challenging divorce. She had two small children and was finishing her education. She was

quoted as saying, "God has been my rock through the toughest times in my life. My

spirituality is my everything. There was a time when I could not depend on anyone, but I

always remembered that I could lean on God."

Respondent 27 spoke about the importance of spirituality in her daily life. She

shared, "My faith in God and my time in prayer gives me a sense of resilience and the ability

to challenge the obstacles I face. I trust God to guide me through the challenges and

uncertainties on my job." I will never understand hoe individuals who do knot have a "faith

based" belief cope with the difficulties and challenges of the workforce. My spirituality is

my means of coping, my joy, my comfort, I can't live without it, I wont."

Respondent 29 shared that she had a favorite scripture, similarly mentioned by

Respondent 22, Philippians 4:13, that reads, "I can do all things through Christ who

strengthens me." She stated this scripture hangs on her wall in her office, and when times

get tough, she reads the scripture aloud, and it immediately encourages her when she is

facing challenging times in her role as a leader. She is quoted as saying the following:

My spirituality is how I fight the everyday battle of being African American, a

woman, and a leader. Sometimes I feel like those three components of my life are

what hinders me from moving forward to other roles in my career. God and my

faith help me know that I am resilient and that I do have the ability to fight through

the challenges I face. I need God to help me; I could never fight this on my own.

Respondent 34 declared, "I always rely on God and I consult him before making

major decisions; even decisions concerning my staff." She spoke of a time when she was in

the process of interviewing candidates for a promotional opportunity and expressed the

following:

I truly rely on prayer to help me make the right decision about who would be the

best fit for a role I was interviewing candidates for. My spiritual life is of utmost

importance in my daily life. I was raised to consult God about everything and wait

for him to give you a sign, an answer.

Respondent 38 expressed that she was raised in a Christian home, and her faith and

spirituality was her core. She spoke about days when she had challenging staff members

who tested her some days to her limit. She stated the following:

Some days are so trying. There is often a need for me to have a private moment

with Jesus. I don't know what I would do if there was not a way I could go stand

inside a bathroom stall and pray, just me and Jesus. Some days, on my way back

from meetings, If I am able to catch the elevator alone, I can pray between floors,

just me and Jesus. I stand firm on my spirituality, and I walk in my faith. I *need* it

daily.

Respondent 43 spoke about Jesus being a servant leader and stated that she was

also a servant leader. She mentioned, "As a leader, one must be a servant to their staff,

empathizing with their needs and showing that you care about them as people as well as employees." She quoted Warren Bennis, saying the following:

> Managers do things right; leaders do the right thing. I always want to be found doing the right thing. My spirituality is a part of who I am as a leader. Jesus was humble, he did the right thing, and even as a leader, I remain humble to both my staff and my managers, it is a part of who I am.

In summary of the responses related to Research Question 2, all of the women interviewed in this study stated that spirituality has been the foundation and the core of their leadership. This finding is in alignment with the studies of Hendricks, Bore, and Waller (2012) discussed in Chapter 2 that states spirituality has been identified as a fundamental attribute of African American family life and has for years been a considered a vital element of strength in African American communities. All of the women collectively stated that without their faith in God, they would have no hope in difficult situations, on their jobs and otherwise. They all stated there is a need to carry their spiritual walk with them everywhere they go. This helps to fight through the challenges of being an African American woman in a leadership role.

Developing personal behaviors. Developing personal behaviors was identified as a definite theme, based on the number of times it was articulated during the interview. Of the 43 women interviewed, over half reported that it was important for them to develop behaviors or *habit*s that would ultimately lead to successful leadership practices. This finding supports Covey (1989), who reported that habits are the intersection between knowledge, skill, and desire. All of the respondents stated that being on time, doing your research, and showing up more prepared than anyone else were habits they practiced on a

regular basis. One woman stated, "I have been the only African American woman in my department for over 30 years. I have made it a habit to always be proactive and work in excellence, no matter how small the task is. This has helped me in my leadership role and caused me to be well respected among my colleagues." Seventy percent of the women interviewed shared that they make it a habit to show up more knowledgeable than anyone else in the room. One respondent stated, "Everyone is aware that Black people are never on time. As long as I have been alive, it has been a stereotype that we are late. Therefore, my staff is aware that my leadership style is geared towards letting my staff members know that being on time means being 10 minutes early; anything else is late. It sounds harsh, but I am trying to beat the stereotype of this generation and make the next generation better." Another leader stated that she is always aware that she must work twice as hard to get the job done. This leader, a very seasoned professor of a large college, an attorney, and a community developer, stated that she had a habit of making sure she showed up knowing more than she needed to know. She was quoted as saying, "Some call it over-prepared; I call it efficiency." Remaining confident was another habit one respondent spoke of. She affirmed the following:

> As I mentor my employees, one thing I always repeat to them is the need to know that their voice is important. When in a leadership role, it is important to know that your seat at the table has been earned; therefore, your opinion, your expertise, and your professionalism is worthy of your voice being heard.

Strength. This capability was unmistakable in all respondents, as each woman shared how strong they had to be at one time or another while on their journey to leadership. In each respondents' respective experiences, the continuous examples of the

display of valiant strength was respectfully noted. One woman, an administrator for a large

property management organization, shared the experience of becoming a widow while she

was in an executive role. She and her husband had been married for 10 years, and together

were raising four children when he was diagnosed with a rare kidney disease. During his

illness, she continued to work while simultaneously taking care of their children and being

a partial caretaker of her ailing husband. Although her organization was understanding to

the needs of her husband, as a leader, it took a great toll on her to focus on both. Her

husband suffered for 8 years and passed away in 2014. Although she had to take an

extended leave on several occasions, she noted that it took an enormous amount of

strength to continue in the path she was in as a leader. She stated, "I never knew how

strong I was until I was forced to see how strong I was."

Self confidence. All of the women interviewed possessed a high level of self

confidence. One woman, an officer in the military, discussed her experiences sharing the

following:

> I am the commander of many men who have blatantly spoken and told me that I am
>
> "a woman" and although they were forced to obey my commands, I would pay some
>
> consequences for it. I endured threats from some of the officers and escaped an
>
> attack of one of my soldiers who tried to force me to give him oral sex in the
>
> women's restroom.

She also shared, "I was deployed twice to serve in Iraq and was the commander in charge

of an entire platoon of soldiers, mostly men who never saw me as a woman in charge. She

spoke of the self confidence she had to maintain in order to deal with not only the

circumstances of fighting, but also overcoming the constant abrasiveness exhibited by the

men she was the leader over. She shared that "although self confidence comes from within, sometimes it is easy to feel like quitting; but I will never quit."

Servant leadership. Of the 43 women, when asked, over half said they were servant leaders. Servant leaders lead with their heart. These stated they give their staff the tools for success and they lead by example. One woman, a former aerospace worker, stated that Jesus was a servant, so she leads as a servant as well. Another woman stated that her job as a leader was to serve those she leads. It not only helps her to be a good leader, but daily it humbles her, making her an even better leader.

Assertiveness. Although most of the women interviewed stated that when they were assertive, it was frowned upon, they also stated that this is needed in their roles as leaders. They simply have to find a balance of assertiveness and confidence. One woman, a dean of students at a community college, stated she gets a lot of backlash for her assertiveness, but at the same time, she has learned how to balance it with professionalism and has shown that although she is a firm leader, she is also approachable. She also has several students she has taken under her wing and is presently mentoring them. One of the students she presently mentors is an African American girl who had various problems, including some anger management issues evoked by the vicissitudes of her life. As a mentor to this young woman, she stated that her constant method of being direct and assertive with her has helped her mentor this young girl.

Research Question 3: Advice to African American Women as Potential Leaders

Research Question 3 asked: What advice do African American women in leadership suggest to other African American women who desire to be in a leadership position? Interview question four was used to elicit answers to this research question. Of the 43

respondents, there were many offerings of advice and life lessons. Listed below are some

pieces of advice and quotes that left a resounding impact.

Developing personal behaviors. Several practical behaviors were mentioned.

One stated that she felt Black women should always show up *over*-prepared for any

meeting. Another habit was, "Do your research. Make sure to always present with dignity,

integrity, confidence, and class. Know more than your need to know and be better

prepared than you need to be. This can only help you, not hinder you." An additional habit

was stated thus: Be a lifelong learner and never give up. Never 'arrive.' If you ever arrive

you should leave the earth because there is nothing left to learn. No matter where you go,

find yourself looking for opportunities to fill your life with information, education, and

knowledge. When being mentored, make sure you glean all you can from that individual.

Strength. Beat the stereotype and don't play the politics. There will be many times

that you will be on the receiving end of a stereotype. Understand that the media presents

African Americans in a negative light for various reasons. Just because you have been

stereotyped does not mean you have to fall into the action this entails. Beat the game, do

not fall into the trap of what you are perceived to be; be better.

Self confidence. Document your accomplishments and refer to them for your next

journey. Keep a journal of your accomplishments and victories. Refer to them during your

journey because there will be times in your new journey where you will feel that you

cannot make it through, reading about our previous accomplishment will push you through

every time.

Servant leadership. Make where you go a BETTER place than it was before you

arrived. Leave your mark wherever you go. Be sure to leave a positive lasting impression

on people you encounter, especially at work. That way, the next time they need a job done, they will call you!"

Assertiveness. Be confident, unique, and leave a legacy. "Leaving a legacy for your children's children is the best way to make sure your voice is always heard. I fought hard to get into the role I am in now. As an African American woman in leadership I am committed to leaving a lasting legacy for my son and daughters." Over half of the women interviewed collectively stated that it is essential to find a balance between being assertive and the "angry Black woman" assertive was essential to being a successful leader. Assertiveness was a theme identified as a result of the qualitative analysis**.** Many women stated during their interview that often times they were careful about how they asserted themselves because they did not want to be looked at as the "angry Black woman." However, all of the women agreed that there is a communication style that is congruent with being a part of a diverse workforce that they all must conform to on a daily basis. Though several women stated this was sometimes difficult but manageable, the majority of the women agreed that it was necessary to balance their assertiveness with the style of communication that exists within the culture of their workplace. This common theme surfaced in over half of the interviews and was documented as one of the perceptions African American women in leadership face in their day to day life. The following quotes will convey examples of how assertiveness became a resounding theme in this research.

> Respondent 5**:** I am always aware of my tone when in meetings or in the presence of those who work for me. If I get irritated or give a directive, I have to maintain my tone because once I was told by my African American male manager that I should be careful not to be viewed as the angry Black woman.

Respondent 9: A break in occurred at our office once and it was revealed that one of my students left the window open. Although it was a mistake, I was visibly upset because some very valuable things were stolen. It is very hard to explain, but there is an overwhelming feeling that you have as an African American woman, people are afraid of you when you get angry. I had to suppress my anger for fear of being the angry Black woman.

Respondent 25: I am very short in stature, and can be timid at times. My manager saw the leader in me and I was promoted rapidly. However, upon becoming an executive leader, it was initially a challenge to be as assertive as I needed to be. I had faith in my leadership capacity, but often it was hard to balance my demeanor with I was told in my evaluation that I needed to be more assertive. I took the directive of my manager and began to be more assertive and more confident in my role. The following year, I got three complaints on my evaluation that I was overly assertive and not approachable. I still have a hard time finding the balance.

Respondent 30: I have been told that I am very well respected on my campus. It is a great feeling, because being the only African American woman in my department for over 30 years, I know there is a great deal of respect that I have earned from my colleagues. However, I feel a part of the reason is because I am not afraid to assert myself. I once overheard someone talking about me and when I approached her, I was assertive; not angry. I never get angry. I don't want them to look at me as the 'Angry black woman,' but I do speak with authority, and I guess it has worked for me.

Respondent 36: I have an assertive disposition. It works in my favor as a professional because I am the one my office sends to handle the challenging cases in my line of work. However, it becomes very stereotypical when I people say, 'You don't want to upset (Respondent 36), she will go from zero-60 in under a minute.' Although it is often mentioned as a joke among my colleagues, it makes me feel like I am perceived as the angry Black woman, I go along with it to keep the peace in my office, but it gets challenging at times.

Respondent 40. I work in a predominately male environment, so I have to be assertive due to my surroundings. However, I am not only the only woman; I am the only African American. I often feel like I am labeled because I am the manager, and although I am confident in my leadership capabilities, I sometimes get challenged if I assert myself. It's hard for anyone who has not experienced it to understand it. It's a feeling, a perception, something that really can hold you down.

Spirituality. One respondent stated,

Allow God to be the center of everything you do and every decision you make in your role as a leader. He will guide you through challenges both in life and on your job. In everything you do, pray, and pray always.

Another stated,

Don't underestimate the real meaning of your journey. It is only a part of your life. Always remember that the journey you are taking is only a snippet of your life; it is not a destination. There will be peaks and valleys, learn from both. When you get to your destination, accomplish your goal, set another goal, create your new strategy, and begin a new journey.

Mentoring and networking. Respondents noted the need to ask for a mentor if one is not appointed to you. "Everyone has a role model, someone they look up to. However, having a mentor is having a person who can actually guide you through life and help you not to make the same mistakes they may have made." Expand your network beyond African America culture.

> Some of the mentors and leaders you will find to help you may not necessarily look
> like you. Make sure to know that reaching out to those who can assist you in
> aligning yourself for leadership can be any race or gender.

Listen to what is being communicated, process it, decide how to apply it to your life, use it, and stay humble. Wise counsel is always available by way of a mentor. Make sure to take heed to their words, they have lived through what you are going through and can offer wisdom and learned abilities to help guide you. Apply this wisdom to your life, use it positively and intelligently, and always remember to stay humble.

Personal Observations of the Researcher

This study offered the opportunity to look through the lens of African American women working in executive roles. It is amazing how there is such a connection between the 43 women who participated in this study and myself. During each interview, the genuine conversation and the familiarity of their individual experiences often caused me to feel like I was simply conversing with a friend, a sister, or a fellow colleague. When a researcher can associate her personal experiences with that of a broader audience with congruent experiences, it helps position the view of the researcher, brighten the perspective, and sanction the value of the subject matter. Knowing that this subject is immensely under researched, the need for more knowledge in this area is corroborated.

While several women became slightly emotional in their reminiscent state, it was particularly fascinating to discover how many women willingly shared their individual experiences. This simply shines on the idea that this type of study is necessary in order to gain a better understanding of how to encourage future African American women leaders. Charging through multiple challenges, climbing the corporate ladder despite obstacles, and developing strategic capabilities to become successful in their careers identifies the strength these women possess.

Summary

This chapter offered details of the data collected from the 43 respondents. Seventy percent were married, and 30% were either single, divorced or widowed. All women stated that they worked more than 40 hours a week, and 95% had children. These leaders, all college educated, represented a wide variety of industries including law, military, healthcare, education, and finance.

The researcher used qualitative reasoning by way of a group of trained coders to categorize data demographic information regarding the participants. From the collected data, 12 themes emerged. The most prevalent themes were spirituality in these women's daily lives as a leader, the importance of mentoring for the sake of upward mobility, and the balancing of assertiveness as an African American woman. These were mentioned in some fashion by every respondent. Spirituality and mentoring are categorized as capabilities, and balancing of assertiveness is categorized as a challenge to African American women leaders. Other themes for capability included forming habits, strength, self-confidence, and servant leadership. Other themes for challenges encompassed

stereotyping, under-representation, intersectionality and super-woman syndrome. Based

upon these findings, the initial model proposed for this study will be revised.

Chapter 5: Summary, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Summary of the Study

Problem. Recent studies have closely examined common dilemmas of women in the workplace regarding how from a cultural perspective, femininity has been judged incompatible with traditionally-conceptualized leadership traits (Lips, 2009). In 1963, only 15% of managers were women; however, since the 1970s, the subject of women in leadership has made constant progression. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, by 2009, the percentage of women managers doubled to almost 40%, and in 2011, women comprised 51.4% of management-related positions. Yet, of all people employed in management, professional, and related occupations, African American women only comprised 5.3%. The lives of professional Black women in America have seemingly been understudied and their contributions as leaders less valued, therefore, more focused research on the experiences of these women could be an important contribution (Parker, 2005).

Purpose. The purpose of this study was to examine common challenges and obstacles African American women experience as they advance to executive leadership in their careers. This study also addressed the capabilities required by African American women to overcome their perceived obstacles. The goal of this research was to ultimately disclose an understanding of how African American women leaders made meaning out of their perceived barriers on their rise to executive leadership. The researcher intended to clarify the relationship between experiencing hardship and acquiring an authentic leadership, as well as examine the elements that impacted achievement and advancement into high-ranking executive positions.

Research methodology. This study utilized an exploratory qualitative research method for data collection using a long interview protocol. Demographic information was gathered from 43 African American leaders including marital status, number of children and ages, level of education, parents level of education, and number of hours worked per week. The researcher specifically tapped into her networks that included local universities, regional sororities, church women's affairs department, and places of employment in the greater Los Angeles area. The leaders of the network groups were targeted for the initial population for this study, and all had to meet the basic criteria, which included being a U.S.-born citizen, being in a leadership role for at least 2 years, having at least five employees directly reporting to them. A phenomenological approach was used to interview each woman for the sake of capturing the real life experiences of each leader. Purposive sampling was used, and 43 participants were interviewed after being invited to participate via email. An example of the recruitment letter is included in Chapter 4. The interview questions, comprised of four open-ended questions with two to three probes, offered a lenient structure for the women interviewed, as the primary objective was to provide a comfortable space for an open dialogue that would allow candid and truthful responses about their experiences. Each interview was audio recorded with permission, and extensive field notes were taken for each participant. The audio recordings were professionally transcribed. These 170 pages were coded by six trained doctoral students, categorized into themes, and connected to the following research questions:

1. What are the perceived obstacles to leadership that African American female leaders have experienced?

2. What capabilities have African American women demonstrated to overcome these obstacles in their career?

3. What advice do African American women leaders suggest to other African American women who desire to be in a leadership position?

Findings. Demographic information regarding the participants was presented, and responses to the three research questions. Of the 43 respondents, 70% were married, and 30% were either single, divorced, or widowed. All women stated that they worked more than 40 hours a week, some admitting they work over 50 hours per week, despite having families. Most, 95%, had children. These leaders, all college educated, represented a wide variety of industries including law, military, healthcare, education, and finance.

The researcher used qualitative reasoning by way of a group of experienced coders to categorize data. From the collected data, 11 themes emerged. The most prevalent themes were spirituality in these women's daily lives as a leader, the importance of mentoring for the sake of upward mobility, and the balancing of assertiveness as an African American woman. These were mentioned in some fashion by every respondent. Spirituality and mentoring are categorized as capabilities, and balancing of assertiveness is a challenge to African American women leaders. Other themes for capability included forming habits, strength, self-confidence, and servant leadership. Other themes for challenges encompassed stereotyping, under-representation, intersectionality, and super-woman syndrome.

Respondents encouraged leaders to reflect upon stereotypic thinking and revise their actions to eliminate these stereotypes. They recommended setting priorities and

creating good habits. They shared that leaders should be on time, use correct English, dress appropriately, be over-prepared, and leave a lasting impression wherever they work.

Conclusions

Based upon these findings reported above, the researcher drew the conclusions discussed in this section.

Conclusion 1: **Spirituality is expressed as the core foundation of these African American women who serve others in leadership positions.** Of the 43 women interviewed, all stated that spirituality lay at the core of their leadership. They rely upon spirituality as a means of coping, and stated God was there for them in times of controversy and challenge.

Prior literature had revealed the importance of spirituality in the lives of African Americans. As noted in Chapter 2, spirituality was identified as a fundamental attribute of African American family life and was considered a vital element of strength in African American communities (Hendricks, Bore, & Waller, 2012). Spirituality gives hope during difficult situations and guides those who trust God to direct them in their personal and professional paths. One leader mentioned that she never makes any decision about work, home, or family without consulting God first. She stated, "I was raised in a Christian home. My parents raised all of my siblings to read the bible and pray. My mother always told me that I should never do anything without first consulting God. We had to recite the scripture, Proverbs 3:5-6 that says, "Trust in the Lord with all of your heart and lean not to your own understanding; In all your ways acknowledge him and he shall direct your path." I was recently offered a job out of the state and I had to take the time to pray about it and allow God to direct me. I ultimately ended up declining the offer. God always gives me a

sign or a feeling to help me make a decision. It is spirituality that aids individuals in rising

above circumstances and as leaders, and gives them the ability to strive for deep empathy

for people and interconnectivity with God (Bouckaert, 2012). One respondent mirrored

Bouckaer's theory of spirituality stating the following:

> Life happens. One day, a staff member of mine called and told me he had an
>
> emergency and could not make it to work that day. As his leader, I am aware that
>
> business must continue to run, and operationally I knew his inability to work that
>
> day could hinder our productivity. However, as a leader, when my staff calls and
>
> tells me they have a family emergency, I am aware that they are in need of empathy
>
> and not a boss who has no feelings for their unfortunate circumstance. I believe God
>
> has given me the patience and empathy I need to help other people and be
>
> understanding in their time of need.

This theme is congruent with the writings of Mirsaleh, Rezai, Kivi, and Ghorbani

(2010), mentioned in Chapter 2, reported that in the workplace, African Americans often

draw on their spirituality as a source of peace and serenity and hail it as the foundation of

their lives in connecting with other African American women for support.

Another leader mentioned a time when she had a big presentation to do, and it was

the first time she would be presenting to an audience of high level CEOs and managers. She

was the only African American woman and wanted to do the best job she could. She stated

the following:

> I have a favorite scripture that I have in my wall in my office, it talks about faith. It is
>
> the scripture found in the book of Hebrews, chapter 11, verse one that says, 'Now
>
> faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.' I draw on

that particular scripture when I feel like I am doubting myself or when there is a

challenging circumstance before me.

Faith is an unwavering belief without proof based upon complete confidence or

trust in a person. It is evident that strength and spiritualty are necessary components of

their leadership and there is an infinite continuum.

All of the women interviewed spoke of their individual places of worship as a place

where they find comfort and strong social relationships among one another. These women

collectively affirmed that their faith-based community offered a form of familiarity and

allows them to cope with challenges they go through as a leader. One of the women leaders

stated she allows her staff to have a bible study at lunch time once a week. She mentioned

the following:

> Although I as a manager cannot always participate due to meetings or other
>
> managerial tasks, I have implemented a bible study within my department once a
>
> week. Over 75% of my employees participate in this hour-long study that is usually
>
> conducted by a particular staff member. Not too many managers can say this, but I
>
> absolutely love the idea that my staff engages in this bible study. It not only builds
>
> camaraderie, but it also promotes better attendance, personal fulfillment, and better
>
> organizational performance as a whole.

Conclusion 2: African American women were supported by mentors and

mentor others in return. All 43 women interviewed stated they either had a mentor

during some part of their life or that they presently mentored an individual or a group of

individuals. As discussed in Chapter 2, having a mentor is significant to an individual's

achievement as well as their career goals (Johnson, 2002). There are five different types of

mentoring: educational mentoring, career mentoring, psychological mentoring, formal

mentoring, and informal mentoring. Educational mentoring evokes an inspirational type of

mentoring, motivating students in grade school, middle, high school, and collegiate levels.

Over half of the women interviewed stated they had a mentor in grade school or for

preparation for college. Two respondents, a set of twins stated the following:

> We had a mentor in college from our sophomore year through our senior year. He
>
> was a Caucasian male career counselor who made sure all of his students were well
>
> led and mentored. He assisted us in making sure we took the proper courses to get
>
> an education in human resources.

One twin stated, "I am grateful for him as the job I have now is a direct result of his

mentoring. He helped me find an internship several months before gradation, as a result of

that, I have now been on my job for 18 years."

> Career mentoring assists those in the workplace to strategize and gain upward

mobility within the organization. Mentoring as a means of strategic upward mobility was a

dominant theme among over half the women. One woman stated that she got her nurse

practitioner degree as a direct result of being mentored by a nurse. She affirmed the

following:

> I initially went to work as an intern in an office and was going to settle for simply
>
> having my nursing degree. However, I was mentored by an African American female
>
> psychologist who encouraged me to continue on and attain my doctor of nursing
>
> degree. I have just completed my coursework for my degree as a doctor of nursing
>
> and have been offered a job in my field.

Psychological mentoring is associated with career mentoring, but works on the individuals' personal skills and development. Many of the respondents stated their organizations offered organizational development classes on an ongoing basis, but often these classes are not offered at times when it is convenient for the individual. One of the respondents was the leader of a class where she taught computer skills and leadership-based curriculum. She stated the following:

> I work in the Organizational Effectiveness (OE) Department and one of the classes we offer is based on mentoring to gain better employment opportunities within the organization. I run a class weekly for the employees at my organization; however, often times these employees are not given the time to come or they are made to use their own time. The classes are conducted during work hours, so the programs are not utilized as often as we would like. My goal as the leader of this program is to implement a different style of attendance where the individuals can come during their work hours.

Formal mentoring is a structured program where individuals are placed with a mentor through a formal process. In contrast, informal mentoring occurs naturally as a result of friendship or interaction with one another. Both these forms of mentoring were mentioned by all of the respondents. Formal mentoring was stated as being an essential component in the lives of each of the respondents. One stated the following:

> I have formed an organization that works with high school aged children that assists them in finding their niche in the workplace. I work in healthcare, so we have a formal mentoring program that connects mentors with individuals who have the same interests. We call this connection "job shadowing" as it aims to have the youth work

in the same capacity as the mentor they are connected with. These connections are

based on a 25-question survey that asks questions about personality, work interests,

and career goals. It is set up like this so the youth participant can get a glimpse of what

type of work is entailed within the position in which they are interested.

The respondent stated:

Once they are connected, the pairs stay connected for six weeks at a time with the

youth participant shadowing their selected mentor. I love the impact it has on each

youth that comes through the program. It gives me such a rewarding feeling to know

that I am walking in my God give purpose. I find mentoring essential to my growth

and development as both a human being and a leader.

Conclusion 3: African American women leaders struggle to find a balance

between being assertive and sounding like a stereotypical angry Black woman. All of

the women interviewed agreed that leaders must possess the leadership quality of

assertiveness. All of the women interviewed shared that there is a balance in voice tone

that an African American woman in leadership must find that will convey assertiveness

rather than that of a so-called attitude or an *angry Black woman* stereotype. As stated in

Chapter 4, they also all agree that there are times when they understand it is necessary to

changes their wording to match that of the culture. This means matching the tone of the

workplace. However, although it is agreed that this is often necessary, it does become

cumbersome and unauthentic, causing these leaders to feel they have to conform or "fit in"

to a culture. This is aligned with the discussion of stereotypes in Chapter 2 that discusses

the expectations of this specific group. One respondent stated that when giving a directive,

it is easy for her staff to feel she is angry, so she remembers to keep the balance in her tone

of voice. Although a growing number of minorities (specifically women of color) in

management is one of the most common trends among the labor market to date, insofar as

they exhibit stereotypical characteristics of a manager, they are seen as breaching the

traditional female stereotype. This opens them up to criticism (Wirth, 2005). Research has

concluded that women endure negative perceptions when their language, behavior,

attributes, or roles are not congruent with that of conventional gender stereotypes.

Additionally, Rudman and Glick (1999) contend that women present themselves as agentic

in order to be hired and viewed as competent, but they are likely to be punished for their

violation of standards of interpersonal communication and niceness. Therefore, women

simultaneously experience increase in perceived competence of their leadership, but

decrease their likability, causing a backlash effect. This situational predicament has led to a

reduction in the perceived performance of individuals belonging to a negatively

stereotyped group, African American women being one example.

Conclusion 4: African American women leaders perceive themselves as

servant leaders. Of the 43 women interviewed, over half stated that the most successful

leaders have qualities that include servant leadership. Servant leaders are those whose

objective is to put the needs of others before their own. One respondent was quoted as

saying, "Jesus was a servant leader; I should be the same way as a leader." These leaders

capture the essence of this leadership style by successfully focusing on being authentic.

Authentic leaders acquire a personal point of view that reflects clarity about their specific

convictions and values. This conclusion mirrors the literature in Chapter 2 that defines

authentic leadership as focusing on the incorporation of a leader's self-knowledge, self-

regulation, and self-concept (Northouse, 2010). This quality also involves knowing and

acting on what is true and real inside oneself, their team, or their organization and is connected to *how* choices are made rather than *what* choices are made (Terry, 1993). Authentic leaders weigh heavily on their own life story and attachments to their life experiences. One leader described an incident where she had worked a 12-hour day, but one of her employee's children was rushed to the hospital and was in ICU. She had recently lost her husband in the war and was personally familiar with the pain of having a loved one in danger. After her 12-hour shift, she went and sat with her employee the entire evening. She stated, "The pain of knowing you cannot do anything for your loved one is painful enough. The least I felt I could do was to be a shoulder for them to cry on." The authenticity of her leadership shined through, even in that family's darkest hours. Her authentic style of leadership was often challenged as she also shared about a time when she was told by one of the male soldiers in her unit that he would never be found taking orders from a woman. Though her leadership was tested, she was still able to maintain her authentic leadership and the solider was given the admonition to listen, by the senior commanding officer, who was also a woman.

Conclusion 5: African American women leaders have managed to mesh leadership and family responsibilities. Two women remarked that they had spousal support for their leadership. One woman, a doctoral student, executive manager, and the wife of a minister stated of her husband, "I don't know what I would do if I did not have his full and undying support. He has always been there for me through every challenge at work as well as helping me with dinner for our sons so I can focus on my studies." Another leader, a franchise owner and the wife of a school superintendent stated the following:

Although my children are adults now, I love my husband even more because I remember going to school, working a full time job, and being pregnant with our second child. He was always very supportive of my goals and aspirations early on. I started out as an entry level employee, and was able to be in executive leadership by the time our second child was a pre teen. My husband was beside me the entire time.

Three women remarked that they changed their careers in order to have a family. One woman, an operations manager at a large healthcare organization, stated she initially wanted to become a doctor. She got married, had a child, and realized the sacrifice and time away from her family it would take for her to pursue this career path. She stated the following:

I finished my master's degree before getting married and was pregnant with my son almost immediately after getting married. I really never wanted to be a stay-at-home mom, so my husband and I made a deal that we would work opposite shifts in order for both of us to have our separate careers, and still be loving parents to our child. Medical school was no longer in my plans but I was still able to stay in the field of healthcare.

Another leader, an elementary school principal and the wife of a minister, stated,

Initially, I wanted to be a Lawyer. I conceived my first year of law school and one of my mentors asked me if I wanted to be a teacher instead. Because it was not as long of a dedication to my education, I decided to make a detour and go into education.

One leader, an Assistant Principal of a High School, and a single mother of a teenager

shared that she initially wanted to become a doctor. She affirmed the importance of family

life:

> I always wanted to be a doctor. I had medical school in my future and aspirations of
>
> working in medicine by the time I was 30 years old. Nine months before graduating
>
> from my undergraduate studies, I conceived. I went into labor the week of finals,
>
> had my daughter and went to take my final exam the next day. I was dedicated to at
>
> least finishing my undergraduate studies. The next semester, I applied for my
>
> masters degree and decided to go into education administration. I was now a
>
> mother and I did not want to take that much time away from my daughter. I am
>
> grateful for the support of my family who assisted me in my educational journey.

Conclusion 6: Many African American women leaders place leadership

aspirations over having a family. Twenty-one of the 43 participants were single, some

stating they really wanted to be successful and did not have a lot of time to date or desire

to be married. One woman, a financial analyst, single with no children stated,

> I want to get married at one point. Just not right now. I have been highly successful
>
> and sometimes I think marriage will cause me to lose my place in corporate
>
> America. I have worked hard to get to the level I am in, and I enjoy my life and my
>
> professional success. It will happen one day, just not today.

Another woman, a social worker, married with two children, conversed about her desire to

stay single until she was successfully employed. She sated,

> I was always advised by my mother to stay single, get my education, and start my
>
> career all before starting a family. Therefore, I did not marry until my mid 30s and

did not begin having children until my late 30s. I like the fact that I listened to my

mother; however, my advice to the future leader would be for them to know you can

successfully balance a family and a career. It just takes time, healthy communication

with your spouse, and planning. It is achievable.

Conclusion 7: Create personal behaviors that will propel you into successful

leadership practices. African American women leaders suggest how they and others

serve as role models, practice high work ethics, and consciously work to eliminate the

stereotype of the aggressive Black woman. These women also spoke of the importance of

personality and always maintaining a caring, considerate, pleasant approach with their

employees. There is a self determination that they posses which is described as an

autonomous behavior of motivation, development, and wellness. This behavior causes an

autonomous motivation that launches a self endorsement of their actions (Deci & Ryan,

2008). One woman mentioned, "My mentors have always conveyed to me that I need to

make a habit of walking into a room and owning it with my pleasant smile balanced with

my confident demeanor." Twelve women mentioned Ursula Burns, who was the first

African American CEO of a fortune 500 company, one woman declaring, "She did not get to

the executive leadership position she is in today without forming several of the habits

mentioned in Stephen Covey's book *Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*." Another

leader stated that Condoleezza Rice was one of her role models. She avowed the following:

It is highly important to have a mentor. Although I did not have one until I began my

career, I sought out different role models, women I could emulate and maybe one

day mirror their success. For me, one of those role models was Condoleezza Rice. I

may never meet her, but her actions inspire the leader in me.

Conclusion 8: Updated version of theoretical model. The figure below is a revised model of African American women in leadership detailing the challenges faced and necessary capabilities to become a leader. This model was initially created by the researcher and displayed in Chapter 1 to connect prior research. After the qualitative analysis was completed, this figure was updated to reflect the gathered information. New categories of super woman, correct English, and balance were added.

Its infinity shape symbolizes the perpetual challenges of African America women in leadership. Although they rise to executive leadership roles, they still have to face new challenges and gain additional personal capabilities as they move forward in their leadership capacity.
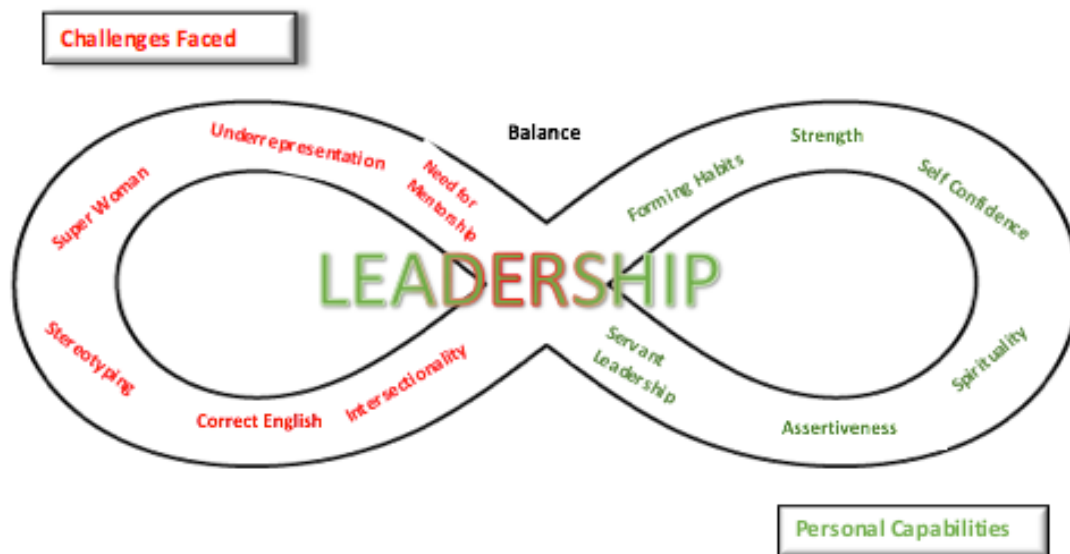
Figure 3. An updated model of African American women in leadership detailing challenges faced and necessary personal capabilities.

Recommendations for Practice

The findings show that Black women do bring a valuable perspective into the executive boardroom. As stated in Chapter 1, the goal of this research was two-fold, first to offer a proposal of sustainability and succession to women presently working in executive leadership. In addition, this study sought to provide a design matrix that will assist women who desire to attain executive leadership roles, and to offer a recommendation of a blueprint to organizations assisting them in successfully offering opportunities for advancement to female leaders. Therefore, based on the conclusions the recommendations in the following subsections were made.

Apprentice positions. It is recommended that organizations aggressively recruit and train African American women for leadership roles. Ten percent of the women interviewed began their jobs working in an entry level role and worked their way to their present roles. Though these women successfully gained their executive roles, they worked hard, often without a mentor or example. A discovery was made that very few people of color were identified as candidates for future executive and managerial roles. This was viewed as a significant problem that needed to be addressed in such a way that would not only be the formation of just another program that would die down years after implementation, but that would make an impact on the promotion and development of people of color for years to come. Therefore, organizations should wholeheartedly look into providing opportunities for growth and development through implementation of apprenticeships as a means to assisting and retaining top performers, as stated by Olson and Jackson (2007). Such a program should mirror the one implemented by a large healthcare organization called the *Diversity Leadership Development Program,* designed to

specifically to help people of color aspiring to take on higher-level roles to be connected

with mentors and coaches with similar backgrounds. The process should begin with the

selection of top performing women of color chosen based on their performance evaluations

and letters of recommendations retrieved from their manager. Submission of a resume and

summary of career aspirations should help them be matched with mentors. Mentor-

protégé training should be provided, focusing on the mentors' expansion of their cultural

competence and effectiveness as a leadership coach. Training for the protégés should

include instruction on collaboration, communication on how to create a meaningful

development plan, dialog and exchanging ideas, and giving "upward" feedback . Olsen and

Jackson also state that ongoing training should persist with both the mentors and protégés,

positively resulting in a significant impact on both the development of protégés and the

growth of their executive mentors.

A day in the life of a mentor. It is recommended that there be a process to

specifically connect mentors with mentees and offer the mentees to shadow a model

executive. Though African American women are rarely sought after for higher level roles, if

this process is enforced and there is a stellar source to emulate, there will be a higher level

of possible candidates with the necessary skills to offer that is already within the four walls

of the organization. As stated in Chapter 2, General Mills Corporation (2009) realized the

benefits to having a diverse employee base within the company. Their Diversity and

Inclusion program assists minorities and women in being successful by offering a

mentoring program that joins middle management with top executives. Understanding

that informal mentoring relationships are difficult for minorities to initiate in corporate

America, General Mills has established a corporate mentoring program to assist novice

minority employees in becoming more familiar with the company. It is their belief that exposure to the company in this manner will retain employees (General Mills, 2009). This infrastructure provides a model for other large organizations. Affirmative Action no longer forces businesses to maintain a certain percentage of minorities in certain states; however, the number of African Americans in this country is growing, which makes it more difficult for top executives to be racially exclusive when selecting their employees (Collins, 2000).

Such a program could ultimately be viewed as a formal mentoring program that would be offered for African American women and would follow the exemplary leadership policies mentioned in Chapter 2 by Kouzes and Posner (2007). These practices provide five exemplary leadership guidelines that are congruent with policies for mentoring. They affirm that mentors *model the way* by acting with integrity and understanding who they are. These individuals are aware that they must be the models of the behavior that is expected of others. In order to effectively model this behavior, these individuals must find their own voice and clarify their values. They also state that mentors *inspire a shared vision* because their passion is making a difference. They are visionaries who create an ideal and unique image of what others can become, desiring to make something happen and create what has not been seen before. When it comes to process, Kouzes and Posner believe that mentors *challenge the process* by venturing out and searching for opportunities to think outside of the box and challenge the status quo. These individuals not only take risks, they also experiment through innovation and creativity. Mentors *enable others to act* by fostering collaboration and building trust among one another, acting as mentor and mentee. This makes it possible for others to feel strong, capable, and committed. These individuals give power away instead of hoarding it.

Recommendations for Policy

Every organization should create and implement a policy that would offer trainings on cultural sensitivity. Cultural sensitivity and awareness means raising the awareness of cultural differences and similarities between people without assigning them a positive or negative, right or wrong value. Simply training individuals that no single culture is better than another in all ways, and heightening the awareness of various cultures, including ethnicities and gender. The implementation of this policy would consist of more than just a one-day training program and would include ongoing training and a sustainable plan. The world day for Cultural Diversity is May 21st , and although this day is a recognized day, within the four walls of some organizations, it is simply a day only recognized in the policies and procedure logs. In speaking to several of the women, they stated there was little to no awareness about cultural sensitivity in their organizations, also affirming that their organizations only offer the idea of cultural sensitivity training during a time of crisis, minimalizing the importance of making it visible and available at all times. Encouraging this as an initiative within any organization would assist individuals in moving from stereotypical opinions and help them to embrace not only African Americans but all ethnicities. Ultimately, making provisions for open dialogue among African American groups and strategically heightening the awareness of individuals could potentially minimize feelings of Intersectionality, discrimination, and stereotype. The development of programs for African American women makes room for dialogue, increases the likelihood of retention among African American workers, and brings more cultural competence to colleagues.

Recommendations for Future Research

Though this research offered rich insight and enlightening findings, this study of African American female leadership did not touch on all topic relevant to the research goals. During the study, the researcher noted several additional topics that warrant academic attention. These topics include but are not limited to the following:

- A comparative study that identifies whether or not African American women thrive better in a Black-owned organization

- Expanding the study to include all minority ethnicities and their individual challenges in leadership

- Phenomenological research on leaders' pivotal moments in leadership

- A comparative analysis of the communication style of African American women leaders and their male counterparts

- A study on the effects of spritualty in leadership styles

- A comparative study of the mentorship programs in organizations and its effectiveness using a sample of small organizations versus fortune 500 organizations

- Expansion of this research to determine of there is a change in leadership style in that of Millennials, compared to the leadership style of Generation X, or Baby Boomers

Recommendations for Publication

The findings from this study reveal that these leaders have triumphed through various challenges and now own significant pieces of advice to offer upcoming African American women who desire to be leaders as well as those who presently work in leadership roles.

Therefore, there appears to be a need for these significant pieces of advice to be gathered and compiled into a publication that incorporates the advice given. As stated, the infinity shaped model created for this research depicts the ongoing challenges that African American women will have and the necessary capabilities they must always possess to be a leader. This model shall be utilized as a template to illustrate to women the importance of understanding that although they will rise into executive leadership, there will be a never-ending cycle of underrepresentation, stereotyping, and Intersectionality that they will face. However, though this cycle may not always be easy, with a heightened awareness, strength, spiritual guidance, and mentoring, it will always be achievable.

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APPENDIX A

List of Mark Maier's Dirty 2-Dozen

1. When going on a job interview, I do not stop to think about how the fact that I am White or a male may be held against me in some way. I don't anticipate that coworkers will presume that I am less competent because of m race or gender. I don't expect people to believe I had an attitude. I don't wonder whether I will be taken less seriously because I am a man
2. If I get a position, people are not likely to assume that I only got it on account of my race (or gender) or spontaneously assume (and declare) that I was probably unqualified.
3. If I accept the position, I am not likely to wonder whether on account of my race I will fit in (or experience potential hostility) in the neighborhoods I will be moving into. I am also not likely-on account of my race alone-to have to exclude any geographical region as an unacceptable area to move to or consider in my job search).
4. Given pre-existing stereotypes my on-the-job commitment and competence is likely to be assumed-unless proven otherwise. (For women and people of color, the opposite typically holds true.) In other words, as a White man, I rarely wonder whether others are judging my ability on the basis of m race or gender. I typically do not work about whether my commitment or performance will be judged either more harshly on account of my race (or gender) …. or more leniently.
5. When I look at the distribution of people up the organizational hierarchy, I am likely to see many others of my own gender and race. People like me will be well represented at higher levers-the –higher I look, the greater the proportion of people of my own race and gender. In fact, I can assume that when I walk through the door a work, most people on my level and nearly everyone above it will be people of my own race and gender.
6. I am not likely to be restricted from business-related networking opportunities because of my gender (or race).
7. My physical appearance is either neutral, or an asset. In contrast, women- who face more restricted latitude of what constitutes attractiveness in the first place- may find that while being considered unattractive is a deficit, being too attractive can also be a liability and detract from their ability to be taken seriously. If I am tall, I do not have to worry, as a man of color would, whether the people I interact wit will initially and spontaneously fear me. In fact, as a tall White man, my height will likely enhance the perception others have of me as a potential leader.
8. When I act in ways that are stereotypically presumed to be managerial and serious, I will not be seen as violating people's preconception's regarding appropriate behavior for people of my gender and race. If I do well in my position, I will not hear others say, "You're not like most people of our race or gender…"
9. I can assume that nearly all the support functions in my organization (secretarial, custodial, meal service, etc.) will be performed by people of a different gender (and/or race) than my own. Thus, when I walk the halls of my own organization, I am not likely to be mistaken for the janitor or the security guard. (Ditto for when I travel).
10. When I travel alone on business, I can count on my personal space- on the plan, at a restaurant, or bar – being inviolate. I will not have to worry about someone of the other

gender interrupting me without invitation. Similarly, I can expect that most people I interact with in business- clients, colleagues, customers – will likely be people of m own race (and gender); I won't have to worry if they will feel comfortable with me.

11. I will see people like me well represented in official company literature (annual reports, advertising, etc.). The implicit communication I will see and hear is, "You belong here."

12. I will not be asked to represent the White (or male) viewpoint on matters under discussion. I am likely to be referred to (either to my face, or privately) as the White manager or the manager in our division (Maier, 1997, p 22-23)

13. I will not have the additional burden of wondering, if my performance is judged to be not up to par, whether my detractors will argue, "See? I told you we shouldn't have hired a man (a White) for the job!." On the other hand, of my performance is exceptional and record breaking, I don't have to worry whether it could foster resentment and anger in those who feel strongly that someone of my race (or gender) supposedly has "no business being in this business."

14. I will not as a White person, feel obligated to "give something back" to the White community, or extend myself outside of work hours to bring others of my race into the opportunity structure.

15. If there are already one or two people, in a demographic similar to mine, in highly visible, top-level positions, I will not wonder whether that reduces the likelihood of my advancement to those ranks. (Women and people of my advancement to those ranks. (Women and people of color must often vie for limited-token –slots, whereas White males expect to compete for all positions.) Thus, if I get promoted, I am not likely to wonder whether this reduces the chances for other people of my gender or race.

16. If I get promoted, I am likely to assume that my race or gender had nothing to do with it; I will believe my success is based had nothing to do with it: I will believe my success is based solely on my competence. If I am promoted ahead of another White male (or passed over for a promotion), I will not wonder whether the promotion (or its denial) was based on my race or gender.

17. I can assume that I will be neither patronized nor pitied on account of my race (or gender).

18. I can assume that my mentoring relationships with superiors will remain (appropriately) professionally focused and not become sexualized on account of my gender. I will not (as a male) generally worry about the likelihood of being sexually harassed.

19. As a man, I can assume that being married and having children will not adversely impact my prospects for advancement-and, in fact will probably enhance them.

20. As a married man, I may unconsciously expect that my wife will defer to my career, thus enhancing my prospects for organizational advancement her own. As a man in our gendered work-family system, I can rationalized away a lack of parental- r domestic-role performance with the excuse, "I've got too much work to do; I'm too busy with work to do that now." (Married women are less likely to be allowed this excuse or have it respected by their partner.) I receive, "See how hard he works to provide a good life for his family."

21. As a man at social functions involving partners of organization members, I am not likely to be mistaken for just a spouse (and possibly ignored).

22. As a White person in a White –dominated organization, I do not have to contend with people consistently mistaking me for the other person White person who works here. (See #15)

23. I can congregate with people of my own race at work, without being accused of not being friendly with my colleagues. I can engage in same sex conversations without being accused of gossiping.

24. As a White person, I am far less likely to be discriminated against when I apply for a home mortgage loan. I can count on there being many people of my race in the community I move to. I can assume there will be facilities to provide the services I need, such as hairdressers and barbers who are familiar with and willing to work with my type of hair, pharmacies that sell Band-Aids that match my skin, churches that I am familiar with. I can count on not being treated like a potential shoplifter every time I enter a department store. I can count on not being mistaken for a burglar if I park my moving van in front of my house and begin to remove my possessions.

APPENDIX B

Recruitment Letter

Dear _____,

      Thank you for being so gracious and agreeing to take part in this research. Below I have noted information about the scope of my study as well as a description of your involvement.

Background and Purpose

I am currently a Doctoral Student in the dissertation phase of my Educational Doctorate in Organizational Leadership at Pepperdine University.

The topic of my dissertation is "African American women in Leadership - Overcoming Obstacles and Rising to the Challenge." The primary purpose of this study is to explore the intersection of race and gender for African American women in leadership and how their experiences contributed to their personal leadership style. The goal of this study is to identify strategies used by African American women to overcome barriers in their progression to leadership despite ongoing hardships and challenges. You have been selected to contribute to this study due to your role as a leader in your organization.

I am interested in learning how you confronted and overcame any obstacle on your journey to leadership. As a result of this study, I will provide a design matrix that will assist organizations with successfully offering opportunities of advancement for African American female leaders.

Your Involvement

Attached, you will receive an informed consent outlining my responsibilities related to your protection as a participant as well as the guaranteed confidentiality of you answers. Upon signing the consent and agreeing to the terms, I will contact you via phone and email in order to schedule your interview

This study involves the completion of two tools

    1) A personal history questionnaire

    2) A short answer survey outlining your experiences as a leader

I assure you that all information collected by me (the researcher) will remain confidential and be carefully protected. Identifying information will not be reported to anyone and the knowledge gained by the researcher during the process will be reported in dissertation format. A "code" number will be used to identify you.

The personal history questionnaire should only take about 10 minutes to complete. The short answer questionnaire may take 45 minutes to complete and the interview could take anywhere from 45 minutes to an hour to complete. A mutually agreed upon time will be confirmed via email.

Please know that your participation in this study is COMPLETELY VOLUNTARY and if at any time you choose not to participate, you may leave this study without any penalty or consequence.

A committee of professors at Pepperdine University is overseeing my research: Dr. Dianna Hiatt Michael, Dr. Stephen Kirnon and Dr. Deborah Olsen. If you have any questions, you may contact Dr. Hiatt-Michaels or myself.

Thank you again for your participation

All the Best,

Lysa Liggins
Doctoral Student of Organizational Leadership
Graduate School of Education & Psychology
Pepperdine University

APPENDIX C

Interview Questions

Career Path – *Tell me about your career*

Probes

How did you come to select this career path?

What factors affected your present career?

What were significant personal career decisions?

How have family, friends, and mentors affected your career path?

Leadership – *Let's move to your leadership. Tell me about your role at work.*

Probes

What do you do that makes you a leader in your business?

What do you believe is a model leader?

What kind of leader are you?

How has being a woman influences your leadership?

How has being Black influenced your leadership?

What factors or critical incidents influenced your leadership style?

Why were these so influential?

Did you consider at various times to change your leadership style? Why?

What qualities do you desire in your employees?

Challenges and obstacles – *Life is filled with challenges. Please share some of the obstacles you have faced during your career and how you resolved them.*

Probes

What were your major obstacles?

How did you face and resolve each one?

How do you weather difficult times as a leader?

How do you meet these obstacles you face?

How would people say you respond to these difficult times?

As an African American woman in leadership, what are the advantages and disadvantages you face?

How do you perceive your journey to leadership was affected by your ethnicity?

How do you perceive your journey to leadership was affected by your gender?

Life Lessons – *Finally I'd like to hear what advice you would give to other women and especially Black women who are seeking leadership positions.*

Probes

What are some lessons you have learned as an African American woman in leadership?

What aides you in getting over obstacles you have faced or are facing now?

How important is mentoring future leaders to you?

Is there anything you would like to add?

APPENDIX D

Interview Script

Hello, my name is Lysa Liggins-Moore and I am working on my doctoral dissertation. The purpose of this research is to distinguish the influences that contribute to the achievement and advancement of African American women despite enduring documented hardships on their journey to executive leadership. I appreciate your willingness to participate in this study. Your responses will be used to help the next generation of African American women who desire to be in executive leadership. As summarized in the consent forms, this is voluntary, and you may stop at any time.

Date _____ Time of interview _____

Location_____

Interviewee (pseudonym)_____

Industry _____

Position of Interveiwee_____

Number of years in position_____

      I.   Demographic Information

           Marital Status_____

           Number of Children and ages_____

           Level of Education _____

           Parents Level of Education _____

           Number of hours worked per week_____

"Thank you again for agreeing to take out the time to be a part of my study. Our interview will begin with a request for some personal information such as your work industry, position, and title. I will be asking four categories of questions that will focus on your career path, leadership role, challenges and/or obstacles you have faced, and any life lessons you have gained in the course of your journey. Again, you may stop at any time if you feel it necessary to do so. "

Let's move into the substance of the interview that will focus on your career.

Career Path – *Tell me about your career*

Probes
How did you come to select this career path?
What factors affected your present career?
What were significant personal career decisions?
How have family, friends, and mentors affected your career path?

Leadership – *Let's move to your leadership. Tell me about your role at work.*

Probes
What do you do that makes you a leader in your business?
What do you believe is a model leader?
What kind of leader are you?
How has being a woman influences your leadership?
How has being Black influenced your leadership?
What factors or critical incidents influenced your leadership style?
Was the role of a mentor evident in your path to leadership?
What was the gender and race of your mentor?
Why were these so influential?
Did you consider at various times to change your leadership style? Why?
What qualities do you desire in your employees?

Challenges and obstacles – *Life is filled with challenges. Please share some of the obstacles you have faced during your career and how you resolved them.*
Probes
What were your major obstacles?
How did you face and resolve each one?
How do you weather difficult times as a leader?
How do you meet these obstacles you face?
How would people say you respond to these difficult times?
As an African American woman in leadership, what are the advantages and disadvantages you face?
How do you perceive your journey to leadership was affected by your ethnicity?
How do you perceive your journey to leadership was affected by your gender?

Life Lessons – *Finally I'd like to hear what advice you would give to other women and especially Black women who are seeking leadership positions.*

Probes
How do you consider social class as a factor in your life?
Were your parents a part of the same social class as you?
What are some lessons you have learned as an African American woman in leadership?
What aides you in getting over obstacles you have faced or are facing now?
How would you define spirituality in your life?

How important is mentoring future leaders to you?

Summary Question - Please rate the following Personal Capabilities on a scale of 1 to 5.
Resilience / Spirituality / Mentorship / Taking Risks / Developing Habits

Is there anything you would like to add?

Thank you so much. I shall contact you as soon as the Transcriber completes this interview so that you can review and revise its contents. How do you wish to be contacted? _____ text _____ email _____call _____ hard mail _____ in person

APPENDIX E

Permission to Audio-record Form

I, _____ agree to being audio taped during my interview

with Lysa Liggins as part of her doctoral dissertation entitled: African American women in

leadership; Perseverance to Power. I understand I will be informed when recording is

taking place as well as when it has stopped.

_____   _____

Research Participant   Researcher

_____   _____

Date   Date

Lysa Liggins

Doctoral Student

Pepperdine University

APPENDIX F

Interview Techniques

1. Initiate the interview: Be courteous and use introductions, explain in brief the purpose of the study and why they were chosen.
2. Put respondent at ease: During the exchange of the conversation interviewer should act natural and relaxed.
3. Businesslike: Stay concise and on track with questions.
4. Keep interview situation as private as possible: Stay focused and keep the interviewee focused even in the case of minor distractions.
5. Avoid stereotyping: For the purpose of influencing the respondent, avoid preconceived notions and remain objective.
6. Be thoroughly familiar with the interview instrument: Use frequent eye contact and a constant flow of questions directed to the respondent.
7. Ask every question in its proper sequence and exactly as written: This will minimize changes in the wording of the question consequently affecting the response from the subject.
8. Do not assume the answer to any question: Respondent may answer differently than assumed.
9. Speak slowly and clearly, with a well-modulated tone: Speaking in this voice tone will improve the sound of communication with the respondent.
10. Do not answer for the respondent: Wait patiently for respondent to answer the question and complete her thoughts; if necessary, repeat the question.
11. Use an appropriate probe when necessary: Generate additional discussion by asking for more information if a response is ambiguous or inadequate.
12. Take notes during the interview: This provides an immediate record of each interview conducted. (pp. 115-117)

APPENDIX G

Observation Record

Interviewee (pseudonym): _____

Notable tone and content of interactions with staff or other persons in office:

Notable aspects of manner, dress, body language of interviewee:

Noticeable aspects of the company culture as indicated by office layout, style and frequency

of interactions, dress standards:

Notable aspects of demeanor and attitude toward interviewer:

APPENDIX H

Consent to Serve as a Human Research Subject

Title of Project: African American Women in Leadership; Overcoming the obstacles, rising

to the challenges

This form explains the nature of the research study and requests your written consent to

participate. The study involves research conducted by Lysa Liggins, doctoral student

presently under the supervision of Dr. Diana Hiatt-Michael in the Graduate school of

Education and Psychology at Pepperdine University. The overall purpose of this study is to

understand what strategies African American women in leadership use when confronted

with barriers and obstacles on your journey to leadership, the ultimate effect on your level

of resilience, and how these obstacles ultimately formed your leadership style.

The subsequent information is provided to assist you in deciding where you wish to allow

me to use the information gathered as a result of my conversation with you today as

information to formulate my dissertation research at Pepperdine University. Upon your

request, a copy of any published papers or professional presentations that take place as a

result of this interview will be granted.

My participation will involve the following:

A Face-to-face interview where I will answer 15 questions about my experiences as a Black

woman in leadership. I understand that if necessary, an over-the-phone interview can be

arranged in lieu of face-to-face. In this case, an electronic consent will be emailed and

signed electronically.

_____(Please initial) I understand that I have been selected to be a part of this study as a direct result of my role as an African American women in leadership within my organization.

_____(Please initial) I understand that my participation in this study will involve the completion of two tools: 1) A personal history questionnaire that will take approximately 10 minutes to complete and 2) A short answer interview that could take anywhere from 45 minutes to an hour to complete.

_____(Please initial) I understand that I can be referred to as only by a "code" number from a "generic organization." I understand my identity and name of my organization will be kept confidential at all times during the course of this study.

_____ (Please initial) I am aware that my participation is totally voluntary. I will not monetarily benefit from my participation in this study and I am free to withdraw my consent and discontinue my participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which I am otherwise entitled. Declining to participate will not affect my relationship with the researcher, or Pepperdine University.

_____(Please initial) I understand that I will be audio taped upon my decision to participate in this study. The tapes will be used for the purposes of research only. All recorded information will be stored in a locked file cabinet maintained by the researcher and will be shredded after five years.

_____(Please initial) I understand that the potential risks of emotions may occur. I will be asked prescribed questions pertaining to my adult life as well as questions concerning my thoughts, perceptions and attitude toward my experiences. This may cause irritation,

excitement, boredom, or fatigue to occur. In the event of such an experience, I will be granted a rest break.

_____(Please initial) I understand that should physical injury occur from the research procedures, medical treatment may be provided at my own expense or at the expense of my health care insurer, which may or may not provide coverage. If I have questions, I should contact my insurer.

I understand that the researcher is willing to answer any questions I may have concerning the study herein described. I understand that I may contact the chair of this research, Dr. Diana Hiatt-Michael at (310) 663-1518 or diana.michael@pepperdine.edu if I have other questions or concerns about this research. If there arises a concern regarding my rights as a participant, I can contact Kevin Collins, Manager of the Institutional Review Board at Pepperdine University at (310) 568-2305 or kevin.collins@pepperdine.edu.

I satisfactorily understand the information regarding participation in the research. I have received a copy of this informed consent form, and I have read and initialed the communication. 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 in which the subject has consented to participate. Having answered all questions and given a full explanation, I am cosigning this form and accepting consent from this participant.

_____   _____

Lysa Liggins, Principal Investigator   Date

APPENDIX I

Letters of Support from Institutions

Dear _____

      I hope this letter greets you in the best of health and spirits.

 Presently, I am a doctoral student at Pepperdine University, earning a Doctorate of Education in Organizational Leadership. I am in the process of completing my dissertation entitled *Perseverance to Power*, which underscores the common barriers confronted by African American women whilst on their progression to executive leadership. This matter is presently widespread, yet despite noted hardships and challenges, it is severely under investigated. Therefore, my objective is to unfold how strategically cultivating specific developmental techniques can aid African American women in successfully overcoming these barriers.

Ultimately, the goal of this research will be to:
1) Propose a blueprint for success to African American women who desire to work in executive leadership.
2) Design an effective sustainability plan for women presently working in executive leadership roles.
3) Offer a deliverable design matrix that will assist organizations with successfully offering support networks and opportunities of advancement for female leaders.

Within the dissertation process, there is a requisite to gather evidence from individuals, answer formulated research questions, and **obtain support from significant sources**. Therefore, I would like to humbly request a brief letter affirming your support with regards to my topic. Also, I would be honored if you would be willing to write a brief foreword for my final published work. *Please be advised, this letter of support would be from a personal perspective of support.*

Along with this letter I have provided a *template* of a support letter. Please feel free to make any amendments, additions or deletions OR create an original. I am available to answer any questions you may have pertaining to my study or in regards to this request for support. Please feel free to contact me by email at   or by phone at:

Thank you for your consideration to this request. I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Sincerely,
Lysa Liggins
Regional Learning Consultant, Kaiser Permanente
Doctoral Student, Pepperdine University

KAISER PERMANENTE®

Kaiser Foundation Hospitals
Kaiser Foundation Health Plan, Inc.

Bernard J. Tyson
Chairman and CEO

September 25, 2015

Dear Pepperdine Dissertation Committee:

This letter of recommendation is written in support of Ms. Lysa Liggins and the submission of her Doctoral Dissertation, *Perseverance of Power*.

Ms. Liggins is exploring a topic of great relevance in corporations, boardrooms and families today. It's focus on the promotion and progression of African American women and the obstacles found is more relevant today than ever.

I support this research and know that the findings and proposed solutions will help to further life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness for all and on level playing fields.

Sincerely,

Bernard J. Tyson
Chairman and Chief Executive Officer
Kaiser Permanente

One Kaiser Plaza
Oakland, CA 94612

National Association of Health Services Executives

SoCal Chapter

www.nahsesocal.org

June 17, 2015

Dear Pepperdine Dissertation Committee:

I, Thomas Harris, Jr., write on behalf of the Southern California Chapter of the National Association of Health Services Executives (NAHSE). It is my pleasure to offer a letter in support of Lysa Liggins-Moore and the submission of her Doctoral Dissertation entitled *Perseverance to Power.*

As a non-profit organization of Black health care executives founded in 1968 for the purpose of promoting the progression of Black health care leaders, NAHSE strives to improve economic opportunities, educational advancement, and nurture the professional development of African American leaders.

Therefore, because our mission is aligned with the subject matter of this study as it relates to the growth and empowerment of African American executives, as an organization, it is our pleasure to fully support the focus of this research.

Sincerely,

Thomas Harris, Jr., MHA, FACHE
President
NAHSE SoCal
nahsesocal@gmail.com I www.nahsesocal.org
Like us! https://www.facebook.com/NAHSESoCal
Link with us! https://www.linkedin.com/grp/home?gid=6947243

APPENDIX J

Template of Response Letter Provided to Organizations

Add letterhead

Date ****, 2015

Dear Pepperdine Dissertation Committee:

I write on behalf of *****************. It is my pleasure to offer a letter in support of Lysa Liggins and the submission of her Doctoral Dissertation entitled *Perseverance to Power.*

As a ************* working with health care executives ********** for the purpose of promoting the progression of health care leaders, economic opportunities, educational advancement, and nurture the professional development of African American leaders.

Therefore, because ******* is aligned with the subject matter of this study as it relates to the growth and empowerment ******, it is my pleasure to fully support the focus of this research.

Sincerely,

******

APPENDIX K

IRB Approval Letter

PEPPERDINE

Pepperdine University
24255 Pacific Coast Highway
Malibu, CA 90263
TEL: 310-506-4000

NOTICE OF APPROVAL FOR HUMAN RESEARCH

Date: December 18, 2015

Protocol Investigator Name: Lysa Liggins-Moore

Protocol #: 15-10-079

Project Title: A Phenomenological Study of African American Women Executives: Perceptions, Challenges and Required Capabilities to become a Leader

School: Graduate School of Education and Psychology

Dear Lysa Liggins-Moore:

Thank you for submitting your application for exempt review to Pepperdine University's Institutional Review Board (IRB). We appreciate the work you have done on your proposal. The IRB has reviewed your submitted IRB application and all ancillary materials. Upon review, the IRB has determined that the above entitled project meets the requirements for exemption under the federal regulations 45 CFR 46.101 that govern the protections of human subjects.

Your research must be conducted according to the proposal that was submitted to the IRB. If changes to the approved protocol occur, a revised protocol must be reviewed and approved by the IRB before implementation. For any proposed changes in your research protocol, please submit an amendment to the IRB. Since your study falls under exemption, there is no requirement for continuing IRB review of your project. Please be aware that changes to your protocol may prevent the research from qualifying for exemption from 45 CFR 46.101 and require submission of a new IRB application or other materials to the IRB.

A goal of the IRB is to prevent negative occurrences during any research study. However, despite the best intent, unforeseen circumstances or events may arise during the research. If an unexpected situation or adverse event happens during your investigation, please notify the IRB as soon as possible. We will ask for a complete written explanation of the event and your written response. Other actions also may be required depending on the nature of the event. Details regarding the timeframe in which adverse events must be reported to the IRB and documenting the adverse event can be found in the *Pepperdine University Protection of Human Participants in Research: Policies and Procedures Manual* at community.pepperdine.edu/irb.

Please refer to the protocol number denoted above in all communication or correspondence related to your application and this approval. Should you have additional questions or require clarification of the contents of this letter, please contact the IRB Office. On behalf of the IRB, I wish you success in this scholarly pursuit.

Sincerely,

Judy Ho, Ph.D., IRB Chairperson

cc: Dr. Lee Kats, Vice Provost for Research and Strategic Initiatives