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Motivated and Determined & Making a Difference as Executives (MAD & MADE) in the Entertainment Industry: A Phenomenological Study of Black Female Entertainment Industry Executives' Challenges and Paths to Elevation

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MOTIVATED AND DETERMINED & MAKING A DIFFERENCE AS EXECUTIVES (MAD

& MADE) IN THE ENTERTAINMENT INDUSTRY: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY

OF BLACK FEMALE ENTERTAINMENT INDUSTRY EXECUTIVES' CHALLENGES

AND PATHS TO ELEVATION

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction

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Doctor of Education in Organizational Leadership

by

Angela M. Killens

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Gabriella Miramontes, Ed.D. – Dissertation Chairperson

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DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

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DEDICATION

The submission and completion of this dissertation is dedicated to the Black women who are executives in entertainment corporations and participated in this research. You are incredible, and the way you navigate challenges to elevate and maintain your very important positions in your respective companies proves that a Black woman's resilience and fight is unparalleled!

This is also dedicated in the memory of my loving father, Eugene Maye, who passed unexpectedly in 2015. My Daddy was/is so important to me. I have characteristics and traits that trace directly back to him. He was serious about his business, he stuck to whatever he committed to, he was smart, he was intelligent, he did not back away from a challenge, and he stood firm on his convictions. Even as the provider of our home, he made time to come to the most important events in my school career. He pushed excellence in education, and I know he was proud of me and all of my accomplishments. He never missed an opportunity to tell me.

Daddy blessed me with an undergraduate education and his footing the bill allowed me to focus on school, which was very important to him. He beamed at every graduation from (likely) preschool to when I received my Master's degree. You couldn't tell him that I wasn't one of the smartest people on the planet! He knew how to push and encourage. My first Saturday class in this program was on the fourth anniversary of his passing. As tough as it was, I knew he would have not wanted me to spend that day any other way, because I was headed to something greater. I heard his voice when I wanted to give up and I felt his love when things were difficult.

I know Daddy would be proud of me and the idea of his baby girl getting a doctorate would have him tickled pink! As such, Daddy, I honor you as I complete my doctoral studies and this dissertation. I feel your pride and love. Thank you for walking with me through this journey. Love you forever. Your baby girl, Dr. Angela M. Killens #missingEugeneSOmuch

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When I decided to return to school in January 2019 to pursue this doctorate, a part of me thought, *This is crazy! You haven't been in school in 12 years.* However, this was something that I had been juggling around in my mind, on and off, for the same period of time. The road that led me here is lined with people, some of whom knew they were a part of my journey and others who had no clue. The lingering thought of returning to school returned in about 2017, when several women posted on social media that they had completed their doctoral journeys. You could say that they were the "match" that was struck against the matchbook of my mind to get the flame started. Dr. Jessica Boro, Dr. Valinda Bowens, Dr. Martinique Starnes, and Dr. Tephanie Scroggins let me know that this journey was possible. By the end of 2017, my former fifth grade student, now Dr. Nicole Jones, helped to fan the flame. In her first year in the EDOL program at Pepperdine, she convinced me to really consider it. By the end of 2018, I was completing the application process to return to the place where I'd received my Master's degree some 12 years prior.

Though those women were an important part of me making the final decision to pursue a doctorate, my journey to a doctorate started well before grade school. I was raised by parents who believed that education was a priority in life. My mother, Bettye Maye, was an educator in her own right, serving as an education aide at my elementary school from the time I was a Kindergartener until I was in high school. Sometime later, she worked at Urban League Head Start State Preschool. But she was always a teacher to my sisters and me. My mother read to us as children, teaching nursery rhymes and taking us as far as she could before starting grade school. Then she read with us when we were older. In our home, I developed a love for learning and school.

As if it wasn't enough to have a mother who was an educator, my sisters, Rosalind and Gina, took over where Mama left off, declaring vividly in my memory, "We're gonna make you smart." Being the youngest definitely had its privileges. My sisters drilled addition and multiplication facts in my head, played school with me, and had me writing in cursive before I got to third grade. I guess, they were educators, in their own right, as well. These women helped to pave my way to this point in my life. My village…

Just a microcosm of the universe-sized village I really have, I have so many who pushed me, checked on me, and encouraged me through it all. I chose not to share this part of my life with a lot of people, but the ones who knew, had my back. They are a part of various sects in my life, and are grouped this way, so they know who they are: my Dissertation Committee: Dr. Miramontes (your feedback and encouragement lifted me up), Dr. Madjidi, Dr. Brahme, and Dr. Wong; my family; the 2Ps (FF and LT), and personal friends from various walks (Howard U, WPHS, LAUSD, Pepperdine U, and my AKA Sorors. I must call out Marissa Borden, my principal, who helped and supported me in ways that I cannot even begin to list here.

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ABSTRACT

Since the birth of the United States and the enslavement of Africans in America, Black women have had to navigate challenges in various industries to elevate toward, and excel in, positions of power. From grade school to the workplace, Black women have had to contend with racism, discrimination, and inequities that have been impediments despite their level of education and experience. With little literature specifically documenting the experiences of Black women who work on the corporate side of the entertainment industry, the data acquired from this qualitative phenomenological study provides insight into these women's lives. The study discloses some of the challenges that Black women entertainment industry executives encounter as they elevate up the corporate ladder to executive levels and beyond. The participants described their lived experiences, revealing how they moved beyond barriers, despite the societal stereotypes and perceptions of them as Black women. These professional women provided examples of challenges, strategies to overcome challenges, and recommendations for not only sustaining a long-term career in the industry, but also how executive hopefuls can mitigate the obstacles that the participants have highlighted.

Keywords: Black, women, bias, discrimination, entertainment, corporate, executives, challenges, sponsorships, phenomenological study

Chapter 1: Introduction

Background/Historical Context

Title VII of the Civil Rights Act in 1964 (U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, n.d.) deems that no one should be discriminated against when being hired for employment. Nevertheless, there is considerable literature describing the amount of scrutiny and inequitable treatment that Black women face in the workplace (Constantine et al., 2008; Dickens et al., 2019; Hall et al., 2012; Pizarro & Kohli, 2020; Quaye et al., 2020). This treatment equates to challenges and barriers that include discrimination practices in the form of microaggressions (Sue et al., 2008, 2019), invisibility (Lewis et al., 2016), gendered racism (Spates et al., 2020), coming in contact with the *glass ceiling* (Bloch et al., 2021), and stereotypes (Hawkins, 2017; Lewis et al., 2016). The aforementioned challenges are just a few examples of the numerous obstacles that Black women encounter as they rise through the ranks of the corporate ladder, with hopes of occupying executive level positions, specifically in the entertainment industry. As such, Black women have had to find strategies to cope with, and navigate, these barriers (Hall et al., 2012; Kilgore et al., 2020; Okello et al., 2020; Quaye et al., 2020; Spates et al., 2020). These barriers manifest in different forms and can be both blatant and subtle.

Since the abolishment of slavery in America in 1863, efforts have been made to pursue equity and equality for Black people. Over time, the notion of a quality education was thought to be the key to equality (Griffen, 2019). However, despite the number of Black women who have earned degrees, there is a grave disparity and disproportionality in the number of degree-earners and those who hold executive level positions. When compared to White men and women, there is an underrepresentation of Black women in executive level positions. The *2018 Board Diversity Census of Women and Minorities on Fortune 500 Boards* showed that 19.5% of the

people who held board seats at the time were minorities and identified that 11.1% were African American/Black (Deloitte & Alliance for Board Diversity, 2018). In their 2021 *Women in the Workplace Report*, McKinsey & Company and LeanIn.Org (2021) provided data regarding the positioning of Black women in the corporate pipeline, which Table 1 depicts. At the Vice President (VP) level, women of color accounted for 7%, which means Black women were represented at a lower rate than White women, who accounted for 24%. The 7% represents a 1% increase from 2020 (McKinsey & Company & LeanIn.Org, 2020). Furthermore, the *2020 Women in the Workplace Report* indicates that women of color represented 5% at the Senior Vice President (SVP) level, compared to 23% of White women. The C-Suite (Chief Executive Officer-CEO, Chief Operations Officer-COO, Chief Financial Officer-CFO, or Chief Technology Officer-CTO) positions had 4% of women of color, compared to 20% of White women.

Table 1

Representation in the Corporate Pipeline By Gender and Race

	Entry Level	Manager	Sr. Manager/Director	Vice President	Senior Vice President	C-Suite
White men	35%	42%	50%	56%	61%	62%
Men of color	17%	17%	15%	13%	12%	13%
White Women	30%	28%	27%	24%	23%	20%
Women of color	17%	12%	9%	7%	5%	4%

The U.S. Census Bureau (2019) reported that, in 2019, 14.8% of Black women over 25 had a bachelor's degree and 10.1% had a graduate or professional degree. In comparison, 21.4% of White women had a Bachelor's degree and 13.5% had a graduate or professional degree. These data illustrate that there is a significant absence of Black women in leadership positions at major corporations.

To further highlight the disparity in the appointment of Black women in leadership positions in corporations, many Black families highlight the importance of school and make a correlation between doing well in school and ultimately obtaining gainful employment (Ispa et al., 2020). Considering that Black families have conversations that promote obtaining a quality education and being a stand-out for professional promotion opportunities, the reality is that, oftentimes, Black women are overlooked, even with a great deal of education, experience, and preparedness (Hall et al., 2012). This paradox is difficult for Black women to reconcile. Black women indicate that they believe their race is the main factor that prevents them from accessing higher levels of promotion (Huang et al., 2019).

The literature can be used to support the existence of a correlation between the current treatment of Black women in the workplace and the historical and disparaging treatment of Blacks in America during, and since, slavery. Hinson (2018) noted the efforts made to prevent both free and enslaved African Americans from being able to purchase land during slavery and both during and after Reconstruction. Hinson further stated that such tactics as preventing Black landowners from acquiring land titles, selling them less than desirable land, and keeping them in debt were just some of the ways that were used to keep Blacks at bay and out of competition with White people. Still, today, Black women face barriers—including stereotypes, gendered racism, racial microaggressions, implicit biases, and intersectionality—that make it difficult for them to advance to executive levels in corporations (Carr et al., 2014; Mariolle, 2019; Okello et al., 2020; Simms, 2001; Sue, 2010). The barriers speak to the systemic ingraining of racism and practices in the United States that still impede progress for Black people as a whole (Okello et al., 2020; Sue et al., 2019). Dovidio and Gaertner (1999, 2000) asserted that being born in America makes it almost impossible to not harbor some racial biases. Accordingly, Sue (2010)

asserted that White people who may be considered well-educated and liberal can still present as aversive racists. *Aversive racists* believe that they are not prejudiced, ascribe to egalitarian views, and would not consciously be racists, although they hold unconscious biases that may result in discriminatory actions (Dovidio & Gaertner, 1999, 2000).

Black women are not less qualified than White men, White women, and Black men when it comes to promotional opportunities, but Black women receive fewer opportunities for promotion (Huang et al., 2019). In their 2019 report on women in the workplace, Huang et al. stated that this is why, for every 100 White men promoted to management, only 58 Black women were promoted. One's education and experience is considered, and when a Black woman is considered for an executive level position, along with a White man, a White woman, and a Black man, it is most probable that the Black woman would not get the opportunity for promotion. The opportunities for Black women to move up to higher rungs of the corporate ladder get slimmer the higher up the corporate hierarchy the position is. McKinsey & Company and LeanIn.Org's (2020) *Women in the Workplace* report exhibits the disparity between Black women in executive positions compared to White men, men of color, White women, and women of color. In Vice President positions at the beginning of 2020, White men accounted for 57% of those positions in the study. Women of color represented 6%. If the total number of women of color is only 6%, and Black women, along with Latino, Asian, Pacific Islander, and Native Americans comprise women of color, then Black women in those positions would equal less than six percent.

The difficulty for Black women to be considered for executive level positions is increasing, yet there is still a long way to go (Huang et al., 2019). Various efforts have been made to increase the likelihood of Black women having the chance to be hired in executive level positions (DuBois, 2016; S. K. Johnson et al., 2016; Martin, 2013). One suggestion is using

practices similar to affirmative action in hopes of affording more people of color the greater

likelihood of being selected for executive positions (DuBois, 2016; S. K. Johnson et al., 2016).

Affirmative action was a mandate developed as a part of the Civil Rights Act of 1961 and was

expanded in 1964 through Executive Order 11246 to open up government contractor and

subcontractor access to minorities (Leonard, 1984). The Civil Rights Act of 1964 established the

Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) and provided the origin for litigation

under Title VII (Leonard, 1984). Affirmative action has been a highly contested and

controversial practice (Button et al., 2006) by many conservatives and Republicans like then-

Senator Orrin Hatch, who felt the EEOC was guilty of "the diminution of competition,

inefficiencies due to the employment and promotion of marginal labor and the consequent

demoralization of good workers" (Leonard, 1984, p. 145) by implementing affirmative action.

Civil rights laws have been created for decades to try to place Black people and women

on equal footing with their White male counterparts (Spiggle, 2019). The Equal Pay Act (1963)

was created to make it illegal to pay women less than men solely based on sex. In 1964, the Civil

Rights Act of 1964, or Title VII, was passed to prevent discrimination based on sex, race,

religion, or national origin in the workplace. Title VII litigation was found to make a difference

in the hiring practices applied to Black people from 1964-1981 (Leonard, 1984). The Patient

Protection and Affordable Care Act of 2010 allows for covered time and a private space for

women to express breast milk in the workplace (Spiggle, 2019). These laws are examples of

provisions made for Black people and women, over time, in order for them to begin receiving the

same benefits as White men and receive accommodations related to their gender-based needs.

Another law that was put in place to afford women and minorities opportunities that they

might not otherwise receive was affirmative action. As previously mentioned, affirmative action

was commonly known as *reverse discrimination* because its intent was to make allowances for citizens who were not White men (Button et al., 2006). Despite the benefits that citizens who were not White men received, there were both proponents and opponents of the law (Little et al., 1998). Jacobson (1985) indicated that the arguments made against affirmative action were a new form of racism, noting that the strides that emerged from the Civil Rights Era, 20 or more years earlier, that Black people made for equality caused them to make and win too many demands from the government. One such example was the highly-publicized case regarding affirmative action between Allan Bakke, a White man, who sued the Regents of University of California, Davis (Cornell Law School, n.d.). In this Supreme Court case, Bakke alleged that UC Davis allowed 16 fewer qualified applicants to be accepted to its medical school before Bakke. The Supreme Court upheld the ruling of the lower court in favor of affirmative action. Still another case that surfaced prior to the Bakke case, but that the Supreme Court denied hearing, involved AT&T. As a result, AT&T's affirmative action program was upheld, denying the reverse discrimination allegation and did not violate White seniority rights (Jacobson, 1985).

With the ongoing battle for equality and equitable rights for people in America who were not White men, South Carolina's Republican Senator Tim Scott sought to adapt a 2003 practice of the National Football League (NFL) to extend opportunities for employment and vendor contracting to minorities and women (DuBois, 2016). In 2014, Scott introduced Senate Resolution 511, which encouraged companies to enlist best practices in order to pinpoint minority candidates and vendors. This resolution emulated the NFL's Rooney Rule, which encourages teams to voluntarily create best practices for ensuring that at least one minority candidate is interviewed for head coaching positions. In order to do this, a plan should be implemented that will result in interviewing at least two qualified candidates who are considered

minority for managerial openings from director level and above. In addition, a minimum of two qualified minority businesses should be interviewed prior to approving a vendor contract.

Using a strategy that adapted the NFL's Rooney Rule was considered to be a viable option for companies that sought to increase diversity in executive level positions (DuBois, 2016). To support this theory, S. K. Johnson et al. (2016) encourage the idea of ensuring there are more women in the pool of candidates when looking to appoint them to Chief Executive Officer (CEO) positions. From a statistical perspective, there is a very small likelihood that a woman will be selected if there is only one in the pool, as based on DuBois's (2016) study. Implementing a practice that adapts the Rooney Rule affects the composition of the hiring pool with qualified Black women. DuBois noted that this rule does not change the hiring criteria, so adapting the rule in the corporate setting does not ensure that Black women would rise to higher levels of the corporate hierarchy. To move away from what is comfortable and what has become the status quo, more women need to be sought out in order to increase diversity in such positions (Huang et al., 2019).

Hayes (2008) conducted a study in response to limited empirical evidence related to Black women in a corporate setting. She sought to look not only at their experiences in the corporate setting, but also how the women developed psychological strategies to process their experiences. More specifically she wanted to determine how the 16 women in the study who worked in Fortune 1000 companies perceived their experience despite barriers they faced and how they made meaning of their experiences. Hayes determined that some of the women viewed themselves as having authority over their fates while still relying on other people to make sense of themselves.

Additionally, Dickens and Chavez's (2018) study revealed that Black women had to act like they were someone they were not in order to be successful. In their study, they described the idea of *identity shifting*, which denotes Black women altering their speech and other aspects of themselves in order to assimilate into the norms of the predominant group in a setting. The women were also very concerned about maintaining their conception of self as they navigated up the corporate ladder. Furthermore, the women felt it was important to add value to their respective companies (Hayes, 2008) in order to go beyond the *glass ceiling*, which is an artificial barrier that impedes upward mobility to executive levels for women of color (Bloch et al., 2021). The women also felt it was important to compromise and negotiate their identities. Hayes's (2008) study and its results correlated with common themes in more current literature, like that of Dickens and Chavez's (2018) study.

Entertainment Industry

For years, not only has the television and film industry been run and managed by male norms, but it has also been difficult for women of all races and ethnicities to break through the barriers that the entertainment industry presents to women behind the camera (Wallenberg & Jannsen, 2021). The entertainment industry comprises film, print, radio, and television (Firsthand, n.d.). It includes a conglomerate of segments, such as TV and radio shows, movies, news, music, newspapers, magazines, and books. Literature that discusses women and disparate treatment in the entertainment industry is often limited to those on the creative side, including actresses, directors, and producers and the lack of opportunities presented to them (Alonzo, 2003; Lauzen, 2020; Wallenberg & Jansson, 2021).

Lauzen (2020) provided data regarding behind-the-scene women in television and film. The data showed women representing 20% of the total directors, writers, producers, executive

producers, and cinematographers who worked in the 100 top-grossing films in 2019. This data reflects a 16% increase from 2018. It is also noted that 13% of all directors who worked in the top 250 films of 2019 represented a five percent increase from eight percent in 2018. Nevertheless, Lauzen failed to mention the total or percentage of representation of women in executive to C-Suite positions on the corporate side of entertainment industry companies. The next chapter will discuss the information regarding Black women who work and have worked on the corporate side of entertainment industry companies. This will include their challenges and contributions to the entertainment industry.

Barriers

Black women must navigate many barriers as they seek out executive level positions. Navigating these barriers requires Black women to find coping methods so they can maintain some semblance of sanity, because there are often mental, physical, and psychological implications related to the barriers (Carr et al., 2014; Hall et al., 2012; Kilgore et al., 2020). Some of the coping strategies include seeking out spirituality (Christo-Baker et al., 2012; Hall et al., 2012), writing (Kilgore et al., 2020), and self-care (Hall et al., 2012). These strategies are integral in being able to maintain a level of confidence and optimism and maintain psychological and emotional stability in an otherwise difficult environment (Carr et al., 2014; Hall et al., 2012; Spates et al., 2020).

Systemic racism, discrimination, bias, microaggressions, and stereotypes affect Black women's opportunities to get to executive levels and their psychological well-being (Carr et al., 2014; Hall et al., 2012; Hawkins, 2017; Spates et al., 2020; Thomas et al., 2008). These barriers leave Black people feeling that achieving executive levels in corporate settings is virtually impossible (Coqual, 2020). Coqual's (2020) study examining Blacks in corporate America found

that approximately one in five Black people felt that it was not likely for them or someone of their race to attain a top position in their company. As such, not being able to reach top positions in their company resulted in 33% of Black men and 36% of Black women interviewed in Coqual's study indicating that they were considering leaving their company in 2 years if they did not reach the level they desired. Therefore, resorting to leaving their company is an indication that some Black people feel that opportunities that they are prepared for, but to which they do not have access, elude them. It makes sense that 16% of Black women in the study had aspirations and plans of starting their own ventures. Regardless of the barriers that Black women encounter, some seek to find solutions or create their own opportunities in the face of challenges.

Stereotypes

Since slavery, Black women have been subject to the same recurring stereotypes for hundreds of years (Simms, 2001) that result in biases toward Black women (Mariolle, 2019). These biases create a perception based on gendered racism that makes it difficult for Black women to ascend to the higher rungs of the corporate ladder. Stereotypes are a common form of discrimination. According to Hall et al. (2012), Black women feel like stereotypes affect their chances of being hired or promoted and how they are treated in the workplace.

Various stereotypes have been attached to Black women. Some of the stereotypes include *Angry Black Woman Syndrome* (ABWS; Kilgore et al., 2020; Knoxville & Neville, 2015; Lewis et al., 2016; McPherson, 2018)*, Jezebel* (Mariolle, 2019)*,* and the *Mammy* tropes (Wisseh, 2019). Black women are also stereotyped as being oversexualized, rude and lazy, and intellectually inferior (Woods et al., 2009). These stereotypes make it difficult for Black women to escape negative ideas about them wherever they are in society.

From school to work to entertainment, stereotypes have plagued Black women and have been the culprit of grave misunderstandings and misconceptions about who they truly are in society (Lawson, 2017). In Lawson's (2017) study looking at ABWS, one participant discussed how difficult it was for her to separate herself from misconceptions about Black women because of outside influences and preconceived notions that people who may be responsible for hiring her already have. The media also depicts Black women through reality television and situation comedies (sitcoms), further perpetuating these mindsets into society's image of Black women. Most of the participants in Lawson's study blamed the media for the perpetuation of the ABWS in the workplace for Black women. Furthermore, these perceptions are difficult to separate from, even with intention and deliberate efforts to do so, and make it hard for Black women to be confident in who they truly are (Dickens & Chavez, 2018).

Lack of Mentorships

One of the strategies that seems to evade Black women most as they try to break through the barriers that hinder them most from reaching higher levels of the corporate hierarchy is difficulty finding mentors or being a part of a mentoring program (Candia-Bailey, 2016; Erskine et al., 2021; Hall et al., 2012; Hawkins, 2017; Hite, 2004; Kingsberry, 2015; Lawson, 2017; Wells, 2017). In her study regarding the barriers that Black women face in the workplace, Wells (2017) found that all of the women she interviewed desired a mentor and deemed it important. Furthermore, the women said that mentorships were the key to them having opportunities they may not otherwise have or to which they may not be exposed.

Likewise, Lawson's (2017) study that examined ABWS and its effect on Black women leaders in corporate America had results similar to Wells's (2017) research. Not only did women feel like not having mentorships impeded their efforts to promote, but they also deemed it

imperative to become mentors to Black women who were coming up behind them. The women felt like mentorships were important because they experienced a double standard between them and their White counterparts. These double standards are based on biases with positive perceptions and leanings toward White women.

Microaggressions

Various stereotypes that Black women encounter that are related to overt racism and sexism make way for more subtle forms of racism and sexism. These interactions involving subtle comments that may be interpreted as insults made to people of color, and are often communicated verbally and nonverbally by well-intentioned White people, are known as *microaggressions* (Kilgore et al., 2020; Sue et al., 2019). Microaggressions may manifest as racially-motivated or gender-related (Sue, 2010). Either way, microaggressions influence the mental health of Black women, including adding stress, anxiety, and an upset stomach (Chancellor, 2019; Kilgore et al., 2020). Most qualitative research finds that people of color experience invisibility, feeling treated as second-class citizens, and cultural assumptions of who they are and how they communicate (Sue et al., 2008).

Because of the subtle nature of biases and discrimination, biases and discrimination are often missed and not challenged by the recipient (Sue et al., 2019). As a result, the offender holds the misconception or belief that the act or comment is harmless and has no significance. According to Sue (2010), race experts believe that present-day racism is more discreet and subtle than it has been historically and resonates below the awareness of consciousness. The subtle nature of microaggressions, even by people who are considered liberal and well-meaning in regard to race, make it that much more difficult to contend with in the work environment.

Intersectionality

Historical perceptions of Black women, which are often negative, influence their ability to be seen as qualified for executive level positions, causing worry, stress, and other mental health issues in the workplace (Adkins-Jackson & Levine, 2020; Carr et al., 2014; Myers, 2002). Viewing the centuries-old social construct hierarchy in America, Buchanan (2005) identified White men as the group that has most often benefited from the privilege of race and gender, placing Black women at the bottom. As Black women deal with these barriers (including sexism and racism) and strive for upward mobility in the corporate setting, they have to figure out how best to deal with them (J. E. Everett et al., 2010; Holder et al., 2015; Linnabery et al., 2014). Exploring race and gender in isolation overlooks the details of how their intersectionality affects Black women in the workplace (Carr et al., 2014). The uniqueness of Black women calls for a more defined and comprehensive focus on them to be viewed through the perspective of their gender and their race (Button et al., 2006; Carr et al., 2014). Oftentimes, Black women are compared to White women or Black and White men. However, because they fit into two groups that are systematically discriminated against (i.e., being both female and Black), the intersectionality of racism and sexism must be explored and acknowledged (Hawkins, 2017; Knoxville & Neville, 2015). Some Black women have found ways to promote to executive levels; however, based on previously mentioned data, most of them face *double jeopardy* being a part of both so-called minority groups (Jean-Marie et al., 2009).

Gendered Racism

The theory of *gendered racism* was created by Essed (1991) as she looked at racism that occurred in the lives of Black women every day. Gendered racism derived from the theory of intersectionality (Carr et al., 2014). Various researchers have emphasized the importance of

viewing the intersectionality of oppressive experiences based on multiple oppressions and their impact on mental health (Cole, 2009; Hatzenbuehler, 2009). Carr et al. (2014) posited that it would be beneficial to engage in a concurrent exploration of racist events, sexual objectification, and gendered racism.

As mentioned earlier, racial discrimination and simultaneous sexism experienced by Black women is difficult to deal with, causing a lot of stress and challenges to psychological health over time. This is because the discrimination manifests itself in various forms of oppression, becomes tiring, and influences the psychological and physical health of Black people.

As an extension of the theory of gendered racism is *gender role congruity* theory. A part of the difficulty with Black women rising to executive levels is the inaccurate understanding that women are able to only perform certain roles, or that certain roles are considered best suited for them, because they are women (Eagly & Karau, 2002; Koenig et al., 2011). Examples of traditional roles women are stereotypically believed to perform better in include teachers, nurses, and clerical positions. Gender role congruity theory asserts that there is an association, or norm, related to gender and certain roles (in this case, leadership), and performing a role outside of the congruity of one's gender causes a rift in one's ability to perform in that role optimally (Eagly & Karau, 2002; Garcia-Retamero & López-Zafra, 2006; Koenig et al., 2011).

Garcia-Retamero and López-Zafra (2006) conducted research hypothesizing that there would be prejudice toward a woman in a leadership position by participants, if she was not in a position that was congruent with her role. In their research, the hypothesis was confirmed. A part of Black women's difficulty reaching executive level positions is that, based on role congruity, there is a prejudice that they are unable to fulfill those leadership roles and requirements as well

as men would. This theory helps explain why Black women are not typically promoted to these levels.

Racial Battle Fatigue

Racial battle fatigue is caused by discrimination that is a result of microaggressions (Arnold et al., 2016; Chancellor, 2019; Quaye et al., 2020). Black women's continual exposure to microaggressions over time results in residual effects, which manifests as racial battle fatigue (Chancellor, 2019). These microaggressions affect people in various ways, including physically, emotionally, and mentally. Chancellor (2019) recalled scenarios she witnessed in her graduate studies where microaggressions were used toward some Black members of her cohort. The first instance involved a senior professor chastising a student of color, stating that the student needed to be leashed. The other situations included questions being asked about her weight, physical appearance, and shoe size. Having to constantly defend and explain who they are and hear comments that are subtly insulting is overwhelming for Black women. These examples provide a frame of reference as to how microaggressions can have various impacts on the body.

Stereotype Threat

One theory that is beginning to resonate in the corporate world is *stereotype threat theory* (Roberson & Kulik, 2007). Stereotype threat theory was originally derived in academia, referring to the notion that Black college students' perception of stereotypes connected to them had a negative impact on their psyche and ultimately their performance in educational settings (Steele & Aronson, 1995). Bergeron et al. (2006) defined stereotype threat as the threat of being at risk of establishing as truth to oneself a negative stereotype about one's group or affiliation (in the case of this study, being Black and a woman). Based on that definition, it is plausible that this

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theory may be applied to the disparity in the data that calls out Black women's ability to break through the glass ceiling and rise to executive levels in the corporate setting.

Recently, stereotype threat has transcended settings and been applied to Black women in work and professional environments (Bergeron et al., 2006; Chung et al., 2010). Research has identified stereotype threat's impact on women's behavior in the workplace. Stereotype threat has been deemed one of the barriers that impede women from rising to higher levels of leadership in organizations. As a result, Bornstein (2016) has explored antidiscrimination cases. In higher courts, it seems difficult to prove discrimination in these cases, unless they are viewed through the lens of stereotype threat theory. Exploring stereotype threat theory is important for women, and more specifically Black women, who feel the plight of their intersectionality and the discrimination they face while being Black and women. They are prevented from experiencing opportunities granted to their White male and female counterparts and other counterparts who are people of color, simply because they happen to be Black women.

Statement of the Problem

Historically, C-suite positions have been elusive to women. Only in the summer of 1999 did Carleton Fiorina become the first woman to become Chief Executive Officer of Hewlett-Packard, a Fortune 500 company (Cotter et al., 2001). It was not until a decade later, in 2009, when Ursula Burns, a Black woman, reached the Chief Executive level in another Fortune 500 company (Cornileus, 2013; S. B. Smith, 2021). Prior to that point, no other Black woman had been bestowed that distinction. In promoting Burns, Xerox Company did something historical and record-breaking. As of this writing, she was the only Black woman to be at the helm of a Fortune 500 company; she subsequently stepped down in 2015. On March 15, 2021, 6 long years later, another Black woman, Rosalind Brewer, became CEO of Walgreens (S. B. Smith, 2021).

The third Black woman to become a CEO in a Fortune 500 company was Thasunda Brown Duckett, who started as CEO of Teachers Insurance and Annuity Association of America (TIAA) in May 2021. Although she is the third Black woman CEO of a Fortune 500 company, Duckett's placement is another historical and record-breaking achievement in its own right, as she succeeded Roger Ferguson, Jr., who is also Black.

The fact that less than five Black women have attained CEO status at a Fortune 500 company is no coincidence. The current literature surrounding the difficulties that Black women face when moving up the corporate ladder makes a clear case to explain the small number of Black women in Chief Executive positions (Erskine et al., 2021; Hall et al., 2012; Hawkins, 2017; Thomas et al., 2008). In addition, the literature also explains the difficulty that Black women encounter when trying to elevate to all executive level positions in companies.

Black women contend with a multitude of barriers as they move up the hierarchy of the corporate structure (Bloch et al., 2021; Carr et al., 2014; Erskine et al., 2021; Thomas et al., 2008; Wells, 2017). These impediments reinforce the need to provide them with support and create systems in the corporate structure in order for them to be able to navigate the obstacles they face (Erskine et al., 2021; Hall et al., 2012; Hite, 2004). Although the support may not alleviate all the barriers that Black women face, they may initiate the systemic changes that need to take place on a macro level. This paper will explore the barriers that Black women have to navigate in order to rise to executive levels and beyond. This study focused on women in the entertainment industry, because the literature about the barriers that women face in the entertainment industry is virtually nonexistent.

Although Black communities traditionally hold the mentality that education is the key to success and the proverbial idea that hard work pays off, as mentioned previously, Black women

have yet to see these notions and ideologies manifest themselves in a more equitable way. Much of the data that circulates in various studies supports the reality that, for many Black women, no matter how hard they try, they cannot get ahead (Alliance for Board Diversity, 2021). What those who are on the opposite end of the spectrum of opportunities may perceive as Black women's paranoia reflects data-based reality for Black women. Unfortunately, few Black women have been able to break the code needed to rise to executive levels.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological research was to determine the most viable options and strategies for Black women to navigate the challenges they face when trying to climb the corporate ladder in the entertainment industry. With so many barriers encountered, the various years of experience and strategies may prove to be useful applications for Black women who deal with the similar obstacles. The results of this study should not be considered a formula that offers a one-size-fits-all solution to a perpetual problem. Because there are so many factors that determine what barriers Black women will face, each woman's unique experience, though similar to others' experiences, has different entry points, levels of intensity, and impact on physical and physiological well-being.

This study is also a way to add to the discussion about and strategies to support Black women navigating the obstacles they face to reach executive levels. The underrepresentation of Black women in executive levels may be addressed with the findings of this study, because ample Black women have the education and qualification to achieve promotion (Wells, 2017). Therefore, it is important to highlight the basis of why Black women face the barriers they do in the corporate environment. Thus, identifying society's perception of who Black women are socially and professionally is critical information, and necessary.

This research may also serve as an impetus to highlight the future of corporations looking to diversify executive position placement. Including Black women as a part of changing the narrative for them in their professional journey and aspirations are necessary steps. Strategies and suggestions from the women involved in the research should serve a primary resource when corporations are looking at how they improve their organizational practices and culture to better reflect the proportionality of the population at large. With so many Black women who receive undergraduate, graduate, and doctoral degrees, programs and policies should be established to be more inclusive of Black women who are qualified to fill positions of Vice President (VP), Senior Vice President (SVP), and any C-suite positions.

Research Questions

The following research questions (RQs) were addressed in this study.

- RQ1: What challenges are faced by Black women executives on the path to reach executive levels in the entertainment industry?

- RQ2: What strategies and best practices are employed by Black women executives to overcome the challenges faced on their path to reach executive levels in the entertainment industry?

- RQ3: How do Black women executives in the entertainment industry identify, measure, and track success?

- RQ4: What recommendations would Black women executives in the entertainment industry have for entry-level Black women who desire to reach executive levels in the entertainment industry?

Significance of the Study

This study is significant to several groups and entities, including:

- Black women who are in college and aspire to work in executive level positions in the entertainment industry.

- Black women who currently work in the entertainment industry and aspire to reach the executive level.

- Black women who currently work in the entertainment industry and hold executive level positions.

- Entertainment industry executives, human resource division workers, and policy and decision-makers. This study will help to bring about an awareness of the challenges faced by Black women who work in these companies.

- Political and social activists who seek to make the greater society more diverse, equitable, and inclusive.

- Mental health providers who may not understand the impact discrimination, racial battle fatigue, and microaggressions have on Black women working in the entertainment industry.

- Anyone who seeks to consult companies that are working to create a path toward executive levels that is attainable with the proper training, sponsorships, and mentorships.

- Academics who wish to add to the findings and recommendations of this research.

Assumptions of the Study

A key assumption of this study is that the participants, who are Black women who hold or have held executive level positions in the entertainment industry, will be forthcoming about their journey and experiences. There is also the assumption that the researcher will withhold any biases that may have an impact on the responses of the participants. Finally, there is a gap in the

current literature regarding challenges that Black women in the entertainment industry face. It is assumed that the information provided by the participants may provide greater insight on women in this area.

Limitations of the Study

The study is limited to a qualitative review and responses of 15 Black women who currently hold or formerly held executive level positions in entertainment industry companies. These women face and understand the plethora of challenges presented as they work toward their current levels in their respective entertainment industries.

Definition of Terms

- *Bias/Unconscious Bias:* An unconscious evaluation of a particular group of people that may be based on stereotypes that originate from traditions, personal experience, norms, culture, or a combination of these (Orgeira-Crespo et al., 2021).

- *Black (women, men, or people):* Synonymous with African American and includes anyone who lives in America and is of African or Caribbean descent (J. E. Everett et al., 2010).

- *Concrete Ceiling:* More unbreakable than the glass ceiling, the concrete ceiling or concrete wall is the barrier that makes reaching executive levels in companies more dubious for Black women. Because of the inability to see through concrete, this metaphor represents the idea that many Black women do not get the opportunity to even see positions and levels in a company to which they aspire (Catalyst, 1999).

- *Discrimination:* Unfair and disparate practices toward Black women, particularly in the workplace, that come in the form of stereotypes, exorbitant demands, a lack of

mentoring, ostracism from workplace inner circles, being ignored and/or harassed, and presumptions of being incompetent (Hall et al., 2012).

- *Executive Level:* Any position in the corporate hierarchy that goes from Vice President (VP) to Senior Vice President (SVP) to C-Suite positions (McKinsey & Company & LeanIn.Org, 2020).

- *Glass Ceiling:* The metaphorical and imaginary barrier that prevents Black women from reaching executive levels in companies. It represents women being able to see where they aspire to be, but being unable to break through the barriers due to discrimination due to being women and Black (Bloch et al., 2021).

- *Glass Cliff:* The propensity for organizations to promote women to executive positions in times of crises and then blame them for failure to perform (Ryan & Haslam, 2005, 2007).

- *Microaggression:* Subtle, racial comments, based on racial assumptions that are made toward people of color that have implications of inferiority and a disbelief in ability, and may be construed as an insult. This definition is based on the description of microaggression made by Lewis et al. (2016).

- *Minority:* For the purpose of this study, this refers to races of people and ethnicities who are not of European descent or Americans who are not considered White.

- *Occupational Minorities:* People who are numerically rare in their occupation (Taylor, 2010). Examples of this are men who are nurses and women who are construction workers.

- *Person of Color:* Anyone who is not White (Merriam-Webster, n.d.). These people include Black/African American, Latino, Asian, Pacific Islander, and Native American.

Chapter Summary

From a historical perspective, Black women have struggled to gain equity in every area of society, including the corporate setting (B. N. Anderson, 2020; Carr et al., 2014; Deloitte & Alliance for Board Diversity, 2018; Griffen, 2019; Huang et al., 2019; Lean In, 2020a). There is little information specifically about women in the entertainment industry. Nevertheless, robust information is available about the biases, discrimination, and racism Black women face (Bloch et al., 2021; Hall et al., 2012; Kilgore et al., 2020; Mariolle, 2019; Quaye et al., 2020). Applying the previously mentioned data regarding the number of Black women in executive level and C-suite positions overall (McKinsey & Company & LeanIn.Org, 2020) provides a fairly clear picture of the disparity between Black women and their White male and female and Black male counterparts.

Furthermore, the idea that the challenges and barriers presented to Black women as they try to rise to executive levels resulting in the absence of opportunities for them is unsettling. In a recent survey, only 15% of Black women, compared to 10% of all women and six percent of all men, reported that they do not feel comfortable being their true selves in the workplace (McKinsey & Company & LeanIn.Org, 2020). Black women often face being unseen in the workplace (Lewis et al., 2016; Sue et al., 2019). The absence of mentors and sponsors removes Black women from being considered for various opportunities to be promoted (Erskine et al., 2021; Hite, 2004; S. B. Smith, 2021). Being perceived as angry (Lawson, 2017), rude, and oversexualized (Woods et al., 2009) perpetuates stereotypes that are placed unfairly on qualified

Black women. The weight of racial microaggressions cause Black women a great deal of stress (Hall et al., 2012; Knoxville & Neville, 2015) and mental health concerns (Carr et al., 2014; Kilgore et al., 2020). They must find means of coping with this subtle discriminatory practice in order to maintain some semblance of sanity in the workplace (J. E. Everett et al., 2010; Hall et al., 2012; Kilgore et al., 2020).

Together, these factors lay the foundation for the need to create systems and pathways so that, in the future, Black women who work in the entertainment industry will feel confident that their education and experience will be the sole considerations for their advancement. Because of the long history of biases and discriminatory practices against Black women, this study will lay the groundwork for what the future can be.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The Challenges: From Grade School to Corporate Executive Levels

This chapter will review existing literature and research related to the barriers and challenges Black women in entertainment industry organizations face as they try to move up the corporate hierarchy. The literature often speaks to challenges that Black women face generally in society, narrowing to more specific instances in education, politics, science, and the business industry as a whole (B. N. Anderson, 2020; Arnold et al., 2016; Erskine et al., 2021; Haynes et al., 2016; Holder et al., 2015; Ibarra et al., 2010; Kaba, 2017; Mariolle, 2019). This literature is applicable to the women who will be interviewed in this research and has implications that may be considered for Black women who aspire to ascend the corporate ladder in their respective entertainment industries.

One rarely pursues one's goals, dreams, and aspirations without experiencing obstacles, challenges, and barriers (B. N. Anderson, 2020; Bloch et al., 2021; Candia-Bailey, 2016; Kingsberry, 2015; Manzi & Heilman, 2021; Worley, 2014). B. N. Anderson (2020) and Haynes et al. (2016) suggested that as early as adolescence, as people make advances toward their goals, they begin to understand that their road to success will not be free of challenges and obstacles. As early as elementary school, many Black women experience personal encounters with race and observe differences in people's physical appearances. At this time, Black women begin to realize how race and people's physical appearances influence the way they are viewed, how people interact with them, and whether or not they will be presented with various opportunities (B. N. Anderson, 2020; Copenhaver-Johnson, 2006). These encounters with people emerge as discriminatory and racist, leading to the perpetuated and systemic exclusions that Black women have dealt with in the United States for hundreds of years (Kaba, 2017; Lovell, 2002). Through

the perspective of American citizenship, Kaba (2017) highlighted how discrimination and racism led to Black women being excluded from social supports and opportunities that were accessible to Whites or non-Blacks. These social supports and opportunities included the ability to access unemployment insurance (Lovell, 2002) and the opportunity to hold high political positions, such as President and Vice President of the United States, governor, and Supreme Court Justice (Kaba, 2017). Viewing White people or non-Blacks as more American than Black people has been an impediment for Black people, women specifically, in this context of holding these positions, for many years. Since the time of Kaba's study, it should be noted that as of January 6, 2021, Kamala Harris became the first Black Vice President of the United States. In addition, as of June 30, 2022, Ketanji Brown Jackson became the first Black female Associate Justice of the Supreme Court.

Even as elementary-aged students, especially those considered gifted and high achieving, Black women speak of being ignored and invisible (B. N. Anderson, 2020; Copenhaver-Johnson, 2006; Haynes et al., 2016; Wells, 2017). In this case, being ignored is described as being disregarded as being worthy of, or qualified for, gifted referrals due to their race. Being invisible indicates that the physical presence of Black elementary-aged girls being overlooked and underrepresented (B. N. Anderson, 2020). In her qualitative study about Black women encountering negative perceptions about them as they sought Superintendent positions, Kingsberry (2015) interviewed participants who discussed their experiences or knowledge of encountering invisibility. Although none of them faced it personally, they were aware of it. One of the participants spoke about how she experienced being disregarded as the best person for the job of superintendency. The notion was that those who were hiring for the superintendent position minimized her, or any other Black woman, as not being the ideal person to fill the

position. With the interviewer stating that no women or minorities would be selected solely for the purpose of being inclusive suggests that women nor minorities could be considered as quality candidates, thus putting restrictions on Black women's access to the superintendency. Furthermore, B. N. Anderson (2020) noted that Black women's achievements are often overlooked, despite their educational level. People of color can be made to feel invisible when they are ethnic or racial minorities in their organization (B. N. Anderson, 2020; Dobbs & Leider, 2021; Hall et al., 2012). Dobbs and Leider's (2021) duoethnographic account of their personal experiences as professors at a university recounted how they are perceived and treated. Describing often being selected to attend events for newly admitted students, particularly students of color, the professors discussed how they felt the university's need for them to be at onboarding events was more about the professors being put on display for incoming students and less about their expertise as professors. As such, in some instances, people of color are used as representations of diversity in an organization or to attract other minorities.

In the same vein, young Black girls are referred for gifted testing less often than White girls, but often highlighted for behavior concerns (B. N. Anderson, 2020). Like a foreshadowing of adulthood, young Black girls are disproportionately prevented from being considered and tested for giftedness, just as Black women are disproportionately prevented from having access to promotional opportunities (B. N. Anderson, 2020; Lean In, 2020a). This trend leads to underrepresentation in gifted identification for Black girls and executive level positions and higher for Black women. Disproportionality is shown based on the total number of Black students who are enrolled in school is 19%, although there are only 10% of them represented in gifted and talented education programs (Collins et al., 2020). In 2013-14, 9.9% of the students enrolled in gifted and talented education were Black compared to 58.2% of the students who

were White (National Center for Education Statistics, 2017). Of those percentages, 10.8% of Black girls enrolled in public school were identified as gifted, compared to 57.3% of White girls (Office for Civil Rights, 2013). The idea that Black girls are not considered for giftedness correlates with the historic negative perception society has of Black women. The lack of opportunities presented to Black women and girls impacts them regardless of their age and the setting.

As stated previously, no one moves through life without experiencing some kind of challenge as they work toward their ultimate goal in the workplace (Bloch et al., 2021; Button et al., 2006; Carr et al., 2014; Hall et al., 2012; Sanchez-Hucles & Davis, 2010; W. A. Smith et al., 2011). However, the Black woman is faced with numerous challenges, and most often, not for any other reason than for being Black and a woman (Hawkins, 2017; Jones et al., 2021; Knoxville & Neville, 2015; Quaye et al., 2020; Sue, 2010; Thomas et al., 2008). Because of the lived experiences and longstanding societal views of Black people in the United States since the abolishment of slavery, race, prejudice, and discrimination are likely topics of conversations that take place between Black parents and their children (Hughes & Chen, 1997; Osborne et al., 2021; Wells, 2017). Conversely, Copenhaver-Johnson (2006) suggested that conversations about race do not happen in the homes of White families. Although these conversations take place in many Black homes, they do not take away the sting and difficulty that Black women face as they experience scenarios firsthand that involve racism and discrimination.

Unfortunately, these challenges resonate for Black women many years past their time as grade-school girls. Haynes et al. (2016) recounted how their time pursuing their PhDs brought back feelings of invisibility. Reflecting on their educational journeys, Haynes et al. determined that they were immersed in an educational culture that caused them to have a deficit perspective

of themselves as learners. They identified the root of their mindset as the prolonged exposure to racist and sexist encounters in their lives that also manifested in school (Crenshaw, 1989; G. Gay, 2002; Kaba, 2017; Sue, 2010; Sue et al., 2019). The racist encounters that manifest in school are likely due to teachers who lack cultural proficiency as educators. Not being culturally proficient causes teachers to miss opportunities to build a rapport with, and understand, Black students because they lack an awareness of their biases toward the students (G. Gay, 2002; Howard; 2001).

Haynes et al.'s (2016) educational experiences were rooted in biases and racist practices of which they were victims, resulting in feelings of inadequacy (Parham, 1999) as they worked for their post-graduate degrees. Using collaborative auto-ethnography (CAE), Haynes et al. served as both researchers and participants in this qualitative study as they explored their experiences in grade school that shaped their perspectives as students in a doctoral program. Each of the three participants wrote about her experiences in grade school and their notes and reflections served as data. One participant wrote about how being described as the *White Black girl* by her classmates was better than being considered a troublemaker. Further, being perceived as White aligns with the concept of *identity shifting*, which is what a person of color does to assimilate into the culture and behavioral and linguistic patterns of the dominant race in a setting (Dickens et al., 2019; Jackson, 2002; Jones et al., 2021; Sanchez-Hucles & Davis, 2010). The fact that this participant felt the need to disguise and deny who she was as a Black girl led to the manifestation of invisibility (B. N. Anderson, 2020; King, 2005; Lewis et al., 2016; Parham, 1999). Identity shifting will be discussed more in depth later.

The second participant in the study recalled how being a Black Jamaican who immigrated to the United States made her feel marginalized. She had feelings of marginalization based on

her intelligence and academic abilities constantly coming into question by her White teacher. In addition, her colleagues made the assumption that she was not as bright, therefore causing her to feel self-conscious about her abilities, which led her to stay under the radar and not draw attention to herself. In fact, Parham (1999) claimed that because there are so many racist events in the United States, people of African descent are left feeling like there is something wrong with them. The final participant remembered her diversity class as an undergraduate student. Although she was the only Black student, she anticipated that the group would have open mindsets about topics of diversity. To her dismay, she experienced the group collectively blaming Blacks and Latinos for the poverty, homelessness, and crime in America. She described this interaction as one that silenced her voice and her presence, ultimately causing her to adopt an attitude of silence, which remained with her into her postgraduate studies.

Just as Black school girls deal with being excluded from such experiences such as playing at school (Copenhaver-Johnson, 2006) and opportunities for gifted referrals (B. N. Anderson, 2020), they also grow up missing out on opportunities for advancement in the workplace because they are Black women (Huang et al., 2019; Wells, 2017). Many even come to expect encountering biases, discrimination, and stereotypes as they seek to rise through the ranks in their respective fields (Button, 2006; Christo-Baker, 2012; Glass & Cook, 2020; Lewis, 2013; Wells, 2017). As a result, over time, Black women build a level of tolerance for dealing with these social challenges (Quaye et al., 2021). Consequently, because of biases and discriminatory practices, Black women pay a penalty in the corporate world. The following sections will describe how Black women are penalized and how they navigate the challenges they face in the corporate world.

That's Entertainment

As mentioned previously, although there is limited information regarding the disparate and discriminatory treatment of Black women as they seek to rise through the hierarchy of entertainment industry companies, it is important to highlight the information that is available. In limited occurrences, Black women have achieved moments of success in the entertainment industry (Alonzo, 2003; T. Anderson et al., 2020; Dates, 2004; Ensher et al., 2002; Gillespie, 2021; Murray, 2015; Norment, 1993). These occurrences have increased as society has become more diverse and equitable in the treatment of women in the entertainment industry (T. Anderson et al., 2020; A. Everett, 2015; Worley, 2021). Still, White male dominance permeates the entertainment industry both on the creative and executive sides (Alonzo, 2003; Dates, 2004; Murray, 2014; Wallenberg & Jansson, 2021). As a result, there have been limitations on the number of Black women who have attained executive level status in the entertainment industry, when compared to White males in particular (Clarke, 2016).

Society has called for diversity and a paradigm shift in the practices that have historically evaded Black men and women as they work to ascend to executive positions and beyond (Alonzo, 2003; Clarke, 2016). Nevertheless, Clarke (2016) compared Black women's journey to hold board seats to a tractor trailer that is stuck in a swamp: not going anywhere. Even with these calls for diversity, Black women do not benefit as much as White women do. Alonzo (2003) noted that executives in the entertainment industry were attempting to bring more diversity in corporate offices and television programming 18 years ago. Alonzo was making a specific reference to Debra Lee, who was then the President and COO of Black Entertainment Television (BET). The mention of a Black woman, at that time, had notable significance. Nevertheless, Debra Lee's extraordinary positioning in the entertainment world was a major feat, considering

the limited number of Black women who held C-suite positions at the time. Lee's feat was not possible without the position being handed off to her by her predecessor, Robert Johnson.

Robert Johnson, who sold the BET network to Viacom Corporation in 2000 after founding it 20 years earlier, forever embedded him in the record books as becoming the first Black billionaire (McKinney, 2018). Because of the limitations when it came to programming for and by Black people at the time, Robert Johnson founded BET to create opportunities and diversity that had not been seen on cable television up to that point (Lapchick, 2004). Alonzo (2003) raised the notion that diversity was imperative if there was going to be support for compelling and competitive television programming. Such programming needed to be culturally-specific to engage new audiences and create new markets, which Johnson was successful at accomplishing. Johnson is an example of a Black man creating opportunities for himself to be influential in higher levels of entertainment companies.

In another example, Suzanne de Passe also knocked down obstacles and barriers to rise up the ranks in the entertainment industry. de Passe, a Black woman who began her career in entertainment as creative assistant to Motown Records founder Berry Gordy, ultimately became the President of Motown Records. Her desire to have a greater impact on the entertainment industry led her to create her own company, De Passe Entertainment. Using her connections and experience, she developed a company that was notorious for creating programming that appealed to not only Black people, but also a broader audience (Dates, 2004).

In an interview, de Passe acknowledged that her road to success was not free of challenges. She noted the difficulty of trying to create programming for Black audiences when, oftentimes, White men were the ones who would hear about, approve of, and fund the idea (Dates, 2004). She further indicated that, in instances when there was a rare encounter with a

Black man, it was beneficial in helping to get those ideas to create Black programming approved and funded.

Robert Johnson also paved the way for Debra Lee to be elevated to the upper echelon of BET in a way that had not been possible for most Black women. Even still, Robert Johnson noted challenges that he faced as a Black man just as most Black people may, but simultaneously acknowledged the unique journey he took that may have mitigated those challenges, because he made his own way (Lapchick, 2004). Debra Lee was not the only Black woman who celebrated this time of success and the ability to influence television programming during the early to mid-2000s. There were a handful of other Black women who also enjoyed the success of rising to levels of great influence (Dates, 2004). These women were creating programming and influencing television on the corporate side of entertainment. In 1991, Black women occupied various positions in major media companies, including Vice President of Comedy Development at ABC Entertainment, Director of Motion Pictures for Television at NBC Entertainment, and Director of Current Programs at Warner Bros. Television ("Black Women in TV," 1991). As will be noted in the literature regarding Black women in a traditional corporate business setting, such as Fortune 500 companies, Black women in entertainment industry companies also emphasize the importance of being connected to someone who has influence and power.

Although it may appear that it was easier for Black women to achieve these highly influential positions, during that time than now, White men held more than 75% of the entertainment industry's studio and network entertainment positions ("Black Women in TV," 1991). Limited diversity in entertainment means fewer projects that seek to connect proportionately to the greater population of Black viewers in the U.S. (Alonzo, 2003; Dates, 2004; Gillespie, 2021; Murray, 2015). In more recent years, Issa Rae, actress, producer, and

publishing company founder, has also made her own way (Murray, 2015), just as Robert Johnson and Suzanne De Passe did before her. Issa Rae understands the challenges Black professionals face in the entertainment industry, even as the owner of her own entertainment company (Murray, 2015), highlighting the need for more people of color as executives in entertainment industry companies so that a greater variety of programming will be accessible to viewers. Gillespie (2021) highlights Black women who have worked up to C-Suite positions in the television and film sectors of entertainment. These Black women mentioned have been elevated to the upper echelon of such major companies as CBS Entertainment Group, Warner Brothers Television Group, Tri-Star Pictures, and Orion Pictures. Attaining positions such as CEO and president in these companies results in programming and green lighting projects that amplify the voices and stories of marginalized, underrepresented, and underserved individuals.

Clarke (2016) noted that if Black women want to overcome obstacles, they will have to start early in their careers to be strategic about the jobs they seek and accept, as well as how they build their personal networks and cultivate their sponsors. Although the literature regarding Black women and the challenges they encounter on the corporate side of entertainment is limited, the information presented in this section gives an overview of the ongoing limitations and access to elevation and promotion in entertainment industry companies that Black women encounter ("Black Women in TV," 1991). Nevertheless, there are also examples of how Black women work through those limitations to create their own opportunities (Dates, 2004; Murray, 2015). There is also a conglomerate of Black women who, by their experience and notoriety in the entertainment industry, have moved up the ranks into positions with great influence (Gillespie, 2021). Still, Black women have assurance that opportunities have been, and still are,

accessible. Black women have many opportunities for a more equitable journey, not only with White men, but White women also (Alonzo, 2003; Clark, 2016; Wallenberg & Jansson, 2021).

At the Intersection of Race and Gender - Intersectionality

Despite their tenacity and ability to work through centuries of obstacles and barriers that society has presented to them, Black women have been able to work through and around these challenges to arrive where they desire to be in the workplace. Sometimes these challenges are encountered by Black women, but they are unaware of the reason they are facing discrimination or racism. Kimberle Crenshaw (1989) created the term *intersectionality* based on her research in legal theory. Since then, the research regarding discrimination of Black women has continued, suggesting the importance of looking at Black women as dichotomous beings: both Black and women (Bloch et al., 2021; Carr et al., 2014; Cole, 2009; Crenshaw, 1989; Knoxville & Neville, 2015; Sanchez-Hucles & Davis, 2010; Steinbugler et al., 2006).

To better understand the intersection of race and gender, each must be examined independently. Black women have multidimensional identities due to their race and gender. Therefore, viewing them from this perspective contrasts the one-dimensional identity that relates to being a Black man or a White woman (Kilgore et al., 2020). Looking at intersectionality makes it easier to understand the challenges that women of color who are in leadership positions face (Sanchez-Hucles & Davis, 2010). Additionally, the examination of intersectionality refines and concentrates the conversation related to the challenges presented to Black women down to the framework of the *women's experience* and the *Black experience* that requires a review of policies related to discrimination of Black women (Crenshaw, 1989). Crenshaw (1989) also noted that Black women are often excluded from conversations regarding feminist theory and antiracist policies because it is assumed that the influences of race and gender in their

experiences are mutually exclusive and do not interact with each other. The fact that, for Black women, race and gender do interact with each other is the basis for intersectionality theory.

Crenshaw's (1989) work began as she explored discrimination from a legal perspective, looking at several critical court cases: three Title VII cases that involved Black women as the plaintiff. The first case, *DeGraffenreid v. General Motors*, involved five Black women who sued General Motors (GM) for discrimination, alleging that GM's seniority system perpetuated ongoing discrimination against Black women. GM had not hired Black women prior to 1964 and, at the time of the suit, all of the Black women had been hired after 1970. Apparently, when GM was faced with having to lay off people with the least seniority, Black women were the ones who were laid off first. Seemingly a situation of semantics, the defense was able to avoid the accusation of discrimination. The court stated:

> [P]laintiffs have failed to cite any decisions which have stated that Black women are a special class to be protected from discrimination. The Court's own research has failed to disclose such a decision. The plaintiffs are clearly entitled to a remedy if they have been discriminated against. However, they should not be allowed to combine statutory remedies to create a new "super-remedy" which would give them relief beyond what the drafters of the relevant statutes intended. Thus, this lawsuit must be examined to see if it states a cause of action for race discrimination, sex discrimination, or alternatively either, but not a combination of both. (Crenshaw, 1989, p. 141).

What this meant for the Black women who were laid off was that the court deemed there was no discrimination toward them because GM had hired women prior to their being hired, even if those hires happened to only be White women. The discrimination that Blacks faced, and was prevalent during that time, was not considered.

The court grouped all races of women together, even though no other race of women had the disproportionate and documented historical experiences of being discriminated against as Black women had. In summation, according to Crenshaw (1989), the ruling of this specific case determined that, in the creation of Title VII, Congress did not anticipate that Black women would be discriminated against or that protection from discrimination was necessary for Black women in particular. Crenshaw went on to say that the court not acknowledging that Black women are faced with discrimination via race and gender implies that discrimination toward them is defined by White women's experiences and Black men's experiences. In essence, the court did not take the opportunity to see Black women as a protected class whose experiences of discrimination varied from those of White women, based on gender, and Black men, based on race (Bloch et al., 2021). This is the only case that Crenshaw reviewed to make a case for intersectionality. Other work supports the notion that Black women's experiences should be defined based on their unique binary experience (Thomas et al., 2004). In contrast, it is important to note that although intersectionality presents a disadvantage to Black women, they are also beneficiaries of certain privileges (Cole, 2009), like affirmative action.

Whose Group is Worse Off? - Intersectional Invisibility

Various studies have delineated the barriers that Black women face when rising to executive levels. With Black women being a part of their two distinctive oppressed groups, gender and race, research has also occurred to determine if Black women are, in fact, as disadvantaged as the works of Crenshaw (1989) and others (Bloch et al., 2021; Carr et al., 2014) have purported. Purdie-Vaughns and Eibachs (2008) postulated that people with multiple-subordinate identities may have advantages as well. One side of the argument says that those who have multiple-subordinate identities experience more racism, harassment, and

discrimination. On the other side are the scholars who argue that people who have single-subordinate identities face relatively more disadvantages than those with multiple-subordinate identities. Purdie-Vaughns and Eibachs indicated that the argument surrounding this controversy raised questions and derived theories and research related to intersections of gender, race, class, and sexual orientation. They further noted that there is empirical evidence supporting both sides.

Instead of focusing on the argument of whose group is worse off, Purdie-Vaughns and Eibachs (2008) sought to dispel the idea of androcentrism, ethnocentrism, and heterocentrism. Androcentrism, ethnocentrism, and heterocentrism are the tendencies to define the standard as White, heterosexual men. These tendencies may cause people with intersecting identities to be considered as non-prototypical members of the identity groups they are expected to be assigned to, and people with multiple subordinate identities (e. g., Black women) do not usually fit the prototypes of their subordinate groups (e.g., Black, women); therefore, they will experience *intersectional invisibility*. Viewing this argument through social dominance theory's (SDT) subordinate male theory hypothesis (SMTH), subordinate men are oppressed by dominant men. Lantz et al. (2020) interpreted the SMTH by claiming that human societies are made up of hierarchies that include the privileged and the oppressed, and these hierarchies are driven by systemic oppression that manifest in such areas as the healthcare and legal systems. Although this theory and these notions are empirically supported, the SMTH explores the argument that seeks to determine which group is most oppressed or suffers the most as it relates to intersectionality research. There is research supporting the point that minority men are presumed to experience more prejudice and discrimination than people with more than one devalued identity, specifically racial and ethnic minority women (Cole, 2009; Purdie-Vaughns & Eibachs, 2008).

Androcentrism, ethnocentrism, and heterocentrism in tandem result in people who have intersecting subordinate-group identities being identified as members who are not prototypical of the groups with which they are most commonly identified or by which they are most commonly categorized (see Figure 1). Purdie-Vaughns and Eibach (2008) further argued that people with two or more subordinate identities do not correspond to the prototypes of their constituent groups, thus experiencing intersectional invisibility.

Figure 1

Androcentrism, Ethnocentrism, and Heterocentrism
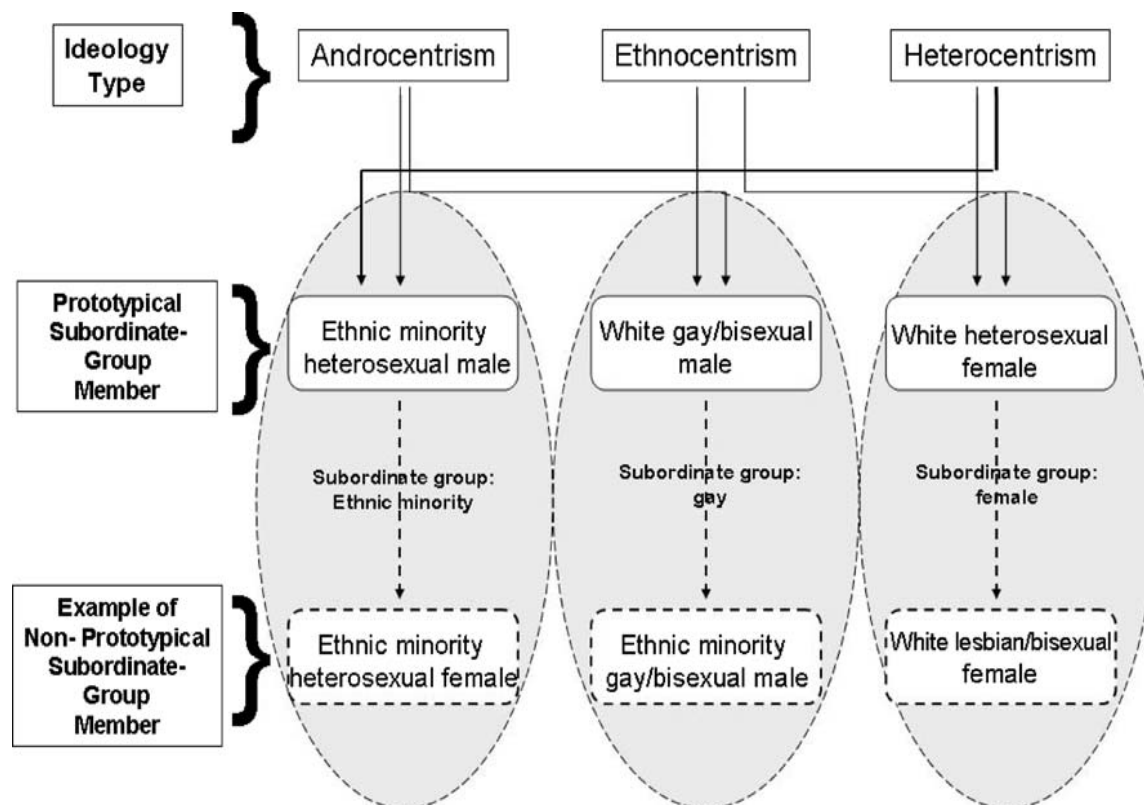
Reprinted from "Intersectional Invisibility: The Distinctive Advantages and Disadvantages of Multiple Subordinate-Group Identities," by V. Purdie-Vaughns & R. P. Eibach, 2008, *Sex Roles, 59*, 382 (https://doi.org/10.1007/s11199-008-9424-4). Copyright 2008 by the authors. Reprinted with permission.

Intersectional invisibility is defined as failing to completely recognize people with intersecting identities as a part of their constituent groups, thus distorting the characteristics of

those with intersecting identities in order to fit them into frameworks defined by the typical member of constituent identity groups. Shifting the focus to the various forms of discrimination and oppression that people with multiple-subordinate identities face provides a perspective that is not commonly considered.

Purdie-Vaughns and Eibachs (2008) distinguished the advantages and disadvantages of having certain subordinate-group identities. They hypothesized that people who were more prototypical in their respective group would face more discrimination that those who were less prototypical. Purdie-Vaughns and Eibachs's findings further revealed that based on the SMTH, and due to their non-prototypicality, minority women and lesbian White women would face less oppression than minority men and gay men. Thus, from the lens of intersectional invisibility, subordinate men are more likely to face discrimination directed toward their group due to their prototypicality, compared to subordinate women. On the other hand, disadvantages were also identified. Hogg (2001) noted that non-prototypical group members are less likely to access leadership opportunities within their group and less likely to have social influence on members of their group when compared to more prototypical group members.

Based on the intersectional invisibility model, people with intersection subordinate-group identities tend to face obstacles correlated with misrepresentation, marginalization, and disempowerment (Purdie-Vaughns & Eibachs, 2008). This notable disadvantage is common to the Black women who seek to rise to executive levels and higher. It is also important to note that Black women are often in conflict with some of the same subordinate groups with whom they share similar interests (King, 2005). Presenting as the proverbial *double-edged sword*, King (2005) also stated that the same groups with whom Black women find alliances in one situation may also serve as adversaries in a different situation. This may leave Black women in the

workplace wondering on whom they can actually rely on to be allies and advocates because of the barrier of intersectionality.

Who's the Best Wo(man) for the Job? - Role Congruity Theory

One could wonder, What does intersectionality have to do with the underrepresentation of Black women in executive level positions or higher in entertainment industry organizations? Part of the challenge is that women are boxed into what is considered traditional roles for their ability in the workplace. As a result, they are not seen capable of being leaders for no other reason than because they are women (Eagly & Karau, 2002; Koenig et al., 2011). The framework of role congruity theory is based on the idea that women are better fit for professional roles that are related to being nurturing and empathetic, like teaching and nursing, because men are thought to perform best in roles that emphasize power, authority, and competition (Garcia-Retamero & López-Zafra, 2006). The theory also suggests the belief that women who occupy positions that are not consistent with traditional roles, such as engineers and law enforcement, are viewed more negatively than men who hold the same positions and women in more congruent professions (Bergeron et al., 2006; Eagly & Karau, 2002). These biased beliefs and practices lead to inequality in jobs and occupations in various industries (Bloch et al., 2021).

Leadership Styles

Given the various leadership styles and characteristics thereof that people may possess, it is important to identify the leadership styles that men or women, despite their race or ethnicity, may have as they lead a department or organization. Although there are several leadership types and theories, the following three types of leaders easily encompass traits that a person of any race or gender may possess. These traits may include being self-aware, having the ability to guide followers and nurture their strengths, providing leadership based on personal values and

beliefs, and exhibiting compassion for others (Avolio et al., 1999; Bass, 1999; Eva et al., 2019;

Shamir & Eilam, 2005).

Transformational leaders empower their followers to see the organization's vision and

own it and cultivate their strengths, which should lead to the followers' optimal performance,

thereby benefiting the organization (Avolio et al., 1999; Bass, 1999). Shamir and Eilam (2005)

identified various characteristics of *authentic leadership*, including: (a) knowing oneself and

possessing a personal point of view, and (b) having a strong identification of the leadership role

and presenting oneself by enacting the leadership role based on personal values and convictions.

A *servant leader* is defined as someone who has: (a) an alternative approach to leadership,

outside of the norm, (b) demonstrated through prioritization of the follower's personal interests

and needs, and (c) redirected their self-concern toward those who work in the organization and

the community at large (Eva et al., 2019). Although there are other leadership styles, these three

were reviewed to show that regardless of the idea that women are not considered as being

congruent with leadership, they can possess any of the leadership characteristics.

Gender Role Congruity Theory

Gender role congruity theory seeks to explain why women are considered incapable of

leading organizations, regardless of the level of their leadership. This theory posits that women

are not best suited for leadership positions because of the assumption, bias, and masculine-

centric viewpoint that men should lead, and the notion that there are other positions best suited

for women (Eagly & Karau, 2002; Koenig et al., 2011). This notion is reiterated in politics

(Schneider & Bos, 2019) and among church and clergy members (Christo-Baker et al., 2012).

Stemming from *social role theory*, which argues that occupied roles in the family and the

workplace espouse gender stereotypes where each sex has expectation of characteristics that

cause them to function in its typical role (Diekman & Eagly, 2000), role congruity theory addresses the congruity of women's traditional and other roles, specifically leadership roles (Eagly & Karau, 2002).

Role congruity theory examines the prejudices that women face in leadership roles (Eagly & Karau, 2002; Garcia-Retamero & López-Zafra, 2006, 2009; Koenig et al., 2011). These prejudices manifest in the perception that women are not as astute in leadership positions as men are and are better suited in positions where they exhibit communal and supportive behavior (Eagly & Karau, 2002; Garcia-Retamero & López-Zafra, 2009). Based on this perception, women have less access to leadership positions than men do. This ideology ultimately results in such disparities as inequality in wages and promotion opportunities (Canales, 2017; Eagly & Karau, 2002; Hampton et al., 2000; Sullins, 2000). Eagly and Karau (2002) indicated that people who have a perception of women judge them as actual or potential holders of leadership roles. This occurs because there is a discrepancy between the communal traits that the perceivers believe women should have and the mostly agentic qualities that the perceivers believe leaders should possess.

Various studies have taken an in depth look at role congruity theory and its implications (Brown & Reisig, 2019; Christo-Baker et al., 2012; Garcia-Retamero & López-Zafra, 2009). Garcia-Retamero and López-Zafra (2009) researched potential differences between the way women and men leaders are evaluated. More specifically, these studies sought to determine if the sex of a candidate for a leadership position, the type of organization, and age and sex of the participants had a bearing on the perception of incongruence between the gender role and leadership role. The results found that women in a more feminine industry were perceived as being more likely to be promoted than if the industry was masculine or unknown. Garcia-

Retamero and López-Zafra also found that, depending on the age of those who participated in the study and the predictions (hypotheses) they made, a woman was more likely to have a leadership style that was more transformational, compared to men having a leadership style that was more transactional. Black women trying to reach executive levels in entertainment could potentially face the scrutiny of not exhibiting congruency as compared to men in their roles as leaders (Christo-Baker et al., 2012).

The Consequence for Being Black *and* a Woman - Gendered Racism

As stated in the introduction, gendered racism was derived from the theory of intersectionality (Carr et al., 2014). Gendered racism is the subjectivity of oppressive forms of discrimination that Black women face because of their *Blackness* and being female (Carr et al., 2014; Knoxville & Neville, 2015; Perry et al., 2012; Thomas et al., 2008). This is also known as *double jeopardy* (Glass & Cook, 2020; Jean-Marie et al., 2009; Lewis, 2013; Thomas et al., 2008). Although Black women experience similar racist encounters as Black men do and similar sexist interactions as White women do, they have their own set of individual experiences that are motivated by both race and gender (Thomas et al., 2008). Being connected to two commonly oppressed groups makes navigating life and work challenging and tiresome for Black women over time (Arnold et al., 2016; Chancellor, 2019).

Although Essed (1991) was a catalyst for bringing gendered racism to the forefront of discussions related to Black women's specific form of oppression in society and in the workplace, King (2005) brought to light the connection between discrimination and stress. Delving more deeply, not only the oppression experienced by these women, but also its effects on their health created a discussion regarding ways to address these discriminatory practices, not only for them as women, but additionally because they are Black. King examined Black

women's responses to discrimination, asking them to determine if they experienced ethnic, gender, or *ethgender* discrimination. King defined ethgender as the distinctive intersection of race and gender. Based on her research, King found that women's negative experiences that they deemed more important to them were more stressful to them. Ultimately, King concluded that, in Black women's experiences, sexism and racism were so intertwined that it was difficult and irrelevant to separate the two.

Gendered racism coupled with microaggressions subjects Black women to be held to a different standard than White women and vilifies them when they are merely being who they are as women (Corbin et al., 2018; Lewis & Neville, 2015). As an example, Madison (2009) recalled the challenges and misperceptions Michelle Obama faced as her husband campaigned for, then became, President of the United States. Madison introduced the term "crazy patriotism" (p. 321), which limits Americans' ability to essentially see and honor the good while simultaneously showing disdain for the bad in the United States. Madison asserted that people's crazy patriotism depicted Michelle Obama as scary, instead of acknowledging the scarier fact that, and admitting to the detrimental effects of, economic injustice, the belief that White people are superior Black people, and the fact that racism occurs within the borders of the U.S. Michelle Obama was also called *bitter* by Shawn Hannity and ultimately described as *angry* any time she spoke of the America she experienced as a Black woman. At the beginning of her time as First Lady, her commentary regarding America caused crazy patriotism to dub her as *unpatriotic* (Madison, 2009). This example is but one of many times when gendered racism affixes stereotypical labels to Black women.

Although stereotypes will be discussed more in depth later, gendered racism cannot be discussed without mentioning stereotypes. Black women are often placed under a microscope

and judged based on historical public perceptions (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2003). Conscious and unconscious stereotypes about Black women and their abilities and character may cause Whites to view Black employees as a risk, thus preventing them from achieving greater opportunities in the workplace, including promotions (Hall et al., 2012). Gendered racism views Black women through the stereotypical lens as Mammy-like, promiscuous, and emasculating (Thomas et al., 2008). Black women are also viewed as dangerous, violent, and difficult to get along with. Black women have reported being called by derogatory terms such as *Black bitch* and receiving sexually objectifying comments such as having a *Black ass* (Buchanan, 2005; Hall et al., 2012; Woods et al., 2009). Such stereotypes correlated with one group of people contribute to the explanation of why so few Black women who are able to rise to executive levels and beyond (Dickens & Chavez; 2018; Hayes, 2008). Stereotypes generate negative misguided views about a group of people. Notwithstanding, depending on one's racial or ethnic background, there may be confusion for people of color when they experience stereotypes that may be perceived as ambiguous, depending on the racial background (Mohr & Purdie-Vaughns, 2015). For example, Mohr and Purdie-Vaughns (2015) suggested that a Black female senior manager and an Asian female senior manager may question whether they are asked to pour coffee because of their race and/or gender. Based on gendered racism, the Black woman may wonder if it is because she is not stereotypically regarded as feminine, and likewise, the Asian woman may wonder if it is due to the stereotype of her being a docile woman who desires to please. Either way, the notion that there is a stigma attached to either woman is based on the intersectionality of her gender and her race.

Gendered racism often places Black women in positions where they do not feel comfortable presenting who they really are (Corbin et al., 2018; Dickens & Chavez, 2018). The

stress that presenting their true selves brings causes doubt and concern regarding non-Black people's perception of them, which results in prejudice toward Black people (Jones et al., 2021). In order to cope with and escape this scrutiny, Black women *shift* their identities. *Identity shifting*, or identity negotiating, is a conscious or unconscious altering of one's speech or actions to prevent negative outcomes of discrimination (Dickens & Chavez, 2018).

Identity shifting incorporates the shifting of language, also known as *code switching*, (Hall et al., 2012) and behavior, or altering one's actions to fit into the norm of the dominant group (Dickens et al., 2019). Code switching, or *talking White* (a term used in the Black community), is another way to describe using so-called correct grammar (Dickens & Chavez, 2018). For some Black women, assimilating in the workplace is a way for them to escape from and counteract the stereotypes attached to them (Spates et al., 2020) and be seen as capable of greater leadership and promotional opportunities. In addition, shifting causes Black women's sense of who they are, their completeness, and the factors that center them to be chipped away, little by little (Hall et al., 2012).

Despite the spiritual, emotional, and physical cost of identity shifting—which can manifest in sleep deprivation, hair loss, and emotional eating (Hall et al., 2012)—one study uncovered its participants' perceptions of certain benefits of identity shifting (Dickens & Chavez, 2018). One participant spoke of how identity shifting allowed her to be able to interact with people from different cultural backgrounds: people with whom she may not normally get the opportunity to interact. Participants also said shifting identities helped them to make and forge sustainable connections with their colleagues. Some participants said that they benefited from enhanced career development. Finally, a participant said that shifting helped to alter people's perceptions of her as a Black woman.

Standing in the "Shade" When There's No Tree - Racial Microaggressions

There are statements that Black women may hear from their White colleagues in the workplace or in society at large (Coqual, 2020; Hall et al., 2012).

"…you're just like a White woman in a Black person's body, because of the way you talk and the way you carry yourself" (Hall et al., 2012, p. 216).

"You're articulate" (Coqual, 2020, p. 5).

Although bias, racism, and discrimination are not new, their enactments have taken on a new form. Since its first mention in 1970 by Chester Pierce, *microaggression* has been used to call out this form of biased racial discrimination. Sue et al. (2019) explained that Pierce's use of *micro* denotes daily encounters. Microaggressions, *racial microaggressions*, or *gendered racial microaggressions* are described as everyday subtle and covert comments and interactions that Black people (Corbin et al., 2018; Sue, 2010) and people of color (Sue et al., 2019) are met with (Huber & Solorzano, 2015; Lewis et al., 2016; Sue et al., 2007). These comments and actions are both intentional and unintentional and may be perceived as slights and insults based on racial assumptions (Sue et al., 2007). Microaggressions are often not easily detectable as racist, biased or discriminatory, so they remain unchallenged because they are disguised and excused as harmless or insignificant (Sue et al., 2019).

Microaggression manifests and impacts people of color in various ways. Microaggressions are communicated verbally and nonverbally through multiple modes, which include social media, TV, and mascots (Sue et al., 2019). Coqual (2020) identified these microaggressions as *microinsults*, which are subtle, insensitive comments (e.g., White coworkers touching Black coworkers' hair without permission); *microinvalidations*, which are comments that negate the essence of a Black person (e.g., Black coworkers being told by White colleagues

that they don't see race); and *microassaults*, which are comments that disregard the feelings of Black people (e.g., Black coworkers hearing racially insensitive comments by White coworkers). Although individual racial groups are on the receiving end of microaggressions, it is noted that specific forms may vary based on race or ethnic group, which include being made to feel invisible and being treated like a second-class citizen (Sue et al., 2008). Sue et al. (2008) further stated that Blacks and Latinos often deal with microaggressions that deem them intellectually inferior and as criminals. This is just one explanation of why Black and Latino males may experience being racially profiled by law enforcement (Higgins et al., 2010) or retail employees (Aymer, 2010). These manifestations of microaggressions flow directly into themes of various research studies.

A Black Woman by Any Other Name is a Stereotype - Projected Stereotypes

Several themes emerge from the study that explored experiences with gendered racial microaggressions, conducted by Lewis et al. (2016), which expanded Sue's (2010) microaggression theory: (a) projected stereotypes, (b) silenced and marginalized, and (c) assumptions about style and beauty. Figure 2 shows the core themes related to the research for gendered racial microaggressions. The next sections will provide an explanation of the literature that reinforces these themes.

One of the greatest barriers that Black women face in the workplace is how they are perceived and otherwise stereotyped (Hall et al., 2012; Knoxville & Neville, 2015; McPherson, 2018; Wisseh, 2019). Black women are often regarded as angry, loud, and emasculating (Lawson, 2017; Thomas et al., 2004; Tyree, 2011), oversexed (Knoxville & Neville, 2015; Thomas et al., 2004), and motherly, obedient, and faithful (Kilgore et al., 2020). These

perceptions often negatively influence Black women's opportunities for promotion (McPherson, 2018).

Figure 2

Gendered Racial Microaggressions: Core Themes and Subthemes
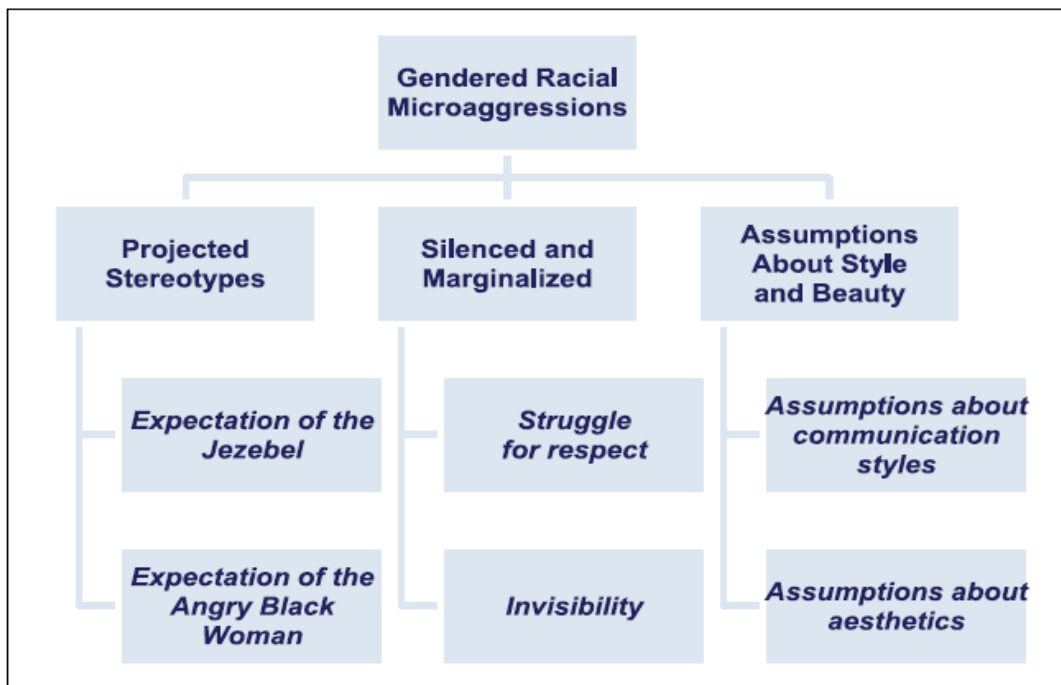
Reprinted from "'Ain't I a Woman?': Perceived Gendered Racial Microaggressions Experienced by Black Women," by J. A. Lewis, R. Mendenhall, S. A. Harwood, & M. B. Huntt, 2016, *The Counseling Psychologist, 44*(5), 787 (https:/doi.org/10.1177/0011000016641193). Copyright 2016 by the authors. Reprinted with permission.

The *Sapphire* trope originated from the *Amos 'n Andy Show*, a comedy television show that aired from 1943-1955 (Corbin et al., 2018). Corbin et al. (2018) explained that from the Sapphire trope, the caricature of the Angry Black woman (ABW), or *Angry Black Woman Syndrome* (ABWS), is derived as being loud, aggressive, and argumentative. Literature depicts multiple studies on the topic of the perception of ABWS (Hall et al., 2012; Lawson, 2017). Hall et al. (2012) conducted research on how Black women cope with stress, gathering various accounts of stereotypes participants experienced in the workplace. One account included a participant speaking about being perceived as hostile to the point of beginning to question

herself. She explained how others' perceptions ultimately began to affect her psyche. This self-insecurity is likely due to the excessive amount of racist incidents that Black people face, which leads to the internalized racist feelings that result in confusion and self-doubt (Parham, 1999).

Motro et al. (2021) conducted research that revealed that, although a White woman and a Black woman may have similar characteristics, stereotypes like ABWS impact the way Black women are evaluated on the job and assessed for leadership capabilities. Therefore, when evaluations are made based on the stereotypes of Black women, Black women are prevented from reaching the threshold of being considered highly competent, thus limiting elevation to executive levels. Lawson's (2017) qualitative research into the effects of ABWS on Black women in corporate America revealed a double standard; White women's inappropriate actions may go unaddressed, but similar actions by Black women are confronted and addressed. Participants also expressed that the ABWS is based on racist perceptions, yet some participants expressed that they did not encounter the effects of this stereotype because of their relationship with their non-Black colleagues.

Furthermore, the media has contributed to the perception of Black women as angry and combative. Reality television (RTV) is one of the most popular types of media that depicts marginalized women as angry, violent, and aggressive (Dubrofsky, 2009). Particularly, shows like *Real Housewives of Atlanta* and *Basketball Wives* perpetuate stereotypes of Black women as belligerent, ready-to-fight, and hostile (Psarras, 2014). Psarras (2014) further indicates that the women cast are often considered dominant, alpha females. Although these shows are considered to present reality, as the genre suggests, the truth is that the reality in the shows is limited, and these shows are partially scripted (Tyree, 2011). Nevertheless, the public's perception of Black women is based on the actions of the women appearing on these shows. It should also be pointed

out, parenthetically, that from slavery to present day, there are many reasons that Black women have to be angry; many of which have been and will be discussed in this paper (Corbin et al., 2018; Crenshaw, 1989; Erskine et al., 2021; Hall et al., 2012; Huang et al., 2019; Sue et al., 2007).

Jezebel is the stereotype of Black women being oversexed, sexually insatiable, and reduced to being defined by her body and sexually objectified (Mariolle, 2019). Black women often deal with commentary related to their body parts that is often inappropriate for the setting. Collier et al. (2017) conducted research that looked at how Black and White women viewed the Jezebel stereotype. The research sought to determine, through hypothesis, if the participants would rate the Jezebel stereotype more befitting to Black women than White women when given vignettes. In addition, the research also sought to uncover whether White participants were higher in implicit prejudice and would rate Black women higher on the Jezebel stereotype than they would rate themselves. Collier et al.'s study revealed that although there was no significant difference in the application of the Jezebel stereotype based on race, White participants with a higher implicit prejudice rated Black women higher on the Jezebel stereotype than White women.

Like the reinforcement of the Sapphire stereotype, the media also has an impact on the perpetuation of the Jezebel stereotype of Black women (Tyree, 2011). Looking at RTV in the 2000s, Tyree disclosed how young Black women were cast and described as the "hoochie," which Merriam-Webster defines as a "sexually promiscuous young woman" (Merriam-Webster, n.d., para. 1). Based on the fact that Brianna, who appeared on Season 18 of the *Real World*, wore tight clothes, exposed her body, and kissed a roommate, her roommates deemed her

promiscuous (Tyree, 2011). This is one example of just one character on RTV, yet the image transcends television to real life, becoming difficult for Black women to outlive.

So many other stereotypes are associated with Black women and prove to be barriers for them in their quest to elevate to executive levels. The mammy trope emerged from slavery, depicting Black women as dark-skinned, subservient, overweight, asexual, and domesticated (Hodson et al., 2021). As recently as 2010, American culture witnessed the iconic and familiar image of mammy in the blockbuster film, *The Help* (Hodson et al., 2021). Wisseh (2019) pointed out the strides that Black women have made while being maligned as this outdated trope, stating that as Black women increased their education, the mammy trope ascended the corporate ladder. Additionally, Black women are also perceived as intellectually inferior to Whites and incompetent (Hall et al., 2012).

Hall et al. (2021) discussed a participant in their study who said that she often feels like her White supervisors watch her more closely, so as to look out for stereotypes associated with Black women. Being placed under a microscope is what Constantine et al. (2008) described as *hypervisibility*. When Black people are hypervisible, a disproportionate amount of attention is given to them that translates to a lack of trust and confidence in Black people in relation to their White counterparts. Further, when a Black person is the only one in an organization or department, they may have feelings of being the token. Feeling like a token causes Black people to focus on their behavior (Dickens et al., 2019). Constantine et al. (2008) also indicated that this form of microaggression causes a great deal of stress for Black people in the workplace because the fear of stereotypes brings on a whole other set of stresses for Black people and people of color.

Afraid of What They Might Think - Stereotype Threat

Sometimes a person has a concern about their ability based on preconceived ideations that society may place on them, specifically in the workplace (Bergeron et al., 2006; Cortland & Kinias, 2019). When people experience a threat that stereotypes associated with their race, age or gender will impact their ability to be successful, people tend to perform worse than their actual ability, which is based on the fear that the stereotype is true (Bergeron et al., 2006; Cortland & Kinias, 2019; Chung et al., 2010; Roberson & Kulik, 2007). This phenomenon, known as *stereotype threat*, was initially used in an educational setting to identify why Black students performed poorly on standardized tests, like the AP Exams and GRE, when compared to their White counterparts (Roberson & Kulik, 2007; Steele & Aronson, 1995; Stricker & Ward, 2004), as well as when White students performed worse than their Asian counterparts on a math test (Aronson et al., 1999). Since the inception of research related to stereotype threat, more research has been conducted to determine how stereotype threat manifests in the workplace for women (Roberson & Kulik, 2007), particularly surrounding promotions (Chung et al., 2010), job satisfaction (Cortland & Kinias, 2019), job performance (Bergeron et al., 2006), and leadership (Hoyt & Murphy, 2016). Stereotype threat is considered yet another barrier to advancement and one of the reasons for the existence of glass ceiling, which will be discussed later in this paper (Bergeron et al., 2006).

The idea that stereotypes associated with Black women can negatively affect professional aspirations causes anxiety, taking a psychological toll (Chung et al., 2010; Hoyt & Murphy, 2016; Roberson & Kulik, 2007). von Hippel et al. (2011) identified the stress and anxiety that stereotype threat causes, which leads to negative attitudes toward work. Anyone who seeks employment must contend with the fact that there is some form of stereotype that may influence

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decisions regarding their placement, positioning, promotion, and efficacy in the workplace (Bergeron et al., 2006). Furthermore, von Hippel et al.'s research revealed that when men are compared from a social perspective, there is a greater fear of stereotype threat, and that stereotype threat in turn is correlated with reduced confidence to attain career aspirations.

Having stereotype threat occupy one's psyche has an impact on positive job performance (Roberson & Kulik, 2007). In addition, women are concerned with whether they are capable of leading a department or organization as well as men (Eagly & Karau, 2002). The stereotypes result in a lack of motivation to stay with an organization, feelings of disrespect (Pinel & Paulin, 2005), and the intention to quit (Pinel & Paulin, 2005; von Hippel et al., 2011), thus contributing to the already disproportionate number of women, specifically Black women, in executive level positions and higher.

Steele's (1997) research introducing stereotype threat theory identified three conditions that must be in place for there to be stereotype threat. The first is that there must be a stereotype that is common in society about a specific group. The second condition is that there must be an identification of an area in an individual's life that is staked on the self-perception of a given ability. For example, a female student may identify with the area of being a great test taker. Historically she has received good grades and scholarships as a result, and she will expect this to repeat. The identity relationship between herself and her ability to test well has been established. Identification with her self-perception greatly depends on her success as a great test taker. The last condition is that there must be relevance to the negative stereotype and the performance of a task. This usually happens when a woman is in a role that is incongruent with her gender, likely causing insecurities.

Stereotype threat manifests for women when certain variables come into play. Figure 3

shows the process of stereotype threat, based on the research of Roberson and Kralik (2007). The

employee has to have a vested interest in a difficult task that is related to an associated

stereotype. In wondering why the task is difficult, the employee is reminded of the stereotype

based on the context of the situation. While performing the task, the stereotype threat is

presented. The threat results in the employer questioning the employee's competence and ability

and the employee feeling frustrated and diminished motivation.

Figure 3

The Stereotype Threat Process
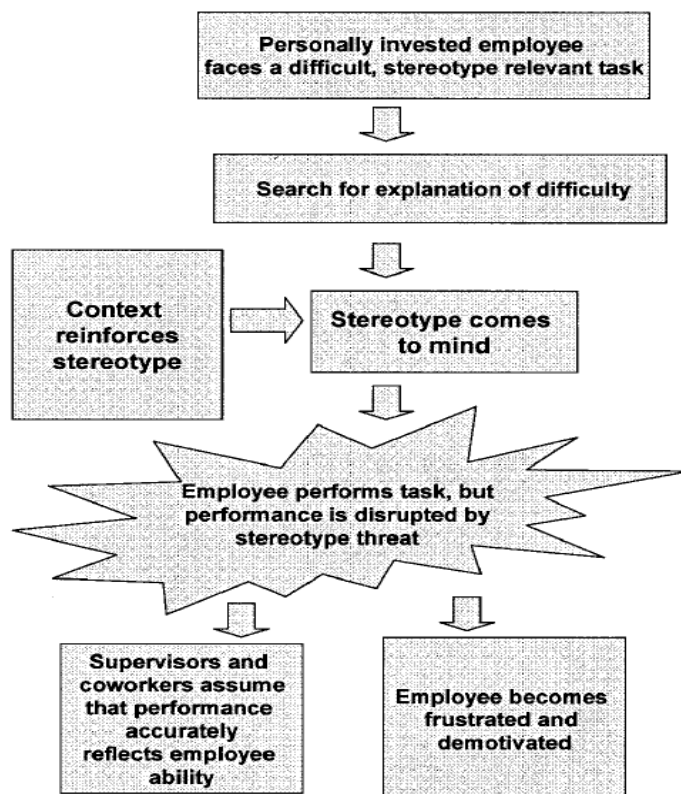
Reprinted from "Stereotype Threat at Work," by L. Roberson & C. T. Kulik, 2007, *The Academy of Management Perspectives, 21*, 30 (https://doi.org/10.5465/amp.2007.25356510). Copyright 2007 by the authors. Reprinted with permission by the Academy of Management.

Research regarding women and stereotype threat has led to findings that suggest how women would combat stereotype threat or would require attention to organizational and corporate cultures shifting to better meet the professional needs of women and the attitudes toward them (Roberson & Kralik, 2007; von Hippel et al., 2011). In a worst-case scenario, one way to deal with stereotype threat is for women to disconnect the psychological connection with their performance and their self-esteem so that optimal performance on a task is not as important (Roberson & Kulik, 2007). The problem with this solution is it may lead to an employee becoming disengaged and less motivated and an organization that does not get the best output from the employees. A better strategy is to interrupt stereotype threat by suggesting a task strategy that would reduce the relevance of the task. This allows for any assumptions about the task that could be seen as liabilities to become assets (Kray et al., 2002). Also, supervisors and managers may call out the stereotype prior to the employee attempting a task in order to reduce the stereotype relevance of the task (Roberson & Kulik, 2007). Doing so mitigates the anxiety the perceived stereotype would cause in tasks where the stereotype is not acknowledged. It is also important to ensure that groups who encounter stereotype threat have access to role models, mentors, and peer support (Hall et al., 2012; Hite, 2004; Hoyt & Murphy, 2016).

It's Not What You Know, But Who You Know - Mentorships and Sponsorships

Mentorships for Black women in the workplace have been previously mentioned; this section will address additional content on the topic. Mentoring and peer support are strategies to aid Black women as they rise to executive levels and higher; these strategies have been mentioned across the literature regarding barriers that Black women face (Erskine et al., 2021; Hall et al., 2012; Hite, 2004; Hoyt & Murphy, 2016). The importance of mentorships for Black women in spaces where they are often overlooked for opportunities of promotion and networking

is emphasized in much of the literature (Glass & Cook; 2020; Spates et al., 2020). In her research looking at sociocultural factors that influence Black women's advancement in higher education, Candia-Bailey's (2016) participants discussed the difficulty of not having access to mentors and sponsors because the good old boys' network kept them out of spaces and networking opportunities. This finding is consistent with the research conducted by Opengart and Germain (2018), which discussed how mentoring programs can downplay the good old boys' network.

Other reasons for mentorships emerged in literature (Candia-Bailey, 2016; Holder et al., 2015; Ibarra et al., 2010; Kingsberry, 2015). Because the number of Black women is often small when compared to White women, Black men, or White men is the workplace, Black women feel out of place and misunderstood (Hall et al., 2012). Having access to mentors also makes it easier for them to have an ally in the workplace, especially when they need someone to speak on their behalf about misinterpretations of their actions or perceived stereotypes. These mentors can also coach up-and-coming Black women in their respective industries and serve as confidants. Unfortunately, there is at least one account indicating that although mentors are important for elevation and visibility, even if Black women may have access to mentors, the mentorship is meaningless if the mentors lack power and influence themselves (Erskine et al., 2021).

Afraid to Speak and Pushed Aside - Silenced and Marginalized

Microaggressions often cause Black women to be silenced and marginalized because they do not want to live up to associated stereotypes (Kilgore et al., 2020; Knoxville & Neville, 2015; Lewis, 2013; Sue et al., 2019). Black women experiencing being silenced and marginalized is evident in various situations and industries, including sports (Harrison et al., 2020), politics (Crenshaw, 1989; Schneider & Bos, 2019), education (B. N. Anderson, 2020), and business (Bloch et al., 2021; Hite, 2004). Lewis (2013) conducted a study to construct and validate new

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measures of microaggressions. Her findings revealed that participants were silenced and marginalized in school, work and other professional settings. Participants acknowledged feeling unheard, having their authority challenged, having their comments ignored, and being excluded from networking opportunities. These barriers make it difficult for Black women to rise up the corporate hierarchy. Likewise, Constantine et al. (2008) conducted a qualitative study with Black faculty at a university. Like the participants in Lewis's study, professors acknowledged microaggressions that made them feel invisible and having no access to mentors. In addition, participants stated that their educational level was reduced (e. g., being called "miss" or "professor" instead of being given the title "Dr.") and it was difficult to tell if the microaggressions they experienced were due to race or gender.

Is Her Black Beautiful? – Assumptions About Style and Beauty

Black women often deal with microaggressions that relate to assumptions about how they communicate as well as their physical appearance (Knoxville & Neville, 2015; Lewis et al., 2016). When people make assumptions about Black women's communication styles, Black women are often accused of *talking White.* Conversely, because of their race, non-Black colleagues attempt to speak to them in African American Vernacular English (Lewis et al., 2016). Black women also encounter being self-conscious when they do not speak in a grammatically correct way (Constantine et al., 2008), or experience pressure to calm down or not be seen as angry when speaking (Lewis, 2013). Where physical appearance is concerned, Black women encounter White people trying to touch their natural hair, only giving compliments when their hair is straightened or permed and making assumptions about Black women's body types (Constantine et al., 2008; Lewis, 2013; Lewis et al., 2016). Black female executives may also

feel pressured to wear their hair straight rather than in natural hair styles, such as braids or natural curls (Dickens et al., 2019; Hunter, 1998).

Another challenge Black women face, not only in society but also in corporate settings, is being judged based on skin complexion. For Black women, being victims of colorism occurs within the race and outside of the race (Hall, 2017; Hunter, 2007). Instead of focusing on race or ethnicity, *colorism* focuses on skin tone. Like racism, colorism can manifest as overt and covert behaviors (Erskine et al., 2021; Hunter, 2007). Hunter (1998) identified the skin color stratification of Black women being linked directly to slavery and the objectification of Black women during that time. Hunter explained that, first, slave owners would commit acts of sexual violence, including rape, with their female slaves, producing light-skinned offspring; this is the initial point where skin tone distinctions were made. Then, light-skinned female slaves were considered desirable because the complexion of their skin was more like their slave owners than dark-skinned female slaves. Light-skinned female slaves were considered more delicate, more beautiful, and kinder than dark-skinned female slaves (Hunter, 2007). Hunter (2007) posited that because of skin stratification, a couple of concepts derived from the color distinctions, the first being the fact that *gendered colorism* has a greater negative effect on dark-skinned women than dark-skinned men.

The other concept that arose from skin stratification is that light-skinned Black women's social capital is maximized because their complexion is more accepted by society due to their proximity to the Whiteness that garners privilege and opportunity in this country (Hall, 2017). Hunter (1998) identified how proximity to Whiteness was determined by comparing a brown paper bag to one's complexion and using a hair comb to see if hair would flow through the comb or have difficulty being combed to the ends of the tresses. Such practices were perpetuated and

ushered in the ideology of what qualities have the most aesthetic value. Hunter (2007) highlighted the stigma associated with being dark-skinned Black women and not possessing the Eurocentric qualities of beauty, including light complexion, straight hair, and thinner noses and lips. On the contrary, dark-skinned Black women may be considered ugly, unfeminine, and barbaric (Hunter, 1998). The implications of the European standard of beauty on a darker complexioned Black woman may thwart her chances of elevation, despite her competence, experience and education, because there is a tendency for society to reward light-skinned Black women based on their complexion (Hall, 2017).

Light-skinned Black women enjoy privileges and opportunities that, in many cases, they share with White women, solely based on the color of their skin (Goldsmith et al., 2007; Hall, 2017; Hunter, 1998, 2007). Goldsmith et al. (2007) asserted that light-skinned Black people are considered in-group and dark-skinned Black people are considered out-group because dark skinned Black people deal more with prejudice, racism, and discrimination. Dark-skinned Black women are viewed as intimidating, suspicious, loud, and having bad attitudes (Hall, 2017). Already dealing with having to juggle the intersection of gender and race makes it that much more difficult to navigate challenges when another element is added for which Black women can be discriminated against. Studies have revealed that, although there is no difference in the wage earnings of light-skinned and dark-skinned Black men (Goldsmith et al., 2007), light-skinned Black women tend to earn more money than dark-skinned women, although both sets of women still earn less money than White men (Goldsmith et al., 2007; Hall 2017; Hunter, 1998, 2007; Saperstein & Penner, 2012).

It should be noted that although light-skinned Black women benefit from some of the privileges afforded to them because of the closeness of their skin tone to that of White women,

they also have to navigate a whole other set of challenges. Within the Black race, light-skinned women have to contend with proving that they belong to the race (Hall, 2017; Hunter, 2007). This could alienate them in a corporate setting if they are afforded privileges to which dark-skinned women do not receive access. All of the aforementioned assumptions are obstacles are difficult for Black women to overcome when trying to access executive levels and higher in the entertainment industry.

She Has No One to Advocate for Her - Aversive Racism

One factor that Black women may not consider or be aware of is another subtle type of racism. Dovidio and Gaertner (1999) contended that, due to Civil Rights laws being made and legislation being passed, overt discrimination and prejudice were mitigated over time. *Aversive racism*, like racial microaggression, is a subtle form of racism or discrimination that is subconscious. The difference between aversive racism and racial microaggressions is that aversive racism is a result of the actions and words of White people who hold egalitarian views and believe that they are not prejudiced (Dovidio & Gaertner, 1999, 2000; Dovidio et al., 2002, 2017; Murrell, 2021). Believing that they are well-meaning because they do not agree with, participate in, and sympathize with explicit and blatant racist practices, aversive racists' attitudes toward Black people are contradictory (Dovidio & Gaertner, 2000). The historical racial practices that Black people have experienced in the United States have helped to shape White people's perceptions of and ideologies about Black people (Dovidio et al., 2002). The murder of George Floyd, an unarmed Black man whose murder was video recorded as a White Minneapolis police officer rested his knee on Mr. Floyd's neck, is an example of a recent case of aversive racism. As disconcerting as it was to the public, the inaction of any of the officers to end this heinous act has been a topic of discussion since the 2020 murder (Murrell, 2021). Murrell (2021)

indicated that, oftentimes, aversive racism causes White people to be bystanders of racial injustices made toward Black people, even though the White people may not necessarily agree with the mistreatment of Black people.

Based on the description of aversive racists and racism, conjectures may be raised regarding the implications that aversive racism has on the lived experiences of Black women who aspire to elevate to executive levels or higher in entertainment industry organization. First, because aversive racism is deeply connected to the historical racial biases that are strengthened by perpetuated societal ideologies (Murrell, 2021) regarding Black people, Black women's ability to move up the corporate ladder in entertainment industry organizations stands to grow and improve in smaller increments than their White female counterparts. This assertion is supported by the fact that shows that, where White women's 14.5% increase in board seats in Fortune 100 companies from 2016-2020 is just slightly higher than Black women's 14.3% increase, the disparity is still significant (Alliance for Board Diversity, 2021). In 2016, there were 221 White women occupying board seats; the number of board seats grew to 268 in 2020 (Alliance for Board Diversity, 2021). Black women occupied 28 board seats in Fortune 100 companies in 2016, growing to 34 seats in 2020. Similarly, in 2020 Fortune 500 companies, White women held 1,226 board seats, which represented a 20.6% growth over the amount in 2016 (Alliance for Board Diversity, 2021). In the same timeframe, Black women held 183 board seats, reflecting an 18.8% growth over the total number of seats that were held in 2016. Fortune 500 companies had 3,627 White men and 327 Black men in Board seats in 2020 (Alliance for Board Diversity, 2021). Even though the number of White and Black men depicted represents a 3% and a 1.5% decline in board seats, respectively, it provides a clear assessment of not only the disproportionality of boards seats held by Black women and Black men when compared to their

White counterparts, but also how aversive racism may play a part in access to opportunities for Black people in corporate America.

Secondly, the data that has been underscored alludes to the likelihood of Black women being under the leadership of White men. In a 2020 survey conducted by Lean In assessing White men and women's view on their ability to be allies for Black men and women and other people of color in the workplace, the results supported the effects of aversive racism on Black men and women and other people of color (Lean In, 2020b). When asked if they saw themselves as allies of people of color, 82% of White men and 81% of White women said they were. This speaks to the perception of well-meaning White people who hold egalitarian views and believe themselves to not be prejudiced (Dovidio et al., 2002, 2017; Dovidio & Gaertner, 1999, 2000; Murrell, 2021). Only 45% of Black women and 55% of Latinas expressed feeling like they had allies at work (Lean In, 2020b). Contrary to the perception of their ability to be allies for Black and Latino women, 10% of Black women and 19% of Latinas felt that White people were their strongest allies in the workplace. In another study, 12% of Black women considered White people as their strongest advocate (Coqual, 2020). Additionally, 45% of White women said that White people were their strongest allies (Lean In, 2020b). The disparity in the sentiments of White people compared to Black and Latino women correlates to findings obtained by Dovidio and Gaertner (2000). Reviewing the 10-year difference in hiring practices, attitudes, and patterns of Black and White people who had the similar qualifications for a position, White people were more likely to select White people to fill the position. This ultimately led to in-group favoritism (Dovidio et al., 2017; Dovidio & Gaertner, 2000).

Studies and observations have demonstrated that when there is ambiguity in the basis for social judgment, discrimination will likely occur, thus giving a White person the benefit of the

doubt over a Black person when the two have similar qualifications or there is ambiguity in the situation (Dovidio et al., 2017; McGillicuddy-De Lisi et al., 2006, McManus et al., 2019). In a worst-case scenario, this could mean that despite her qualifications, experience, and competence, a Black woman would stand to miss out on an opportunity for advancement up the corporate ladder if she was up for the position alongside a White woman. When asked if they spoke out against discrimination at work, 55-58% of White men and women, Black women, and Latinas said they did, with Black women admitting to a greater percentage of retaliation for speaking out against discrimination than any of the four groups when doing so (Lean In, 2020b). This data supports the notion that White people will likely be bystanders when there are injustices and discrimination toward Black people (Murrell, 2021). Furthermore, this finding also speaks to the importance of White employees, particularly White men, who have the greatest likelihood of supervising Black women, becoming allies of qualified Black women in the workplace and advocating for more opportunities for them in underrepresented positions (Lean In, 2020b).

The idea that aversive racists will lean away from blatant discriminatory practices opens the door for strategies and greater efforts to identify biased behavior against Black women. People who make a conscientious effort to support unprejudiced behaviors, yet whose behaviors exhibit racial biases, often experience guilt and misgivings about potential behaviors that would occur instead of what behaviors in which they should engage with minorities (Dovidio & Gaertner, 1999). When people bring their biases to their consciousness, it allows them to be less likely to engage in subtle discriminatory actions. Although racial microaggressions (Sue et al., 2019) and aversive racism (Dovidio & Gaertner, 1999, Dovidio et al., 2002) are both subtle forms of racism, they manifest in very different ways. Racial microaggressions are a result of innuendo and commentary that cannot be easily traced as racism (Dovidio & Gaertner, 1999).

Aversive racism is a result of the inaction of White people who have egalitarian views, although they are less inclined to support Black people when discriminatory or racist practices impact their lives and opportunities (Dovidio & Gaertner, 1999; Dovidio et al., 2002). In either case, Black women have to contend with navigating two of the most indistinct forms of racism as they move upward from executive levels in entertainment industry companies. Therefore, in theory and based on the literature, when aversive racists supervise Black women or make decisions about them in the workplace, aversive racists' subtle actions toward Black women may impact Black women's ability to be seen as qualified or capable. This is because of the biases that White supervisors may harbor toward Black women.

Discrimination Wears Her Down - Racial Battle Fatigue

The preceding sections have discussed the barriers and obstacles that impede Black women from attaining their professional aspirations. The intersectionality of gender and race has placed them in a position that neither Black men nor White women have to withstand. Being tried and tested based on the intersectionality of their Blackness and their femaleness becomes tiresome for them over time. *Racial battle fatigue* is a way to describe how those feelings of being consumed by these interactions on a daily basis. Much of the literature regarding racial battle fatigue is viewed from the perspective of Blacks attending or working at predominantly White institutions (PWIs) of higher learning (Chancellor, 2019; Corbin et al., 2018; Pizarro & Kohli, 2020; Sue et al., 2019). Nevertheless, racial battle fatigue transcends settings and professions. Some of the seminal research related to distress that comes from racial discrimination over time began with the research of W. A. Smith et al. (2011), looking at what is called mundane, extreme environmental stress (MEES), which Black men encountered at PWIs. Pierce (1996) was responsible for initiating the study that identified the definition of stress and

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connecting systemic racism with stress related to racism. He also pointed out that the assumption of an inferior target group gives credence to the superior group, thus giving them license to act in a way that continues the disparity in treatment of the so-called inferior group.

Because minorities encounter racial microaggressions from a young age, it is highly likely that they will experience fatigue from discrimination and negative racial interactions (Okello et al., 2020; Pizarro & Kohli, 2020). As mentioned previously, people of color have to contend with hypervisibility (Constantine et al., 2008), identity shifting (Dickens & Chavez, 2018), and not being able to present their true selves to protect White people's feelings (DiAngelo, 2011). From a perspective of looking at advantages, although hypervisibility subjects people of color to compromise their true selves, Dickens et al. (2019) suggest that hypervisibility also enables Black people to manage their behaviors so as to limit the negative perceptions that may be made about them in the workplace.

The discriminatory and racist practices of which people of color are victims become burdensome for them (Pizarro & Kohli, 2020; Sewell et al., 2016). Pizarro and Kohli (2020) looked at racial battle fatigue's impact on Black teachers. In Pizarro and Kohli's study, one teacher's account of hypervisibility chronicled how her White colleague watched her performance. The teacher felt like her White colleagues often mistrusted and misread her interactions with her students, with whom the teacher felt she had strong connections. In one instance the teacher experienced a White colleague trying to mediate a situation for which the White colleague had no context to intervene. The teacher described this feeling as her colleagues having to *handle* her, without giving her credit for being a professional and being capable of having a relationship with her student. This and other microaggressions that she encountered, including being told that her children and family interfered with her ability to be fully committed

to the work, became taxing, and after 6 years, the teacher left the community that she loved and that loved her. Racial battle fatigue causes the most committed employees so much stress that companies stand to lose their best employees (Okello et al., 2020; Pizarro & Kohli, 2020). Other research has found racial battle fatigue to bring about suppressed rage and the need to prepare for physical battle (Quaye et al., 2020). Quaye et al. (2020) also found that hyperalertness and excessive scrutiny lead to employee distractions. In Quaye et al.'s study, participants indicated the difficulty of being optimally productive, for example, focusing on one's job responsibilities, when they do not feel like they have room to make mistakes. Excessive scrutiny of Black employees by well-intentioned White employers still cause them to engage in discriminatory actions and decisions (Murrell, 2021) that ultimately breeds stereotypes suggesting that Black people are not as competent as White employees.

Navigating racism depletes the health and well-being of Black people, ultimately making it difficult for them to concentrate on given tasks in the workplace (Okello et al., 2020). From childhood, racial microaggressions create long-term effects on Black people physically, psychologically, and emotionally (Franklin, 2019). The effects resulting from the pain and trauma brought on by racism cause Black people to develop strategies that allow them to practice resilience from racism (Quaye et al., 2020). The development of strategies may be mistaken as Black people being unaffected by these instances of racial microaggressions, which Okello et al. (2020) call *wearing the mask*. Just like the sentiment of the poem "We Wear the Mask," by Paul Laurence Dunbar (1913/1993), hiding behind their truth is how Black people adjust to microaggressions. However, it is necessary for them to find ways to deal with microaggressions on the job. Other strategies include suppression of true feelings and emotions, so as to not live up to the stereotypes of being angry or aggressive (Quaye et al., 2020). Pizarro and Kohli's (2020)

research on racial battle fatigue uncovered how educators created feelings of community in affinity groups where they shared their experiences dealing with racism and microaggressions in predominantly White spaces. Having the support group served as a form of refuge for the educators and proved to be a healthy way to work through the barriers they faced. It also allowed them to remain hopeful as they continued their transformative work in their particular school community. Although many of the examples provided take place in educational settings, racial battle fatigue is still likely to occur to Black women in the entertainment industry.

It should be noted that racial battle fatigue is not only experienced as a result of Black women's interactions with non-Black colleagues; Black women face racial battle fatigue while dealing with Black colleagues as well (Hall et al., 2012). Hall et al.'s (2012) study pinpointed some of the intragroup racism and comments that also mentally wear on Black women in the workplace. Some of the examples included Black male colleagues telling Black women to not be aggressive in the workplace and Black women telling other Black women that their promotions were achieved based on complexion. These few examples of inter- and intraracist encounters cause Black women to feel mentally and psychologically fatigued and isolated in the workplace.

Sue et al. (2019) offered suggestions for how best to address racial microaggressions. These strategies should be addressed on micro and macro levels, from individuals to society at large. Through microinterventions—which are intentional and unintentional words and deeds that seek to affirm, validate, and support and encourage targets of microaggressions—marginalized and oppressed individuals and groups are reminded that they are not alone and that they do matter. Figure 4 details how these microinterventions may occur.

As She's Coping, She's Hoping - Coping Strategies

Despite the countless acts of discrimination and oppression Black women face in society and in the workplace, there is another barrier that they have to contend with as they seek to move up the corporate ladder. Stress manifests itself in various forms and has an impact on the social and emotional aspects (J. E. Everett et al., 2010) of Black women's lives as a result of gendered racism (Carr et al., 2014; Spates et al., 2020). Empirical studies provide accounts of Black women who encounter, navigate, and circumvent stressors with various coping mechanisms (Dickens & Chavez, 2018; Knoxville & Neville, 2015; Spates et al., 2020; Thomas et al., 2008). As Black women spend more time in their respective industries, they realize the criticality of not losing heart in their difficult and challenging reality.

Black women who are corporate leaders who try to buffer themselves against humiliation and marginalization must use coping strategies (Holder et al., 2015) to address overbearing stressors in the workplace. These stressors are overbearing because Black women can easily be called out and treated differently than their colleagues (Hall et al., 2012). This is a reality where the effects of the intersection of racism and sexism breed everyday experiences (J. E. Everett et al., 2010).

The methodology Black women use to cope depends greatly on the stressor they are facing. J. E. Everett et al. (2010) described stressors as being the conceptualized problems, adversity, or threats that challenge people's capacity to adapt to them. Additionally, educational and professional obstacles that work in tandem, which include racism and sexism, result in Black women experiencing a psychological toll (Dickens & Chavez, 2018). This is certainly the case when Black women feel like they are always under a microscope, so they try to avoid living up to the stereotypes associated with them (Hall et al., 2012).

Figure 4

Microintervention Strategies

Microintervention strategies		
Directed Toward Perpetrator Microaggressions	**Directed Toward Institutional Macroaggressions**	**Directed Toward Societal Macroaggressions**
Make the "Invisible" Visible		
• Undermine the meta-communication • Make the meta-communication explicit • Challenge the stereotype • Broaden the ascribed trait to a universal human behavior • Ask for clarification	• Keep a log of inequitable practices as you see them • Run your observations by allies who can corroborate • Solicit feedback from fellow coworkers/students • Monitor trends around recruiting, hiring, retention, promotion	• Create partnerships with academic institutions to analyze data related to disparities in education, health care, employment • Disseminate research on disparity trends to general public and media • Organize peaceful demonstrations
Disarm the Microaggression/Macroaggression		
• Express disagreement • State values and set limits • Describe what is happening • Use an exclamation • Use non-verbal communication • Interrupt and redirect	• Boycott, strike, or protest the institution • Request meetings with intermediary or senior leadership to share perspectives • Exercise right to serve on boards to voice your concerns • Delineate financial repercussions of continued macroaggressions • Notify press or other media outlets	• Protest political leaders who reinforce inequity and division/support those who do not • Revise and veto unjust community policies, practices, and laws • Lobby to your congressmen or senators • Attend televised town hall meetings to voice your concerns
Educate the Offender		
• Point out the commonality • Appeal to the offenders values and principles • Differentiate between intent and impact • Promote empath • Point to how they benefit	• Describe the benefits of workforce diversity • Institute long-term mandated training on cultural sensitivity for all levels • Infuse multicultural principles into organizational mission and values	• Raise children to understand concepts like prejudice, discrimination, and racism. • Challenge silence/lack of response to macroaggression • Identify shared mutual goals among people • Increase community's exposure to positive examples of diverse cultures to offset negative stereotypes and biases
Seek External Intervention		
• Alert Authorities • Report the act • Seek therapy/counseling • Seek support through spirituality/religion/community • Set up a buddy system • Attend support groups	• Report inequitable practices to your union • Create networking/mentoring opportunities for underrepresented employees/students • Maintain an open, supportive, and responsive environment • Call on consultants to conduct external assessments/cultural audits	• Foster cooperation over competition • Foster a sense of community belonging • Create caucuses for allies and targets • Participate in healing circles, vigils, memorials that remind us of the consequences of hate

Reprinted from "Disarming Racial Microaggressions: Microintervention Strategies for Targets, White Allies, and Bystanders, by D. W. Sue, S. Alsaidi, M. N. Awad, E. Glaeser, C. Calle, N. Mendez, 2019, *American Psychological Association, 74*(1), 135 (https://doi.org/10.1037/amp0000296). Copyright 2019 by the authors. Reprinted with permission.

As mentioned earlier, empirical research uncovered various types of stress and the impact that many women have encountered via multiple daily stressors (Dickens & Chavez, 2018; J. E.

Everett et al., 2010; Holder et al., 2015; King, 2005; Okello et al., 2020; Pizarro & Kohli, 2020).

From environmental to social and professional, stressors also may impact not only Black

women's intersectionality, but also their class and economic station in life (Dickens & Chavez,

2018; J. E. Everett et al., 2010; Thomas et al., 2008). Black women often experience mistaken

identity: the assumption that they are blue collar workers or sales associates. Thomas et al.

(2008) provided the vignette of a Black woman who is an author in a hotel elevator with a White

man who assumes she works in the hotel and with no hesitation asks her when breakfast starts.

His racist, sexist, and classist assumptions placed the Black woman in a box that his bias

perceived her to best, and most likely, fit in. Such an occurrence is not uncommon for Black

women.

Black women access their spiritual and religious beliefs to cope the the aforementioned

interactions in the workplace (Bacchus, 2008; Bacchus & Holley, 2005; Holder et al., 2015;

Spates et al., 2020; Thomas et al., 2008). A study conducted by Bacchus (2008) found that Black

women often find strength to cope with discriminatory stress and racism, not only in life, but also

in the workplace, by seeking out their spiritual and religious beliefs. Aponte (2002) defined

spirituality from a secular and religious perspective, indicating that spirituality is:

> a universal dimension of life that lends a meaning to our existence, sets a moral standard
>
> for living, and assumes some sense of moral connection among people at the very heart
>
> of our humanity. Some spirituality is based on ethics and philosophy. (p. 16)

Furthermore, Aponte explained that the source and end of spirituality take place in the

supernatural realm of a deity and is often experienced in formal religion. Bacchus found that

97% of women in her study used spirituality as a way to cope. This coping comes in various

forms for Black women, including meditation (Bacchus & Holley, 2005), prayer (Bacchus, 2008; Hawkins, 2017), and relying on their belief in God (Hawkins, 2017).

It is common for Black women to cope with stressors by relying on their network of support (Haynes et al., 2016; Spates et al., 2020). It is also noted through qualitative research that Black women would benefit from social support in the workplace when dealing with discrimination (Jerald et al., 2017; Linnabery et al., 2014; Shorter-Gooden. 2004). *Leaning on shoulders* is what Black women do when they surround themselves with similar people in their social circle (Linnabery et al., 2014). These people include parents, siblings, church members, and friends. J. E. Everett et al. (2010) suggested that these support systems allow Black women to improve their self-esteem and self-efficacy. One other common support for dealing with racial microaggressions is connecting with someone who has navigated microaggressions to rise up the corporate hierarchy. Holder et al. (2015) suggested connecting with a mentor or sponsor as another way of coping with racial microaggressions. A Black woman's survival is based on her ability to access her cultural, economic, and social resources from society at large and her local community (King, 2005).

She Fell, After She Got Up - The Glass Cliff

Various literature provides an explanation for the negative consequences or penalties (Glass & Cook, 2020) that are assigned to women for being both Black and female (Catalyst, 2004; Hawkins, 2017; Lewis, 2013; Thomas et al., 2008). Glass and Cook (2020) went so far as to call the penalty a *risk task*. The first is the *glass cliff*, a term first introduced by Ryan and Haslam (2005, 2007). Their study examined how the financial status of a company, viewed from the perspective of the London Stock Exchange, was determined based on whether the head of the company's board was male or female (Ryan et al., 2016). The study looked at the company's

standing in the Exchange immediately before the appointment of the board's head and immediately after the appointment. The study did not determine that the company was on a downward trend that appointment of a woman did not result in company performance. it was discovered that there were already fluctuations in the company's share prices leading to the woman's appointment. It was typical that prior to a man's appointment to the board, there was stability in the company's share prices. In contrast, it was noted that 5 months prior to a woman's appointment, there was a tendency for companies to experience poor share price performance. As a result, the claim was made that women leaders cause poor company performance (Haslam & Ryan, 2008; Ryan et al., 2016; Ryan & Haslam, 2005, 2007).

From this study emerged the glass cliff metaphor, which relates to how women and minorities are assigned to leadership positions in times of crisis (Ashby et al., 2006; Cook & Glass, 2014, Glass & Cook, 2020). Additionally, women are expected to make changes and end the crisis, yet the difficulty of being able to save an organization or department often results in career-ending situations (Glass & Cook, 2020). The literature highlights glass cliff experiences in multiple industries, including corporations (Haslam & Ryan, 2008), politics (O'Neill et al., 2021), sports (Ahn & Cunningham, 2020), and education (Peterson, 2016).

Based on the initial research done by Ryan and Haslam (2005), which presented the ideology of the glass cliff, Cook and Glass (2014) furthered the research to explore factors that were implications of glass cliff theory. Because previous empirical studies regarding glass cliff implications resulted in conflicting results (Ashby et al., 2006; Haslam & Ryan, 2008; Ryan & Haslam, 2005), Cook and Glass (2014) sought to resolve the findings by investigating factors that shaped the probability of promotions and leadership tenure of White women and minorities. Because the glass cliff theory does not take into account potential consequences that may result

in the glass cliff experience for occupational minorities (Taylor, 2010) after their promotion, Cook and Glass (2014) explored those areas in a quantitative study.

Seeking to look at occupational minorities and test the relevance of the glass cliff theory for them, Cook and Glass (2014) predicted the following: (a) occupational minorities are more likely to be appointed CEO in struggling firms, (b) occupational minority CEOs will have shorter tenures than traditional CEOs, and (c) occupational minority CEOs will be replaced by White men CEOs if firm performance is weak during their tenure. This study used CEO transitions that took place in Fortune 500 companies from 1996-2020, a 15-year timespan. The dataset included CEOs of whom 21 were women, including 17 White and four minorities; 40 CEOs were men, of whom 36 were minorities, along with the aforementioned four minority women. After reviewing and analyzing the transitions and the likelihood of who would be appointed in what instance, the following information resulted, respective to the aforementioned predictions: (a) the predictions was indicated that occupational minorities experienced a glass cliff after they rose to CEO, (b) because the appointments to CEO were mostly toward the end of the 15-year period, the tenures were shorter. Only two occupational minorities were appointed as CEO in comparison to 24 traditional leaders. Therefore, the shorter tenures may have impacted this finding. Finally, (c) when a White man replaced an occupational minority CEO, it was noted that the rate of exchange (ROE) for the 3, 2, and 1-year average prior was significant and negative. Conversely, when a White man CEO replaced another White man or an occupational minority CEO replaced another occupational minority CEO, the ROE was positive for the 3, 2, and 1-year average for the firm.

Ryan and Haslam (2007) noted that often occupational minorities accept promotions during dubious organizational times in fear that such an opportunity may never be presented to

them again. Further, upon appointment, they are denied access to networks that ultimately limit their access to information and support in the workplace (Glass & Cook, 2020). When occupational minorities are not able to deliver a company from its crisis, oftentimes, after minority leaders are replaced by traditional, or White males, this phenomenon is known as the *savior effect* (Cook & Glass, 2014). Thus, it may appear that women, in particular, are incapable of leading companies. In the rare case when women are successful, their performance is otherwise viewed as unsuccessful (Manzi & Heilman, 2021). Taking into consideration the fact that even with success, a Black woman may still be considered unsuccessful, the glass cliff is, undoubtedly, one of the challenges that may be perceived as impossible to navigate.

Even Her Stilettos Can't Break Through - The Glass and Concrete Ceilings

One of the most common barriers that Black women and women in general face when trying to rise to executive positions is the impervious *glass ceiling*. The glass ceiling describes invisible barriers that hinder women from reaching the upper rungs of leadership (Manzi & Heilman, 2021). Instances of women facing the glass ceiling have emerged from several industries, including accounting (Cohen et al., 2020), high-tech firms (Fernandez & Campero, 2017), corporations (Lewellyn & Muller-Kahle, 2020), and academia (Manzi & Heilman, 2021). Wells (2017) pointed out that although the glass ceiling may be used to describe the plight of Black women as they rose up the corporate ladder, historically, the term was used to describe the barriers White women faced as they sought higher positions in their respective fields. Therefore, the term *concrete ceiling* was created in research done by Catalyst (1999) while looking specifically at Black women's difficulty promoting to executive levels and beyond (Holder et al., 2015).

Focusing in on the idea that contrary to glass, concrete is opaque and more difficult to penetrate, Black women facing the concrete ceiling indicates that not only are opportunities to advance more difficult, but also it is more likely that they do not even get access to those opportunities, nor can they access the people who can help them penetrate the barrier (Catalyst, 1999, 2004; Erskine et al., 2021). The concrete ceiling also means that informal networks elude Black women and Black women are also ostracized by White women (Catalyst, 2004; Erskine et al., 2021). This barrier is just as challenging as, if not more challenging than, the glass ceiling.

In 1991, President George H. W. Bush created the Glass Ceiling Commission to determine how women and minorities could have greater access to opportunities in corporate America traditionally occupied by White males. The Commission, composed of bipartisan members from the public and private sectors and politicians of various racial and ethnic backgrounds, completed their research and published their recommendations, entitled *Good for Business: Making Full Use of the Nation's Human Capital. The Environmental Scan* (U.S. Department of Labor, 1995). In this document, the chairman called out discrimination in the form of the glass ceiling, which continues to be the distinction denoting the separation between those who prosper in the workplace and those who are seemingly left behind. Despite the recommendations made to assist in breaking the glass ceiling—which included using affirmative action as a tool, including diversity in business plans, and preparing minorities and women for senior positions—the glass ceiling is still a conversation and remains a barrier for Black women, more than 25 years later.

The term glass ceiling is often used loosely and without context or based on situations where women simply have difficulty rising to higher levels in the various industries; to add clarity on the subject, Cotter et al. (2001) took a more in depth look at the glass ceiling. The U.

S. Department of Labor (1995) defined the glass ceiling as artificial barriers based on the attitude or bias of an organization that prevents individuals who are qualified from advancing toward management-level positions. In order to best describe the glass ceiling based on the definition provided by the Glass Ceiling Commission, Cotter et al. (2001) developed four criteria that should be considered when determining if one is really facing a glass ceiling barrier.

- Criterion 1: Inequality in a glass ceiling is represented by a racial or gender difference that is inexplicable by an employee's characteristics that are relevant to a specific job (Cotter et al., 2001). This means the difference in such factors as productivity and preferences may dictate why one does not promote, rather than discrimination. Supporting this notion, Manzi and Heilman (2021) stated that women vary in their performance and some may not be successful. Further, in research where earnings and authority are being studied, controlling for occupation is not appropriate because changes in occupation are the main way people advance. Consider a teacher who becomes a principal and a principal who becomes a superintendent. A considerable portion of the glass ceiling effect is eliminated when controlling for occupation.

- Criterion 2: Inequality in a glass ceiling is represented by a racial or gender difference that is greater in an organization's upper echelon of an outcome than at the lower levels of an outcome (Cotter et al., 2001). Simply put, there must be proof that fewer opportunities are available for women in lower management positions than at executive level positions, and fewer opportunities are available for women at executive level positions than at C-suite level positions. Discrimination is also present when there is a constant lower chance for advancement at upper levels of a corporate

hierarchy when the pool of women available for promotion is greater than the pool of men at the same level.

- Criterion 3: Inequality in a glass ceiling is represented by a racial or gender difference in the changes of promotion into the higher rungs of the organization, and not solely based on the proportions of the race or gender that is currently at the higher levels of the organization (Cotter et al., 2001). Considering Criteria 2 and 3 simultaneously, Cotter et al. (2001) explained that the glass ceiling is present not solely based on the proportion of gender or race at higher levels, but inequality at higher levels is evidently stronger than those at lower levels.

- Criterion 4: Inequality in a glass ceiling is represented by a racial or gender difference that increases over the life of one's career (Cotter et al., 2001). In summary, this means that under the glass ceiling, the career trajectory for women is flatter for women than men during the course of their career.

Based on this study, these four criteria should be considered and assessed to ensure that women are actually facing a glass ceiling.

The glass ceiling has stood between many women and their desire and drive to rise to executive levels and higher (Bloch et al., 2021; Candia-Bailey; 2016; Glass & Cook, 2020; Kingsberry, 2015; Wells, 2017). In many cases, no matter how educated they are, how much experience they have, and how neutral their demeanor is perceived, Black women often get to a point in their respective fields beyond which they are not able to move (Holder et al., 2015). As a result, moving past management levels in organizations is impeded by these barriers that Black women cannot seem to shatter to advance to executive level and C-suite positions.

Despite the fact that in 2019, 14.8% of Black women held bachelor's degrees and 10.1% held graduate degrees or higher, per the U.S. Census Bureau (2019), Black women are still facing considerably more challenges elevating to executive level and higher positions. Despite the data, there seems to be a disparity between perspectives of White women and Black women about their opportunities. Hite's (2004) research compared the perspective of White women's challenges and access to opportunities compared to Black women's perspectives. Of the White women who participated in the research, seven percent of them felt like Black women had less access to being hired as them, compared to 57% of Black women. In addition, 73.9% of White women felt like Black women had the same access as them to being hired, compared to 34.2% of Black women. Finally, 19% of White women felt like Black women had better access to being hired as compared to 8.8% of Black women who felt that White women had better access. The fact that White women have the perception that Black women's opportunities are, in essence, similar to theirs speaks to the amount of diversity training that may be needed for non-Black people in the workplace (Constantine et al., 2008). Data, however, refutes the perception that White women have regarding the opportunities that Black women have. From 2018-2020, White women showed the greatest gain in board seats in Fortune 100 and Fortune 500 companies, attaining a 15% increase in seats in Fortune 100 companies and a 21% increase in seats in Fortune 500 companies (Alliance for Board Diversity, 2021). This finding also speaks to the invisibility that Black women face in the workplace (B. N. Anderson, 2020; Lewis et al., 2016; Sue et al., 2008).

Chapter Summary

The challenges and barriers that Black women face in rising to executive levels and higher seem insurmountable, yet there are ways to overcome them (Erskine et al., 2021). Some

of the experience and the basic undergraduate education on which Black women relied proved to not be the ticket to promotions and opportunities (Hall et al., 2012). Being uniquely dichotomous based on race and gender means that Black women must go the extra mile to add up and compare to men if moving beyond middle management positions is the goal (Davies-Netzley, 1999). Davies-Netzley (1999) noted that women should consider several factors in order to compete with men, which include acquiring higher degrees and finding similarities with men. Finding similarities may entail wearing pant suits, wearing their hair in a bun, and altering the way they speak when engaging in discourse with men. Bloch et al. (2020) argued that Black women would benefit from there being more management positions available in the workplace, which could align with S. K. Johnson et al.'s (2016) suggestion to place more Black women in the hiring pool in order to increase their chances of being hired.

The corporate side of the entertainment industry reflects the challenges that Black women face on the creative side of the entertainment industry and in other industries as well ("Black Women in TV," 1991; Gillepsie, 2021; Lauzen, 2020). It is important to note that playing by the rules in the industry does not always make it easy to advance ("Black Women in TV," 1991). Furthermore, it helps to be connected to people in the industry who have power and influence. This allows Black women to be put into positions where they can ultimately impact the products that are green lighted and amplify the voice of the marginalized and underrepresented (Gillespie, 2021). Although the entertainment industry reflects a disproportionate number of Black women who are working in executive level positions and higher, they still contend with White men making most of the decisions, being power-players, and having the greatest amount of influence (Murray, 2015).

It is also important to hold those in power positions and those who work in human resources responsible for being aware of biases that could impact their decision making as it relates to moving Black women up the corporate ladder (B. N. Anderson, 2020; Hite, 2004). B. N. Anderson (2020) also suggested that there should be a creation of spaces that affirm marginalized groups, like Black women, and create anti-racist policies. Likewise, Erskine et al. (2021) insisted that it is the responsibility of those in power to create work environments that are not hostile toward Black women, develop intersectionality awareness in their organizations, and create mentorship, sponsorship, and coaching opportunities that are relevant and meaningful to Black women. Hite (2004) identified the disparate treatment between Black women and White women in the workplace, noting that because White women are finding ways to navigate barriers and break through the glass ceiling, the policies and practices in the organization should be reviewed to reflect more equitable treatment.

Haynes et al. (2016) highlighted the importance of Black women remaining persistent, not giving up, and engaging in discourse in situations where seemingly impenetrable barriers may have prevented them from being visible. This helps to create a counter-narrative in situations that may have kept them invisible. Although it is important to stay the course, it is equally important for Black women to go where they are valued (Constantine et al., 2008).

The subtle slights of racial microaggressions affect Black women at school, in public, and the workplace (Banks & Landau, 2021). These microaggressions are difficult to assess as racist because of their subtlety. Encountering microaggressions from childhood to adulthood and in multiple settings causes psychological and emotional stress. Nevertheless, Black women have found ways to deal with the stress in the workplace, although racial battle fatigue sets in. Being associated with decades-old stereotypes causes women to have to shift their identities (Dickens

et al., 2019), alter their speech, and change how they act to fit in with White colleagues in their work environment. With all of these factors, making the workplace and opportunities for Black women more equitable and proportionate to the population at large requires effort on a micro and macro level.

Chapter 3: Research Design and Methodology

This chapter will describe the research design and methodology that the researcher used to meet the goals and objectives of this study. The conceptual framework is laid out. The chapter begins with a restatement of the research questions, which include the purpose of the study. In addition, the nature of the study, which employed a qualitative approach, is outlined. Qualitative research is defined, its assumptions reviewed, and its strengths and weaknesses discussed.

The section on methodology will discuss the phenomenological process, why it was most appropriate for this study, and any drawbacks that may come with this type of qualitative research. There will also be an explanation of why the interviews and analysis thereof were necessary in this type of research. The research design encompasses the population correlated to this research and how the selection of the sample of participants was conducted. The Internal Review Board (IRB) process is required in the protection of human subjects. The chapter delineates how interviews were conducted. Finally, an explanation of data analysis, coding, and inter-rater reliability will end the chapter.

Re-Statement of Research Questions

Research questions are necessary to find questions that may arise in the literature reviewed (Boeije, 2010). Maxwell (2013) indicated that framing questions specific to the participants prevents generalizations that are inappropriate, helps the researcher to recognize the diversity among the participants in the study, which prevents assumptions, and helps the researcher to focus on beliefs, actions, and events that the participants are asked to discuss. This study sought to determine how Black women in the entertainment industry navigate the barriers and challenges they encounter when trying to reach executive levels and higher. Therefore, in reaching the objectives of this study, the following research questions were addressed:

- RQ1: What challenges are faced by Black women executives on the path to reach executive levels in the entertainment industry?

- RQ2: What strategies and best practices are employed by Black women executives to overcome the challenges faced on their path to reach executive levels in the entertainment industry?

- RQ3: How do Black women executives in the entertainment industry identify, measure, and track success?

- RQ4: What recommendations would Black women executives in the entertainment industry have for entry-level Black women who desire to reach executive levels in the entertainment industry?

The interview questions were derived from these research questions.

Nature of the Study

In order to fulfill the purpose of this study, a qualitative approach was applied. Qualitative research begins with the researcher's assumptions. This assumption is that individuals have a part in the reality of social construction and in order to capture the process of social construction, research methods can be used (Boeije, 2010; Denzin & Lincoln, 2008). Creswell (2012) indicates that qualitative research is most appropriate when variables are missing and the research is exploratory in nature (Boeije, 2010; Creswell, 2012). Maxwell (2013) highlighted the genuineness of qualitative research, which does not solely focus on theoretical views or those of the researcher, but considers the perspectives of those being studied. Participants have the opportunity to describe the research topic and their experience in their own words and under their own conditions (Boeije, 2010). Furthermore, Maxwell stressed that the

participants' theories must be taken seriously. This allows the researcher to synthesize and analyze participants' responses to make any correlation to theories found in literature.

Maxwell (2013) underscored two main ways that qualitative researchers fail to make good use of existing theories. First, he stated that when researchers fail to apply any prior theoretical framework to the study, insights that those theories may provide are missed. Therefore, theory should be connected to the phenomenon being studied (Boeije, 2010; Creswell, 2012, 2014; Maxwell, 2013). Second, is when there is failure to connect theory to the phenomenon being studied, by forcing theory, methods, and data into predetermined categories. This prevents the researcher from being able to see events and relationships that by no means are connected to, or fit within, the theory. Thus, the researcher must be reflective and consider how personal experiences and background may sway the outcome of the findings (Creswell, 2014).

Advantages and Limitations of Qualitative Research

Advantages

There are various advantages and limitations when conducting qualitative research. The advantages of observation in qualitative research include being able to record information in the participants' setting, see unusual occurrences, and capture information as a firsthand participant (Creswell, 2012, 2014). Boeije (2010) described several areas where there are advantages in qualitative research:

- Exploration: Qualitative research allows researchers to explore unknown areas about a topic that have not yet been explored. In addition, the collection and analysis of data are flexible and may be adjusted to the findings that emerge.

- Description: Qualitative research allows participants to use their own words to describe their experiences. This is different from quantitative research, which only allows the numbers to speak.

- Explanation: Any data collected through the process is subject to further collection of new data after initial conjectures about the data are made and analyzed.

- Change: The flexibility of qualitative methods allow for the adjustment of data that arises in various fields. Sometimes information can change very quickly in a field. In qualitative research these data are measured based on important decisions and subtle action in the field that could lead to consequences.

- Use: Because the participants' perspectives guide quantitative research, the results can be simply converted into resources and tools for those who work or benefit from the findings in a specific field.

- Sensitivity: Due to the nature of some of the topics of qualitative research, qualitative researchers are able to recruit participants who can provide information about some of the most difficult conversations. Nevertheless, these topics must be researched in order to gain a greater understanding of the difficult topics.

In addition, the advantages to interviews are the opportunity for the researcher to control the line of questions and receive historical information from the participants (Creswell, 2014).

Limitations

Alternatively, some of the limitations of observations are the inability to be attentive and develop a rapport with the participants. Other limitations of interviews include the likelihood of biased responses due to the researcher's presence and participants not being able to articulate their thoughts clearly. In addition, politicians and scientists tend to deem qualitative research

unscientific due to the nature of the research and the inability to confirm the truth of participants'

statements (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008). Regardless of the noted limitations, the experiences of the

Black women in the entertainment industry who will be interviewed will provide valuable data to

collect for this qualitative study.

Methodology

As stated earlier, qualitative research takes place in the world and allows the researcher to

make observations that ultimately result in material practices that make the world visible (Denzin

& Lincoln, 2008). Contrary to the *positivist* belief of quantitative research, which supports the

belief that a sole reality can be discovered through experimental research methods, the basis of

qualitative research lies with the *post-positivist* and *constructionist* beliefs. The post-positivist

researcher agrees with the positivist belief, however, post-positivists believe that environment

and the individuals' experiences make a difference in the results. The constructivist belief posits

that the notion of a sole reality is contingent upon the researcher eliciting participants' ideas of

reality (Teherani et al., 2015).

The various qualitative approaches include grounded theory, ethnography, and

phenomenology (Boeije, 2010; Creswell, 2014). Noting the various methodologies that

encompass qualitative research, the researcher employed phenomenology to capture the data

through the interviews of the participants. Phenomenology not only looks at how people give

meaning to their lives (Boeije, 2010), but also views their individual experiences as phenomenal

occurrences. Furthermore, Creswell (2009) identified phenomenological research as an inquiry

strategy that the researcher uses to capture human experiences about a phenomenon described by

the participants.

Phenomenology captures participants' lived experiences (Creswell, 2012; Neubauer et al., 2019). In this study, the researcher uncovered the phenomenon connected to being a Black woman who seeks to rise to executive levels and higher in the entertainment industry. Participants provided answers to interview questions derived from the broader questions that guided the researcher and that were not connected to the literature (Creswell, 2014). Ultimately, these open-ended questions that emerged from the research questions gave insight to the participants' lived experiences (Creswell, 2009, 2012) and assumptions about the participants' lived experiences were made by the researcher. Additionally, the researcher used phenomenological theories mentioned in the literature to understanding findings about the study. (Neubauer et al., 2019).

Appropriateness of Phenomenology Methodology

There are various types of qualitative research methodologies. Grounded theory develops theories that are grounded in the views of the interviewed participants (Creswell, 2009). In ethnography, the researcher identifies a group of people's culture in their natural setting (Creswell, 2009, 2012). According to Teherani et al. (2015), the purpose of phenomenology is to achieve a description of the phenomenon's essence by investigating it from the perspective of anyone who experienced it in order to best understand what meaning the participants give to the phenomenon. As a result, phenomenology was deemed the best methodology for this study because the researcher sought to understand the phenomenon of Black women working to be promoted to executive levels and higher and how they navigate any challenges that they may encounter. Asking the participants open-ended questions about their experiences gave the researcher detailed descriptions and insight into the *why* and *how* of the phenomenon of their challenges as they moved up the corporate hierarchy (Creswell, 2009). Further, Horsburgh

(2003) identified participants' input and insight in research as valuable because they are experts in their respective fields. Once interviews were completed, the participants' responses were analyzed to determine if there were common threads among their individual responses. These commonalities resulted in the researcher garnering a greater understanding of the phenomenon.

Structured Process of Phenomenology

As stated earlier, in phenomenology, researchers seek to determine the essential understanding of the phenomenon of participants' experiences (Creswell, 2014). The importance of allowing the selected Black women to elaborate on their personal experiences as they face challenges and barriers in the entertainment industry provided the researcher with explanations that would otherwise be unknown (Danzig & Harris, 1996). These illuminations described the meaning of the participants' experiences, which is rooted in what Neubauer et al. (2019) depicted as what is taking place in human experiences and how the human experiences are manifesting. Once the interviews are conducted, data analysis and themes of the experiences are derived (Boeije, 2010; Creswell, 2009, 2012, 2014; Maxwell, 2013).

Researchers who analyze data derived from phenomenological qualitative research face certain challenges. Because there is no real way to verify the validity of the statements made by the participants in qualitative interviews (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008), one challenge is the gathering of information face-to-face in people's homes or workplaces (Creswell, 2014). Researchers may also have difficulty finding participants and, in some cases, despite using pseudonyms, they may have difficulty protecting their identities (Creswell, 2012).

Research Design

This study was conducted utilizing a qualitative phenomenological approach. It was necessary to select participants for this research study systematically. The selection process of

this research includes the analysis unit, population, purposive sampling, and finally participation selection.

Analysis Unit

The purpose of this study was to determine how Black women in the entertainment industry navigate challenges as they rise to executive levels and higher. The ideal participant, or unit analysis, is a Black woman who currently holds, or has held, at least a Director position in a company in the entertainment industry.

Population

Participants should be described by several factors, including being identified by number, where they came from, and characteristics of the sample. In addition, participants should define the population, which is the larger group from which the sample comes (L. R. Gay et al., 2012). The population may be large or small, depending on what sect of the public the researcher is drawing from. For this research study, the population was all Black women who have risen to executive levels or higher in entertainment industry companies. After selecting a portion of the women from this population to interview, the collected data was studied, making it feasible for the researcher to make inferences about those participants (Patten, 2014).

Sample Size

For the purpose of this research study, Black women who have risen to the executive level and higher in entertainment industry organizations were sought out. This is more specifically defined as Black women who hold Vice President, Senior Vice President, President, COO, CFO, CTO, and CEO positions in organizations related to television, movies, and music entertainment. These participants were selected because they have experience navigating challenges and barriers, yet were able to reach those levels in a White male-dominated industry.

Dukes (1984) asserted that because the sample size of phenomenological research does not have to be large, and a one-sample participant is theoretically sufficient to discover the experience of a phenomenon, the bracketing that needs to take place would cause the research to be distorted. *Bracketing* is when the researcher eliminates any expectations, thoughts, or bias about what the literature has revealed, in order to approach the research with an open mind (Boeije, 2010). Looking at the phenomenon of Black women as they navigate challenges in the entertainment industry would best benefit the study if the researcher could look at the experience over and over again. Thus, Dukes (1984) insists that the sample size should realistically be three, five, or even 10 participants. Similarly, L. R. Gay et al. (2012) noted that qualitative studies may range from one participant to as many as 60-70, yet qualitative studies with more than 20 participants are rare. The maximum number of participants is determined by the research procedures. L. R. Gay et al. (2012) indicate that there are two factors to consider when determining the sufficiency of the sample size. The first is representativeness, which means the the participants selected are most appropriate for the research and represent the range of potential participants for the topic. The second factor is redundancy of information provided by the participants' respo ses, which indicates there is no new information emerging. Creswell and Poth (2018) noted that in phenomenological research, participants interviewed may range from three to four individuals to 10-15 individuals. Gray (2018) offers that a sample size should range from ten to 20 participants. Although a set number of participants was determined prior to interviewing for this study, Dukes (1984) and L. R. Gay et al. (2012) concur that the ultimate determining factor influencing the maximum number of participants is known as *saturation.* In qualitative research, saturation occurs when interviews reveal no newly uncovered information

(Boeije, 2010; Creswell, 2012; 2014; L. R. Gay et al., 2012; Horsburgh, 2003; Patten, 2014).

Therefore, for this study, 15 Black women were sought out to participate in this research.

Purposive Sampling

Purposive sampling is a common approach to selecting participants for qualitative research studies (Boeije, 2010; Maxwell, 2013; Patten, 2014). Researchers use this method to intentionally select participants who will provide the best source of information about the topic (Patten, 2014). Based on the researcher's experience and knowledge, participants are selected because the researcher believes that certain people are the best representation of the population, based on specific criteria (L. R. Gay et al., 2012). There is some disagreement regarding the use of the term *sample* in qualitative research, because unlike quantitative research, where a statistical representation is used, purposive sampling is more deliberate than random (Boeije, 2010). Purposive sampling allowed the researcher of this study to identify the participants who were most likely to understand the phenomenon under investigation.

The use of purposive sampling in qualitative research met several goals as identified by Maxwell (2013). These goals ensured that typicality in individuals sought out would simultaneously achieve heterogeneity in the participants selected. In addition, the selected participants supported testing the theories with which the researcher began the study. The researcher also desired to highlight the various similarities and differences that the participants possessed. Ultimately the goals allowed the researcher to be able to answer the research questions related to the study.

Participant Selection

In qualitative phenomenology, researchers select participants who can express their experience related to the phenomenon under investigation (Creswell, 2012). Several steps were

taken to solidify the list of participants for the study's interviews. The sampling frame was created first, followed by the creation of the inclusion and exclusion criteria for participants. Finally, the purposive sampling maximum variation was determined. For this study, 20-25 participants were sought out, in anticipation of resulting in a sample size of 15 Black women in the entertainment industry.

Sampling Frame. To create a sampling frame, which is the master list of individuals to which the researcher can actually have access for the study (Creswell, 2012), the researcher systematically created steps to ensure interviewing the best participants for this phenomenological study. To compile a list of participants, the researcher used the search engine on LinkedIn, a website that connects nearly 800 million professionals through its network in more than 200 countries and territories worldwide (LinkedIn, n.d.). In the search engine, the researcher typed "Black female executive entertainment" to arrive at a population befitting for the research. Under the "All filter tab," to narrow the search, the researcher clicked "Entertainment" under the "Industry section" in the filter, resulting in fewer potential participants. The results had to be sifted through to eliminate any men or women who were not Black. In addition, anyone who did not have a picture or contact information, or who did not work in television, film, or music was also eliminated.

Using the information gathered from LinkedIn, the researcher placed their names, positions, and organizations in a Google document that served as the database of participants. The researcher then went to LinkedIn and messaged each woman individually to request her participation in an interview. A Google document database also served as a contact log and three attempts were made to each potential participant in 2 weeks. The dates on which attempts were made to contact each participant were documented. If the list was larger than the desired 20-25

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potential participants, the researcher eliminated anyone who had less than 10 years of experience and anyone whose career path was not consistently in the entertainment industry. When participants were contacted, the researcher used the IRB approved recruitment script to introduce the purpose of the study and request the participant's participation. Once the participants indicated that they were willing to participate, the researcher acquired participants' work emails and resent the IRB approved recruitment script and then the interview date and time were coordinated.

Criteria of Inclusion. The criteria of inclusion for this qualitative study were:

1. Must be a Black woman, as defined by this research.

2. Works in the music, television, and film divisions of the entertainment industry.

3. Must have moved up the ranks solely in the entertainment industry.

4. Should be in the corporate side of the entertainment industry.

5. Any Black woman who holds at least a Director position.

6. Must have a picture posted.

Criteria of Exclusion. The criteria of exclusion for this qualitative study were:

1. Unwillingness to have the interview recorded.

2. Inability to stay for the duration of the interview.

3. Did not have an email address or a means of contact on the profile.

Purposive Sampling Maximum Variation. As mentioned earlier, purposive sampling captures differences, or heterogeneity, in the population. Maximum variation sampling is best achieved by identifying the criteria of the population's variation most relevant to the research, then selecting the individuals that represent the specified criteria (Maxwell, 2013). This allowed for a broader pool of potential participants on the researcher's list to be narrowed in the event

that the criteria of inclusion and exclusion still resulted in a number of potential participants much larger than the 20-25 initial contacts needed for the research. In this case, the researcher eliminated anyone who did not have at least 10 years in the industry and was an executive in an entertainment industry company that was an entrepreneurship venture. In addition, the purpose is to get participants with varying experiences of the phenomenon of being a Black woman who navigates challenges in the entertainment industry as she rises to executive levels and higher. There were no geographical limitations for the participants.

Protection of Human Subjects

Some of the most critical components of qualitative research are ethical considerations and the protection of human subjects (L. R. Gay et al., 2012). The potential risk and harm to human subjects should not outweigh the research results' benefit to society. Boeije (2010) underscored the importance of the qualitative researcher exhibiting trust. All things considered, three key factors are relevant to any study and were addressed during this research: informed consent, privacy and confidentiality, and anonymity (Boeije, 2010; Creswell, 2012, 2014; L. R. Gay et al., 2012; Patten, 2014).

Although some topics may be considered harmless and easy for participants to discuss, researchers should not assume that certain topics will not be a trigger for participants. For this study, the researcher understood the effects that recalling various scenarios related to discrimination and racism may have on the participants, considering the literature's emphasis on dealing with racial battle fatigue and its mental and emotional long-term impact. As a precaution, the researcher sought to protect participants from physical and psychological harm (Patten, 2014). As such, the researcher was required to submit an application for this research to

Pepperdine University's Institutional Review Board (IRB), the body that governs the review and approval of research proposals.

The application included the researcher obtaining *informed consent*, which ensured that all participants shared information of their own volition, understood the nature of the study, were aware of any potential dangers and benefits that participants may have encountered by participating in the study, and recognized that they could withdraw at any point of the process (Patten, 2014). The researcher also ensured that participants were free from harm, provided them with *privacy*, which prevented exposure to undue risk, and refrained from collecting information about the participants without their knowledge (L. R. Gay et al., 2012). Safeguarding the participants from identification was the next priority for the researcher. Participants had *anonymity* in this study when they did not personally know the researcher and *confidentiality* to protect the identities of those who participated. Ways to keep participants anonymous and confidential included not using descriptors in the results that would be identifiable by anyone who reads this study, using pseudonyms, and removing names from coding information.

Based on the requirements set by Pepperdine University when working with human subjects, the researcher completed the Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI) Course (Appendix A) which is a part of the IRB application requirement. Prior to participant contact and data collection, the researcher completed Pepperdine University IRB's "Informed Consent for Participation in Research Activities" for approval (Appendix B). Included in the submission was the Recruitment Script (Appendix C) and the Interview Protocol (Appendix D), which was sent to each participant to give her detailed information about the study and acquire their consent. Completing these requirements met IRB guidelines and demonstrated the researcher's commitment to ethical practices during this research.

Each participant was contacted via email or message on LinkedIn. The communication included the attachment of the recruitment script. Once the participants read and agreed to participate in the study, a follow-up email was sent, thanking them for agreeing to participate in the research and arrangements were made to solidify a day and time to meet via Pepperdine's Zoom account (https://pepperdine.zoom.us/). Zoom was used because, with a password provided to the participant, it ensured anonymity, confidentiality, and privacy. In anticipation of the impending meeting, participants were emailed the informed consent, which was aligned with the expectations set forth by Pepperdine University's Informed Consent for Participation in Research Activity guidelines. The researcher explained the interview process and purpose of the study. Participants were informed that their interview would be recorded. Anonymity and confidentiality were assured via pseudonyms and alternate company names were assigned to each participant prior to the interview. Therefore, the researcher was the only one who had knowledge of participants' actual identities.

Participants were told that they had the right to pause, withdraw, or refuse to answer a question or participate in the study at any time during the process. They were informed that during the course of the interview, they could experience minor mental or psychological discomfort if the interview questions triggered unpleasant memories or experiences. Participants were notified that, although the research may not bring them personal benefit, the results would be used to provide insight to those in the entertainment industry, corporate leaders, human resource personnel, academicians, and policymakers who seek to advocate for and change the way Black women are portrayed and treated in the corporate setting and entertainment industry. Finally, participants were told that their information would be locked away and that the researcher was the only one with access to the file cabinet.

Data Collection

The researcher contacted the participants through the email address provided or via direct message for all potential participants found on LinkedIn. Through email, the IRB-approved recruitment script was sent to provide the participant with the logistics of the interview. Once the participant agreed to participate in the research interview, the researcher set up a date and time for the interview to take place that was feasible for the participant. In addition, the researcher requested the participant's contact information. The consent to participate was forwarded to the participant for a signature. Once the date and time were confirmed, the researcher provided the participant with a Pepperdine Zoom link that was created solely for the use of each participant.

On the day of the interview, when the participant entered the Zoom platform, prior to questions being asked, the researcher thanked the participant for her participation in the study. The researcher began with introductory questions that were asked prior to the research questions. These questions included obtaining the participant's formal title and verification of years having worked at the company and in entertainment in total. In addition, the researcher reminded the participant of the agreement she made when she gave consent to participate in the research, including recording of the Zoom session. Once these questions were answered, the researcher informed the participants that recording via the Zoom platform would begin, after which the researcher pressed record. During the interview, the researcher wrote notes that depicted the gist of the participant's sentiments and experience (L. R. Gay et al., 2012; Maxwell, 2013). Once the Zoom interview was complete and downloaded to the researcher's computer, the researcher reviewed the interview and transcribed the recording (Boeije, 2010; L. R. Gay et al., 2012). The transcriptions derived from the Zoom recording that was downloaded. During the transcription, pseudonyms and other strategies necessary to ensure anonymity and confidentiality were

implemented. Once the researcher completed transcriptions, the researcher saved the

transcription in a file on the researcher's Google drive. Each participant was named based on the

order in which the interview took place. For example, the first participant was named *Participant

1* or *P1*. The downloaded and recorded Zoom interview and transcribed file for each participant

were placed on a flash drive from Google drive, which be kept for 3 years, then deleted from the

drive.

Interview Techniques

An interview is defined as an intentional interaction whereby one person obtains

information from another person (L. R. Gay et al., 2012). For this phenomenological qualitative

research, the findings of this research were a result of data collected in interviews conducted by

the researcher from Black female executives who worked in entertainment industry

organizations. *Semistructured interviews* are conducted face-to-face, recorded, and the most

commonly used in qualitative research (Patten, 2014). An Interview Protocol (Appendix D) was

used to create the questions to be asked.

To prepare for the interview, the researcher used Pepperdine's Zoom account to create

links for each individual interview. This way, there was no chance of one participant signing in

on another's Zoom session inadvertently on the wrong day, for example. Furthermore, the

researcher asked a few introductory questions to build rapport (Boeije, 2010; Patten, 2014),

which helped the participants feel comfortable and emotionally safe with the inquirer (Boeije,

2010). During the course of the 60-minute semi-structured interview, the researcher asked 14

interview questions that correlated to the research questions. The researcher was an attentive

listener, allowed the participant time to think about answers, clarified and asked for details to

vague answers, and refrained from debating with the participant as she discussed her experience

(L. R. Gay et al., 2012). Upon completion of the interview, the researcher indicated that the recording would end, thanked the participant, and answered any questions that she may have had before ending the Zoom session.

Interview Protocol

The interview protocol refers to the directions prescribed by the researcher for the interview (Creswell, 2012, 2014; Patten, 2014). For this research study, the researcher's ideas and Creswell's (2012) suggestions were incorporated to determine the interview protocols used.

1. Header: This included the name of the participant, date, and the review of the informed consent. There was also information about the participant, which included her organization, position, and any other information pertinent to the research (Appendix E). The following questions were used:

   - What is the name of the company you work for?

   - What is your formal title?

   - How long have you been working for this company?

   - How long have you had a career in the entertainment industry?

2. Opening: The researcher then began the interview with an icebreaker, which included general questions about the participant's work history and non-invasive questions related to the participant. This was done to relax the participants as a strategy to get them to feel comfortable sharing information freely.

3. Interview: The researcher asked the participant the interview questions. During the interview, the researcher was mindful to ensure attentiveness, paraphrased and asked for clarification to ensure understanding of the participant's thoughts, and allowed time for the participant to process questions asked.

4. The closing: The researcher thanked the participant for participating in the interview, reminding the participant that anonymity, confidentiality, and privacy would be maintained, and that the recording would be maintained for 3 years, after which it would subsequently be destroyed.

Relationship Between Research and Interview Questions

The participant was asked a series of 14 interview questions, in addition to the icebreaker questions that opened the interview session. The 14 interview questions that were asked were developed to correlate to the four research questions.

Validity of the Study

In order to ensure that the interview questions that were asked of the participants provided answers that offered a better understanding of the conceptual framework of the research, the researcher employed interview question protocols. Essentially, *validity* is the degree to which qualitative data correctly gauges what the researcher seeks to measure (L. R. Gay et al., 2012).

Prima-Facie and Content Validity. In the 1980s and 1990s, it became necessary for qualitative researchers to justify they credibility of their studies, which included defending the accuracy of the information provided (L. R. Gay et al., 2012). Quantitative researchers have pre-established means for determining validity based on the nature of statistics. The likelihood of encountering both anticipated and unanticipated threats leads a quantitative researcher to have controls established in the research design (Maxwell, 2013). Likewise, it is important to create a protocol to determine if the questions asked allow the qualitative researcher to pinpoint any potential threats and develop methods to try to eliminate those threats.

The researcher created interview questions that correlated to the research questions and were based on the literature reviewed and any presumed gaps in the literature. Assessing validity allows the researcher to make sure that the interview questions asked will measure what the research questions seek to determine (Boeije, 2010). Table 2 shows a correlation between the research questions and the 12 interview questions, thus establishing prima facie validity.

Table 2

Correlation of Research Questions to Interview Questions

Research Questions	Corresponding Interview Questions
RQ1: What challenges are faced by Black women executives on the path to reach executive levels in the entertainment industry?	IQ 1: What are some negative interactions that you encountered with non-Black coworkers and supervisors that you feel were directly related to their misperceptions of Black women? IQ 2: How did you deal with or otherwise overcome the challenge(s) you described? IQ 3: What disparities in treatment and/or opportunities for advancement have you experienced compared to your non-Black colleagues?
RQ 2: What strategies and best practices are employed by Black women executives to overcome the challenges faced on their path to reach executive levels in the entertainment industry?	IQ 4: How did you deal with the disparities in treatment and/or opportunities for advancement? IQ 5: Please share with me some negative interactions that you encountered with non-Black coworkers and supervisors that you feel are directly related to their misperception of Black women. IQ 6: How do you deal with negative interactions?
RQ3: How do Black women executives in the entertainment industry identify, measure, and track success?	IQ 7: How do you determine when it's time to make a lateral or vertical move in your career? What factors are considered to make that determination? (For example, time, experience, or a combination of multiple factors). IQ 8: How do relationships with colleagues, supervisors, and/or people with influence and power within your department or organization impact your level of success? IQ 9: What would happen/happened in your career to indicate

Research Questions	Corresponding Interview Questions
	that you've "made it"?
	IQ 10: How have mentorships or sponsorships within or outside of your organizations positively impacted success in your career?
	IQ 11: How have you been able to keep track of your progress towards your career goals?
RQ4: What recommendations would Black women executives in the entertainment industry have for entry-level Black women who desire to reach executive levels in the entertainment industry?	IQ 12: Looking back on your career, what would you do differently as you set out to reach executive level in your organization or industry? women who aspire to reach leadership positions in the entertainment industry?

Note. The table identifies four research questions and corresponding interview questions. Interview questions were reviewed by a panel of two peer-reviewers and expert reviewers.

Peer-review Validity. To make a judgment of the quality of the research, which Boeije (2010) described as the consideration as to whether the findings and conclusions of the research represent the phenomenon being investigated, the researcher set up a process by which the interview questions would be examined. R. B. Johnson and Christensen (2014) defined content-related evidence as validity evidence that is based on the degree to which the questions adequately test the construct of the research. Therefore, peer-review validity is necessary.

L. R. Gay et al. (2012) identified strategies to ensure the validity of qualitative research. An important strategy is to establish an audit trail. For the sake of this research, this entails enlisting the input of a colleague to become a peer reviewer and support the examination of the research processes, including collecting, analyzing, and interpreting data. The peer-reviewer was instructed to:

1. Read the interview questions aligned to its respective research question.

2. Ascertain the relevance of the interview question to the research.

3. Indicate suggestions for the revisions needed to be made to the interview questions.

4. Provide any other feedback for the interview questions.

The document that the peer-reviewer was given to make suggestions regarding revisions to the questions is presented in Appendix F. Based on the recommendations for changes, the researcher revised and updated the interview questions.

Expert Review Validity. The researcher may rely completely on peer-review of the interview questions. In the case where recommendations were made by peers and the researcher does not agree with the suggested change, the reviewer may then rely on expert review validity. The researcher's dissertation committee served as the experts in this case. If the researcher has cause to not make suggested changes, the researcher should justify the reasons for keeping the original question. The experts provided the final level of recommendations to ensure the interview questions were most appropriate to capture the participants' experience to inform the results and findings for this study. Table 3 shows the questions, revisions, final questions after the peer-review, and if necessary, expert review.

Table 3

Revised Interview Questions

Research Questions	Corresponding Interview Questions
RQ1: What challenges are faced by Black women executives on the path to reach executive levels in the entertainment industry?	Please think of a time, when you as a Black woman, felt was the most challenging time in your career in the entertainment industry IQ 1: At that time, what challenge(s) or difficulties were you facing? IQ 2: Did any of these challenges relate to a misperception of you as a Black woman? How? IQ3: Would these challenges been different if you were not Black? How? IQ4: What other challenges did you face in your ascent to your

Research Questions	Corresponding Interview Questions
	current leadership position? IQ5: How do relationships with colleagues, supervisors, and/or people with influence and power within your department or organization impact your level of success?
RQ 2: What strategies and best practices are employed by Black women executives to overcome the challenges faced on their path to reach executive levels in the entertainment industry?	IQ 6: Going back to your most challenging time example, how did you overcome the challenge(s) you faced? IQ 7: How did you overcome other challenges in your ascent to your current position? IQ 8: How did your mentors, friends or allies guide you through navigating these challenges? IQ 9: Were there any organizational resources available to you?
RQ3: How do Black women executives in the entertainment industry identify, measure, and track success?	IQ 10: What would happen/happened in your career to indicate that you've "made it"? IQ 11: How have you been able to keep track of your progress towards your career goals?
RQ4: What recommendations would Black women executives in the entertainment industry have for entry-level Black women who desire to reach executive levels in the entertainment industry?	IQ 12: How do you determine when it's time to make a lateral or vertical move in your career? What factors are considered to make that determination? (For example, time, experience, or a combination of multiple factors). IQ 13: Looking back on your career, if you had the opportunity, what would you do differently to reach executive level in your organization or industry? IQ 14: What is one piece of wisdom you have gained that you would want to share with Black women who aspire to reach leadership positions in the entertainment industry?

Note. The table identifies four research questions and corresponding interview questions with revisions based on feedback from peer-reviewers and an expert reviewer. Subsequent changes were made to the order and phrasing of questions within the interview protocol.

Reliability of the Study

The researcher should be able to decipher between validity and reliability. As mentioned previously, validity determines if the research will ultimately reach the conclusions and findings related to the goals and purposes of the study. *Reliability* is assessed to determine if the study yields consistent results (L. R. Gay et al., 2012; Patten, 2014). According to L. R. Gay et al.

(2012), in order to evaluate reliability in qualitative studies, the researcher must answer the following questions:

- Is the researcher's relationship with the group completely described?

- Were interviews documented in multiple ways?

- Was the development, plan and test of the instruments used recorded and explained?

- Are the participants described in detail?

- Are the techniques used in sampling documented and adequate for the study?

In order to ensure reliability of the study, the researcher conducted a pilot study. The pilot study was conducted on a small scale, leading up to the actual interviews (L. R. Gay et al., 2012). These interviews were conducted to make sure that the trial participants were able to understand all the language in the questions. The researcher enlisted three people in her network who worked in the entertainment industry and met the criteria of inclusion to participate. Once the pilot was complete, the researcher asked the trial participants to provide feedback on the interview process, including discussing the clarity of questions asked. Conducting a pilot study prevented any missteps in the data collection process prior to the actual interview process.

Statement of Personal Bias

In qualitative research, the researcher must be aware of any biases that may affect the validity of the results and findings of the study. *Researcher bias* occurs when the researcher's experiences or preconceived notions about the phenomenon being studied interfere with the actual results of the study (R. B. Johnson & Christensen, 2014). As such, the researcher's results are in alignment with what the researcher wants to find out, as opposed to what was actually observed or recorded. In order to mitigate bias, the researcher must enlist reflexivity, or engagement in self-reflection about personal biases and predispositions. In the case of this study,

the researcher has some biases and preconceived notions about the phenomenon. As a Black woman, the researcher identified correlations between the literature and her personal life and professional experience. As such, the researcher's awareness of potential biases did not compromise the analysis and interpretation of data from this research.

Bracketing and Epoche

As stated previously, it was important for the researcher to not let personal biases influence the validity of the research. Transcendental phenomenology, which is descriptive phenomenology, calls for the researcher to set aside any expectations or assumptions to the study (Neubauer et al., 2019), which allows for approaching the study with an open mind (Boeije, 2010). Thus, through epoche, the researcher bracketed off any previous understandings, prior knowledge, and assumptions about what Black women may have experienced as they elevated from executive levels to C-suite positions in entertainment industry companies, which occurred during and after the interviews and when reviewing notes taken during the interviews.

Data Analysis

The data analysis portion of qualitative research requires paying attention to the data in great detail. This required the researcher to segment the data, or putting the data in parts, then reassemble the data to look for relationships among responses provided by the participants (Boeije, 2010). Once interviews were completed, the researcher listened to the interviews prior to transcribing the recordings (Maxwell, 2013). Once the recordings were transcribed, the researcher participated in an iterative process called coding. Coding is laborious when done manually, which is the way the researcher opted to analyze the data for this research (Creswell, 2014).

Coding requires the data to be manipulated in several ways. Previously, the concept of segmenting was mentioned. When data is segmented it is broken apart, separated or disassembled, and placed into categories (Boeije, 2010; Creswell, 2012, 2014). Segmenting takes place at the beginning of data analysis and is known as *open coding* (Boeije, 2010, Creswell, 2012). As the data are categorized, themes and topics emerged, giving insight into the phenomenon being studied.

Reassembling the data consisted of the researcher considering the evolving relationships between the various categories that emerged and the reliability of the identified relationships (Boeije, 2010). This is called *axial coding,* which involves multiple single categories, or axes. The researcher has to consider the following questions with axial coding:

- Do the codes that have come to light sufficiently cover the data and create new codes?

- Has the fragmented data been coded properly?

- Has the appropriate code been assigned to synonyms that emerge from the data fragments?

- Has the evidence for emerging main and sub-codes been made to distinguish between the two codes?

- Is there an ongoing thought process related to the codes uncovered from the data? (Boeije, 2010).

When the researcher looks for connections among categories in order to better understand what is happening in the field or with the phenomenon under study, this is known as *selective coding* (Boeije, 2010). This may lead to the development of a theory. As a result, categories that

emerge from this part of the coding process are accepted as theoretical concepts (Boeije, 2010; Creswell, 2012, 2013).

Inter-rater Reliability and Validity

In qualitative studies, reliability refers to the consistency of responses derived from coded data when reviewed by multiple coders (Creswell, 2013). This may be known as interjudge reliability (L. R. Gay et al., 2012), inter-coder agreement (Creswell, 2013), or inter-rater reliability (Boeije, 2010). The coders being outside of the research study help to prevent subjectivity in data analysis and support reliability of data (L. R. Gay et al., 2012). Four steps were taken to ensure reliability in coding:

1. Once the researcher completed the initial three interviews, the data was transcribed and coded, and themes related to the data were derived.

2. The researcher selected two co-raters with whom to share her findings. These co-raters were colleagues in her doctoral program. Co-raters received the transcriptions, codes, and themes. The co-raters reviewed the codes and themes and shared recommendations with the researcher for changes to the derived codes or themes.

3. When there was consensus on the codes and themes, the researcher continued to code the remaining transcripts, based on the procedure used with the first three interviews.

4. The researcher repeated the steps, beginning with Step 2 in this process, arriving at the final codes and themes.

Chapter 3 Summary

This qualitative research study used a phenomenological approach to investigate how Black women in entertainment industry companies navigate challenges and seek to rise to executive levels and higher. In order for this research to be successful, a systematic process was

implemented to ensure that study's goals were met and its purpose was fulfilled. From the four research questions, the researcher created 12 correlated interview questions that underwent a process to ensure validity, thus ensuring the participants' answers would provide data that the design of the research set out to gather.

Likewise, the participants were selected via a process that filtered out the best sample of the population most fitting to describe the phenomenon. Careful consideration was taken in assuring that the potential of mental, physical, and psychological harm to the participants was minimal. When conducting the interviews, the researcher reviewed the questions in order to guarantee validity in the study. In addition, the researcher addressed her personal biases and bracketed them in order for the research to be reliable and free from bias and assumptions. Finally, in the analysis of the data, the researcher coded the data and categorized it into themes, used inter-rater coding to confirm themes, and followed this process with the data from all participants in the study. The themes derived from this research were used as a foundation for the development of a training that can be used to support Black women in entertainment industry companies.

Chapter 4: Findings

In recent years, the number of Black women holding positions of power in the entertainment industry has increased; those women have had a considerable impact on the direction of the industry (Tinubu & Victorian, 2022). There has been an influx of women in the entertainment industry who have been influential on the creative side, in addition to Black women on the corporate side of entertainment who have made power moves and been elevated to C-suite positions. As a means to understand the effort, mentality, and drive Black women must have to sustain as corporate executives in the entertainment industry, this study enlisted the participation of Black women who possess the qualifications necessary to provide deeper comprehension. Participants described specific challenges they have had to overcome, what strategies they used to navigate those challenges, and personal insight into what, in retrospect, could have made a difference in their elevation to executive levels and higher in the entertainment industry. This research sought to answer and address the following questions:

- RQ1: What challenges are faced by Black women executives on the path to reach executive levels in the entertainment industry?

- RQ2: What strategies and best practices are employed by Black women executives to overcome the challenges faced on their path to reach executive levels in the entertainment industry?

- RQ3: How do Black women executives in the entertainment industry identify, measure, and track success?

- RQ4: What recommendations would Black women executives in the entertainment industry have for entry-level Black women who desire to reach executive levels in the entertainment industry?

In order to collect more specific information that would contribute to answering the research questions, interview questions were developed that correlated specifically to the research questions. These open-ended questions allowed participants to share their lived experiences in the world of corporate entertainment. Their individual journeys revealed various phenomena related to Black women's experiences as they rose up the corporate hierarchy in their respective organizations. Participants' vulnerability, candor, and perspective led to data that was coded and analyzed, ultimately resulting in a deeper understanding of the research questions. After participants were asked to reflect what they felt was most challenging time in their career, the following interview questions facilitated data gathering:

IQ 1: At that time, what challenge(s) or difficulties are you facing?

IQ 2: Did any of these challenges relate to a misperception of you as a Black woman? How?

IQ 3: Would these challenges have been different if you were not Black? How?

IQ 4: What other challenges did you face in your ascent to your current leadership position?

IQ 5: How do relationships with colleagues, supervisors, and/or people with influence and power within your department or organization impact your level of success?

IQ 6: Going back to your most challenging time example; how did you overcome the challenge(s) you faced?

IQ 7: How did you overcome other challenges in your ascent to your current leadership position?

IQ 8: How did your mentors, friends or allies guide you through navigating these challenges?

IQ 9: Were there any organizational resources available to you?

IQ 10: How do you determine when it's time to make a lateral or vertical move in your career? What factors are considered to make that determination? (For example, time, experience, or a combination of multiple factors).

IQ 11: What would happen/happened in your career to indicate that you've "made it"?

IQ 12: How have you been able to keep track of your progress towards your career goals?

IQ 13: Looking back on your career, if you had the opportunity, what would you do differently to reach executive level in your organization or industry?

IQ14: What is the one wisdom you have gained that you would want to share with Black women who aspire to reach leadership positions in the entertainment industry?

Participants were prompted to answer questions as thoroughly as possible. In the event there was ambiguity in responses or clarification was necessary, participants were asked to elaborate in order to provide a clearer understanding of their experience. All of the interview sessions were friendly, participants felt comfortable sharing freely, and although interviews were virtual, there were no moments of awkwardness or disconnection between the researcher and the participants.

This chapter will review the interview process, which includes an overview of the participants, collection of data, codes, and ultimate themes that emerged from participants' responses. In addition, the inter-rater process will be discussed to show how consensus was achieved in the process of coding data and developing themes.

Participants

Once IRB approval was obtained on February 21, 2022, the researcher sought the responses of 15 Black women who worked on the corporate side of the entertainment industry. These women gave an account of their personal experiences, including the challenges they

encountered when moving up the corporate ladder. Participants worked in various well-known entertainment companies, including the music recording industry, production of television and film, sports and concerts, and the performance industry. The participants' range of experience was from 15-30 years. In order to maintain anonymity and confidentiality, participants were given numbers to identify them based on the order of their interview. For example, the first participant became known as Participant 1 or P1.

These participants were selected via LinkedIn from an initial list of 63 sample participants once the criteria were input into the search fields, as discussed in Chapter 3. Of the sample of 63 individuals, 33 met the criteria for inclusion and exclusion. The 33 potential participants were contacted and more than two follow up emails were sent to 91%, or approximately 30 out of 33 of the participants. This ultimately resulted in approximately a 2-month span of interviews taking place. Table 4 highlights the participants, their formal titles, their number of years in the entertainment industry, and the dates when their interviews took place. Once the initial three interviews were complete, the researcher began coding the data and the initial themes emerged.

Table 4

Interview Schedule and Participant Information

Participant #	Years in Entertainment	Formal Title	Interview Date
P1	28	Sr. Executive VP, DEI	March 23, 2022
P2	20	Executive Director, DEI	April 4, 2022
P3	25	Head of Strategic Partnerships	April 12, 2022
P4	17	VP of Business and Legal Affairs	April 15, 2022
P5	16	Director, Physical Production	May 2, 2022

Participant #	Years in Entertainment	Formal Title	Interview Date
P6	24	Director, Business and Legal Affairs	May 12, 2022
P7	25	Sr. Director of Community Affairs	May 13, 2022
P8	15	Director, Human Resources	May 17, 2022
P9	16	Director, DEI	May 20, 2022
P10	15	Director, Business and Legal Affairs	May 27, 2022
P11	30	VP of Programming Acquisitions	June 8, 2022
P12	18	CEO and Founder	June 9, 2022

Note. This table identifies personal information about participants while maintaining anonymity and confidentiality.

Data Analysis

To understand the phenomenon of Black female entertainment executives, the researcher had to transcribe the interviews to make meaning of the data. Data analysis occurs when the information is broken apart, segmented, or separated and reassembled (Boeije, 2010). Data analysis began after the first interview. The researcher reviewed the notes taken during the interview (Maxwell, 2013) immediately after the interview, and in some cases annotated the notes. The researcher also listened to the interviews again, prior to transcription. After transcribing each interview, the researcher began coding the data and placing words, phrases, and quotes into categories. These words, phrases, and quotes were coded and further segmented, and themes began to emerge. This was done for each interview question. Continuing this process with each question, the researcher began to see similarity in participants' codes and placed subsequent words and phrases into pre-existing categories. When new information was introduced, the data was coded and additional categories sometimes emerged. At the end of the data analysis, the researcher noted themes that applied to half or more of the participants, which is considered *typical*. When themes applied to less than half but more than two participants, it is

considered *variant* (Patten, 2014). The themes in this study were either typical or variant. When the data reached saturation, the researcher completed the interview process.

Data Display

The researcher summarized the themes that emerged in a format that was meaningful and suitable for sharing with colleagues (Boeije, 2010; L. R. Gay et al., 2012). According to L. R. Gay et al. (2012), some examples of displays include a table, chart, graph, or matrix. The researcher provided a table with the emerged codes to colleagues who supported the collection of data. The colleagues were able to see how the researcher started with words and phrases that were categorized and organized in a way that was most meaningful in order to derive themes.

Data Collection

Data analysis began at the conclusion of the third interview, and the researcher sent the transcribed, coded, and themed data to inter-raters to ensure validity of the data collection process (Maxwell, 2013). The inter-raters provided suggestions to improve some of the themes that were determined by the researcher. As the interview process proceeded and after the inter-rater reliability process was complete, saturation was reached once the interview of the 12th participant was completed. No new information arose from the responses of the participants, as by Participants 9 and 10 no new themes had emerged.

Inter-rater Reliability Process

After the third interview, the responses were transcribed, coded, and themed. To ensure validity of the questions and that the responses would provide a clear understanding of the lived experiences of the phenomenon of Black women's journeys in the entertainment industry, the researcher sent the transcriptions, codes, and themes to other raters for review of the data (Patten,

2014). The raters individually reviewed the provided data and made suggestions to alter or modify themes. Table 5 identifies the suggestions that inter-raters made to the themes and codes.

Table 5

Inter-rater Coding Table Edit Recommendations

Interview Question	Initial Theme(s)	Inter-rater Recommendations	Modifications
1	No Mentors	Change to "Lack of Mentorships"	Changed the initial theme based on the suggestion of the inter-rater.
2	Black Women Career Driven	Change to "Black Women Prioritize Careers"	Changed the initial theme based on the suggestion of the inter-rater
3	• Lack Connections for Advancement • Locked into Genres Based on Race	Merge these together if more responses match similar answers	• Maintained "Lack Connections for Advancement" • Moved "Locked into Genres Based on Race" into "Penalty for Being Black"

Note. This table delineates only the suggestions and corrections made to interview questions based on inter-raters. If there were no suggestions or corrections, they were not included.

Research Question 1

Research Question 1 asked: *What challenges are faced by Black women executives on the path to reach executive levels in the entertainment industry?* This question sought to identify the various challenges Black female entertainment executives encountered as they rose to executive level in their respective organizations and individual journeys and lived experiences. To garner a deeper understanding of the obstacles Black female entertainment executives navigate, the researcher asked correlating interview questions related to the challenges they face. The following five questions were asked and will be reviewed individually:

1. At that time, what challenge(s) or difficulties were you facing?

2. Did any of these challenges relate to a misperception of you as a Black woman?

3. Would these challenges have been different had you not been Black? How?

4. What other challenges did you face in your ascent to your current leadership position?

5. How do relationships with colleagues, supervisors, and/or people with influence and power within your department or organization impact your level of success?

Interview Question 1

After participants reflected on one of the most challenging times in their career, they were asked, *At that time, what challenge(s) or difficulties were you facing?* Most of the participants' responses evoked memories that took place during the earliest moments in their careers. These responses were also based on the intersectionality of their race and gender. Figure 5 highlights the responses that the 12 participants provided, resulting in three themes that represented the challenges and obstacles that they encountered as they rose to executive levels in the entertainment industry: (a) lack of mentorship, (b) being disregarded, and (c) bias and discrimination.

Lack of Mentorship. Six of the twelve participants, or 50% of the women identified this as a challenge. Lack of mentorship speaks to not only the absence of people within or outside of the workplace helping Black women to navigate career moves and decisions, but also not having guidance to make appropriate decisions for their career when they are new to the profession, industry, or organization. Two of the participants (P2 and P5) indicated that not having mentors early in their career made it difficult to know what to do when decisions arose about choosing the best or next route to take when an opportunity was presented. P5 said that she had difficulty "deciding where to start." P3 indicated that her experience with a lack of mentorship manifested as being given limited support. She noted that even with the excessive scrutiny she faces in comparison with her White counterparts, stating, "we're also not given the same amount of

support." P11 indicated that when she was new and inexperienced, she had to figure a lot of things out by herself. She expressed that when she asked for training, "it was a sink or swim approach and that was really challenging." Not having mentorships proved to be crippling for many of the women who described this as being their biggest challenge.

Figure 5

Interview Question 1 – Frequency Response Bar Chart

Interview Question 1 - Coding Results

n = 12 (multiple responses per participant)
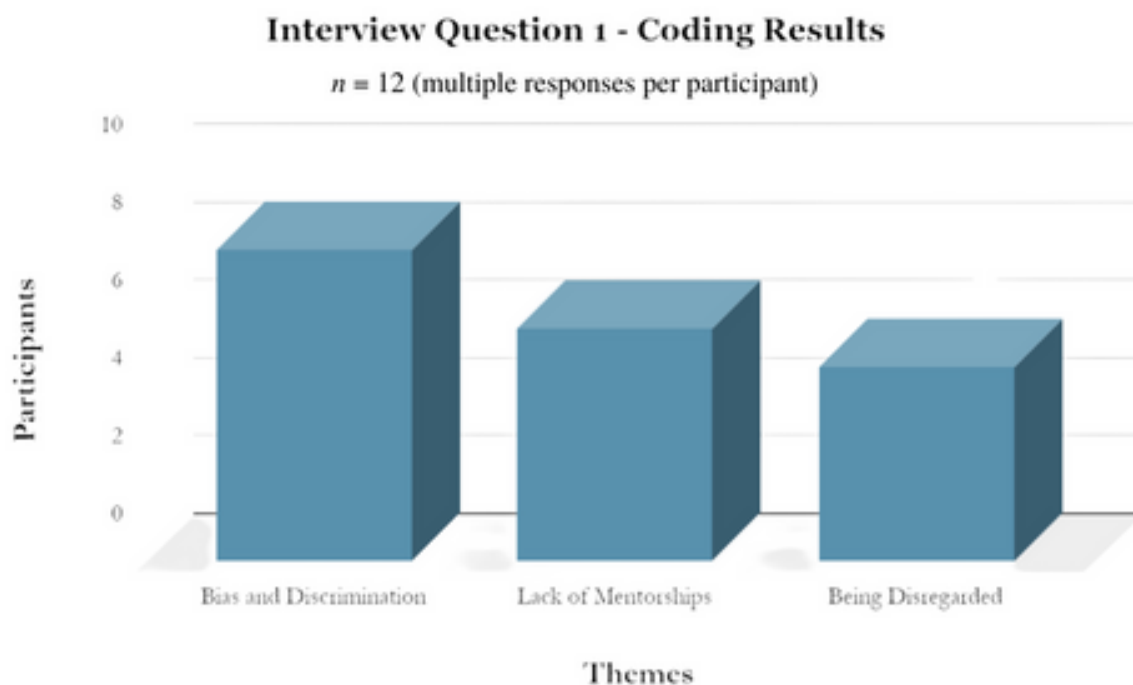
Note. This bar graph shows the results of participants' responses indicating their biggest challenges faced during the most difficult time in their career.

Being Disregarded. Five participants (P7, P8, P9, P11, and P12), or approximately 42%, described their encounter with bias as being disregarded, either for their efforts and contributions to the organization, not being perceived as the leader, or simply as a human being with feelings. P12 mentioned the amount of work she had done and the contributions she had made during her first 6 years at her company as an executive assistant. She noted,

I think the most frustration came in during that time when I started seeing my White

counterparts come in and their trajectory moved much quicker than mine. A lot of them

had come in as executive assistants and had graduated within 2 years.

P10 reflected on the time after George Floyd's murder and how her supervisors, who were

White, wanted to have discussions with the Black employees to see how they were doing. For

her it was them making the assumption that everything was okay before that, though there was a

constant fight for them to be more inclusive in their hiring practices. Therefore, the disregard of

the inequities that Black employees at the company faced prior to George Floyd's murder, then

navigating the culture of the company after that was challenging for her.

P8 recalled being given many competitive deals to negotiate prior to elevating to Senior

Vice President, even though her White male counterpart, who was already Senior Vice President,

was not as efficient as she. Yet, she said, "I wasn't getting the same recognition that he was

getting." P7 remembered planning and running an event at a stadium and having an encounter

with a White man from another company. When he approached her, he said, "Can you connect

me to whoever the gentleman is who's running this event? I'd like to talk to him about some

other potential partnerships." She recollected the tone he used with her, "as if I was the help,"

and how he assumed she could not have been over the event because she was Black and a

woman.

Bias and Discrimination. There were eight participants (P3, P4, P7, P8, P9, P10, P11,

and P12), or 67%, who shared that their biggest challenge was related to a bias and/or

discrimination. Bias and discrimination reflect the negative stereotypical views that Black female

entertainment executives face in the workplace as they elevate to executive levels and beyond.

The participants often discussed challenges of notably disparate treatment between them and

their White and male counterparts. P12 described working as an executive assistant for 6 years despite her experience and education and not being given a promotion. She explained, "But I found myself stagnant as an executive assistant for 6 years, during this time I had a master's degree." P12 noted that she was the only Black person in the division. For her, witnessing White men and women come into the organization as recent college graduates at her level and receive promotions faster than she did was blatant discrimination and frustrating for her. P4 also discussed how she was overlooked for advancement whereas a White female coworker, who had less experience and was not as inclusive as P4 was, was promoted to be her supervisor. P9 expressed her discontent with her disparity in pay versus her White and other race counterparts. Based on her response, she stated, "I don't feel that I was being paid, based on my skill set and education, compared to my [White] counterparts."

Interview Question 2

Participants were then asked: *Did any of these challenges relate to a misperception of you as a Black woman?* It is important to make a connection between the challenge and what the participants perceived the misperception to be or be based on. Participants readily followed up their answers with an explanation without prompting from the interviewer. Nine of the participants (P1, P3, P4, P6, P7, P8, P9, P11, and P12) affirmed that the challenge they faced was based on a misperception. Initially, P10 said no, but then changed her answer. The themes that emerged are: (a) seen as incompetent, (b) no connections, and (c) bias/stereotypes.

Seen as Incompetent. Three participants (P6, P8, and P12), or 25% of the female executives, said that their challenge was based on the misperception that people in executive positions in the entertainment industry are likely not women and Black, and because they are, they are ill-equipped to lead effectively. P6 discussed the notion that often that White executives,

often men, say there are no qualified Black people to hire, but often do not look where they can be found, like in a Historically Black College or University (HBCU). She discussed how a part of the challenge she faces is convincing them to hire Black graduates from reputable law schools, such as Howard Law School. P6 said that "they would say, 'we just don't know where to find qualified, Black applicants to apply for these positions', but yet they didn't interview at Howard." She went on to say that they were more willing to hire mediocre White males, "but the criteria for the Black lawyer is you had to have gone to Yale, Harvard, NYU, Stanford or Columbia. But then the White guys can go to Cardoza, Brooklyn Law School, [or] Fordham." Thus, in this participant's option, this creates a standard that says Black lawyers from HBCUs are not as competent as a White man from the aforementioned colleges. P8's conversation around the challenge of the misperception that Black people are incompetent is the reason why she is "trying to shift perceptions around what leadership looks like." Like P6, she has had to deal with the conception that there are no qualified Black people applying or available to hire. Both P6 and P8 stated that they were committed to ongoing efforts to shift misperceptions about Black women and people in general.

No Connections. Two participants (P4 and P6), or 17%, mentioned not having connections. The female Black executives who were interviewed spoke of not having connections to people with influence or connections within their organization, which contributed to their challenges. Not having someone to advocate for them and validate their integrity or character contributed to misconceptions that people had about them as Black women. P4 was overlooked for advancement because she was not as closely connected to her supervisor who made the decision and was a White woman. The woman who was selected for the promotion was closer to P4's supervisor, thus causing her to lose an opportunity to rise up the ranks. P6

validated this notion by expressing that "people in power [hire] folks that look like them instead of opening up to diversity." This often causes a problem when the people in power are not Black, which is often the case.

Figure 6

Interview Question 2 – Frequency Response Bar Chart
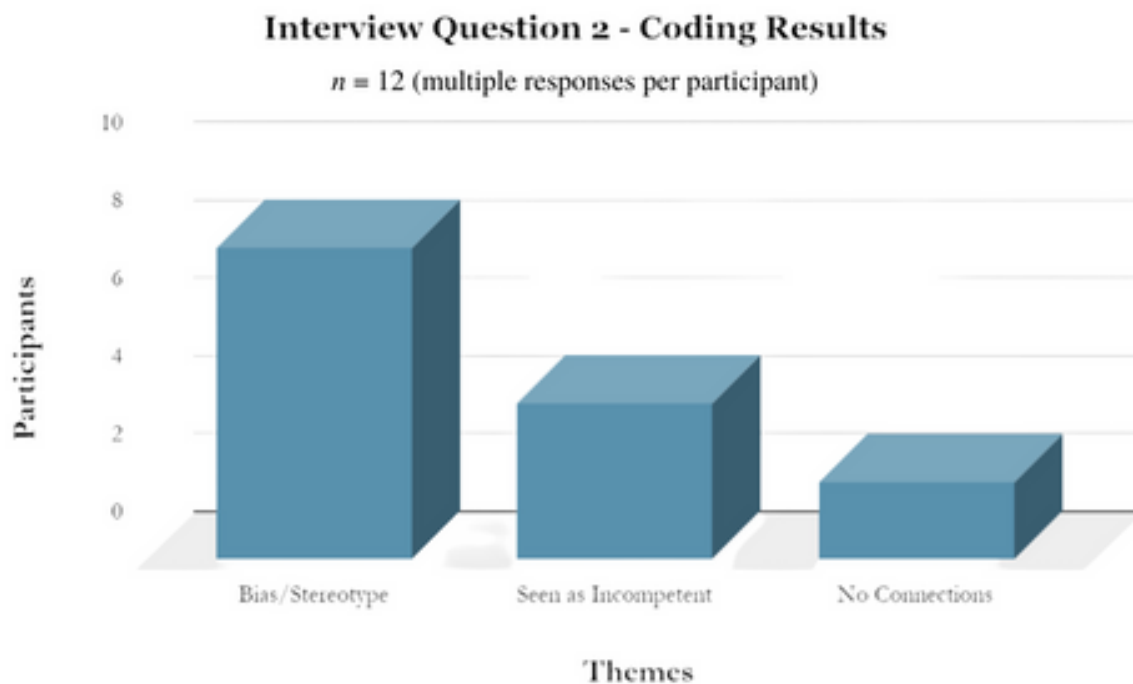
Interview Question 2 - Coding Results

n = 12 (multiple responses per participant)

Note. This bar graph shows the results of participants' responses indicating if they felt their challenges relate to their misperceptions.

Bias/Stereotype. Eight of the executives (P1, P2, P3, P7, P8, P9, P10, and P11), or approximately 67% of the women who interviewed, indicated that the misconception was based on a bias or stereotype. People having a preconceived mentality about how Black women act, what they will say, or what they will do before even being acquainted with them reflects their biases and stereotypes. P1 described how when she says something, because her voice is deep, it's always misconceived as her being angry. She is often told to "calm down." It is all the more upsetting for her that when her White colleague says the same thing, no response is given.

P1 says that she is tired of dealing with the angry Black woman trope after over 25 years in the entertainment industry. P10 indicated that her challenge was based on the "trope that Black women are strong." The strong Black woman trope has also plagued Black women for years, and unfairly so for a few reasons. Firstly, there seems to be a disregard of their feelings; oftentimes, Black women feel like they cannot show vulnerability or are self-pressured to take on more than they can handle to show their strength. Similarly, P8 said that these misperceptions cause her to have to constantly communicate and demonstrate what it means to be a Black woman, which often goes against the biases that non-Black people have developed in their minds. She stated, "you know that you're having to work against a perception about a perception of Black women."

P1 discussed various conversations that she has had have with over the years with her non-Black and often White colleagues. She stated that because White people "don't have Black people in their circles…there is a perception and the sense that they will create a narrative for you, based upon media representation." When this is the case, she says that she feels like it's a job to best represent Black women with positive interactions at work and undo any of the negative stereotypes and depictions that the media creates for Black women. Furthermore, the idea that Black women are monolithic is another bias she encountered. She has had to deal with several misperceptions over the years, including her White colleagues assuming that she was "from the hood" and not from an affluent city in California or being surprised that she got an almost perfect score on her SAT.

Interview Question 3

The third interview question asked participants: *Would these challenges have been different if you were not Black? How?* This question sought to assess if Black female executives in the entertainment industry perceive disparate treatment between them and their non-Black

counterparts. Nine of the participants (P1, P2, P3, P4, P6, P7, P8, P9, P10, and P12) affirmed that either there would not have been a challenge if they weren't Black or the challenge may have been different.

Figure 7

Interview Question 3 – Frequency Response Bar Chart
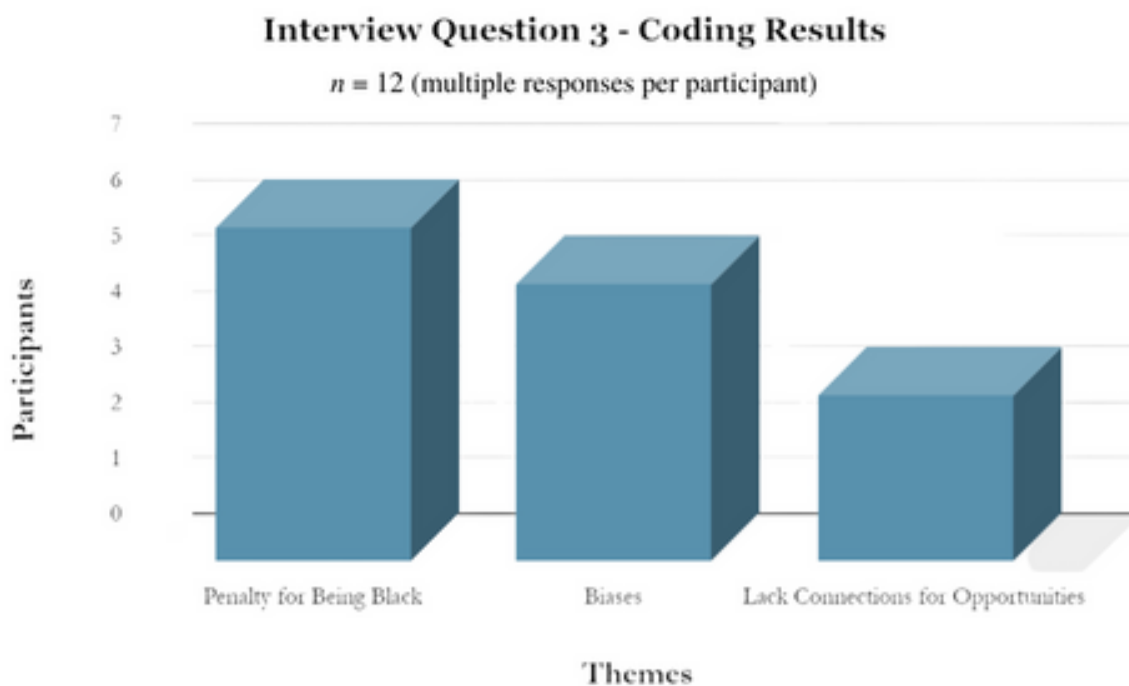
Interview Question 3 - Coding Results

n = 12 (multiple responses per participant)

Note. This bar graph shows the results of participants' responses indicating if they felt their challenges were due to them being Black.

Penalty for Being Black. Fifty percent of the women who were interviewed indicated that they felt like they were being penalized because they were Black, and often, because they were women. This was often based on the context of having to constantly defend themselves for how they looked or facing some type of emotional tax that they had to pay in the workplace. When speaking about if she felt her challenge would have been different. P8 indicated, "Had I been an Asian woman, [the challenge would be] a little different and a [if I had been a] White woman, absolutely differently." P1 mentioned how she was sure that conversations about her

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took place when she was not present. Often, when she arrived at meetings, her suspicion would be confirmed. She said, "My Blackness enters the room before I even physically [do]. 'Oh, we've heard about [Angel].'" She went on further to say, "There's an extra tax on Black women in corporate America that other women do not face."

P4 described the idea that being a Black woman meant having to go above and beyond to prove her competence. She reflected, "I still had to prove myself and I still work twice as hard to get half as far." P8 spoke of how interacting with her White counterparts feels like a "mental exercise" and how "exhausting" it is. She noted that she feels like she has "so many jobs, a job to do the work you've hired me to do, plus my job to manage you." P3 talked about how, as a penalty for being Black, she was forced to work in music genres that are considered "Black," but the opposite was not necessarily true for her White colleagues. She stated, "You put a White person who can work in Black music in a heartbeat, but you won't let a [Black] person go work in rock music." She said that because of this, they do not get to expand their knowledge base because there is an assumption that Black people only listen to, or relate to, stereotypical genres.

Lack Connections for Opportunities. Three participants (P2, P6, and P12), or 25%, shared how the challenges they faced were based on the fact that as Black women, they commonly do not have relationships with people who wield influence. P2 said, "A lot of people have family connections, or I believe connections, and you've seen jobs handed to people based on that." P6 said often White people have

> somebody that's in the industry and who can make a phone call or their father plays golf
> with somebody or whatever. So they have an edge there for the connections that are
> necessary to be able to land that first opportunity and … Black folk don't have the same
> access that Whites do.

P12 revealed, "I recognize that my counterparts were thriving and growing in the space around me…I was the only Black person in that space." As such, for her, she did not have anyone to advocate for her promotion.

Biases. Five participants (P7, P8, P9, P10, and P11), or approximately 42%, provided examples that they experienced biases because they were Black. Biases often play a part in the challenges that Black female executives encounter. The fact that White people often lean away from Black women, for various reasons, impedes their ability to be optimally successful, in many instances. P10 reflected on how the message behind spoken words are often disregarded when a Black person speaks them. She said,

> So communication is not only about what's being said, it's also about how it's being received and people are going to receive it. Sometimes differently, coming from a Black woman than [if] they [would] be coming from a White woman or White man.

Likewise, P8 said,

> You know people feel comfortable with who looks like them. Who they look like. Who sounds like them. So even when you talk about communication, you know, like "Oh, she's aggressive." Well, what was aggressive about that? You know it's different… if you're [a] White woman saying it. It's received a different way. Then the Black ones that seem to always have to be thoughtful about what that communication, how that communication will come across to them [White people].

Interview Question 4

The next question asked, *What other challenges did you face in your ascent to your current leadership position?* Understanding that female entertainment executives face multiple challenges as they rise up the corporate hierarchy, it was important to invite participants to share

any other obstacles that plague them in the workplace. Many of the obstacles that came up in response to Interview Question 1 were also expressed in answers to this question, showing that although these women are on their own unique professional journeys, most of the challenges that they encounter are common to Black women across the corporate settings in the entertainment industry. Four themes occurred most often among the women: (a) bias or discrimination, (b) mental/emotional fatigue, (c) being the only one, and (d) lack of sponsorships/mentorships (see Figure 8).

Figure 8

Interview Question 4 – Frequency Response Bar Chart
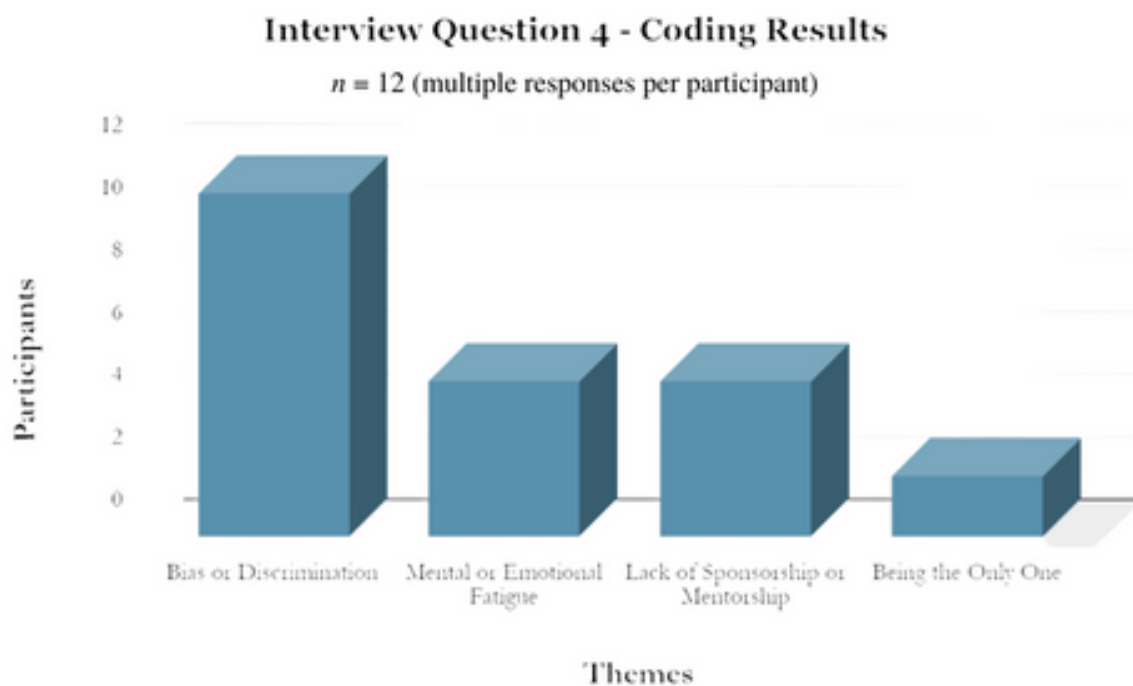
Note. This bar graph shows the results of participants' responses identifying other challenges they faced.

Bias or Discrimination. This theme was experienced by all of the participants except for P2, which is approximately 92%. In addition to bias, participants experienced discrimination and lost opportunities because of their race and gender. The participants provided multiple instances

of how other challenges manifested in their professional journey. P1, P4, P5, and P9 discussed how they were discriminated against with respect to compensation. P5 shared how she was paid less than a White colleague who came in the company after her and whom P5 was training. Her White colleague came in making more than she was. It was 6 months later when P5 received an increase in pay.

P4 said that after she asked a male Jewish colleague who was doing the same job she was what he was making, she learned that he was making considerably more than she was. When she heard his response, she said she "was like, 'whoa, there's a huge difference between what you get paid and what I get paid.'" P1 recalls inadvertently being made aware of what she was going to be offered for a pay increase. She was flabbergasted to find out that the increase was not based on a scale or skill, but rather was an arbitrary amount that her three White male superiors thought would be appealing to her.

P3 and P6 talked about how their efforts were not valued, especially in comparison to their White counterparts. P5 and P8 talked about being overlooked for advancement opportunities. P8 said that not only was she overlooked for a promotion, but also the company "hired this White woman who did not know the business the way that I knew that business, and I was expected to train her." P8 said that she felt like on a daily basis she was "dealing with conscious and unconscious biases."

Mental/Emotional Fatigue. Five participants (P1, P6, P7, P8, and P9), or approximately 42%, described another challenge as mental or emotional fatigue related to the constant conversations regarding race and equity or having to appear to be a certain way for the sake of the job. P1 described the conversations regarding why a Black person or person of color should have an opportunity by saying,

Like, sometimes I feel like I've gone 12 rounds with Mike Tyson at work when I come

home, because I am fighting the good fight every single day. Every single day, I have to

get on and explain, whatever it might be, so it is one of those that is mentally and I would

say, also physically, exhausting by the end of the day.

Likewise, P7 said that having to educate people on how to interact with and treat Black people is

tiring. P8 said that she gets fatigued trying to convince people that there are qualified Black

people who can be hired. P6 said that it is mentally exhausting working for someone who does

not understand you culturally or does not have your professional interest at heart.

Being the Only One. Two participants (P7 and P12), or approximately 17%, identified

being the only Black woman as a challenge. It is important to note that although only two women

called this challenge out when Interview Question 4 was asked, many women spoke of the

difficulty of being the only Black woman in other contexts during the interview. P7 spoke of a

meeting where she was the only Black person with her team, but there were a lot of Black people

on the other team in the meeting. She recalled feeling awkward, yet obligated to correct her

White team members when they said something incorrectly or disregarded factors related to the

team of Black people. P12 discussed the isolation being the only Black person in her division

caused her to feel. She stated, "I just didn't see anyone that can relate to me."

Lack of Sponsorships/Mentorships. Five participants (P2, P3, P10, P11, and P12),

which is approximately 42%, highlighted the importance of having sponsorships or mentorships

as they rose to executive levels in the entertainment industry. Sponsorships are a big reason some

of the participants have risen through the ranks as they have. Participants pointed out that

mentorships are key to getting guidance during uncertain moments during their career. P10, P11,

and P12 agreed that not being in workplace cliques or in-groups made it challenging for them to

access various opportunities or meetings with influential people. P10 said, "It's that clique or…those folks that get the best assignments or they have the rapport. They have the history." P11 remembered that she was omitted from informal mentoring, stating, "I was frustrated both that I wasn't getting that informal mentoring, where they were getting that inside…out on the golf course, but also that I was left behind to handle the workload." She indicated that she makes a point to not exclude anyone from mentoring.

Interview Question 5

Interviewees answered, *How do relationships with colleagues, supervisors, and/or people with influence and power within your department or organization impact your level of success?* As the last question that provides a greater understanding of Research Question 1, this question elicits responses from the participants to determine their clarity on the impact that people have in their ability to move throughout their organizations. The women's responses provided proof that they are aware of the correlation between relationships and elevation in entertainment industry companies. All of the participants except for P1 and P5 saw this question from a position of realizing that it takes all those they work with to work cooperatively to ensure they are able to access opportunities and the best compensation. P1 did not mention the importance of teamwork and building relationships to ensure a positive impact on her career, though she brought up the point in her response to another question. The three themes that were arose from this question, once most of the participants indicated that relationships "greatly" impact their level of success, are as follows: (a) determine compensation and advancement, (b) strong relationships/teamwork determine success, and (c) makes you hypervisible (see Figure 9).

Figure 9

Interview Question 5 – Frequency Response Bar Chart
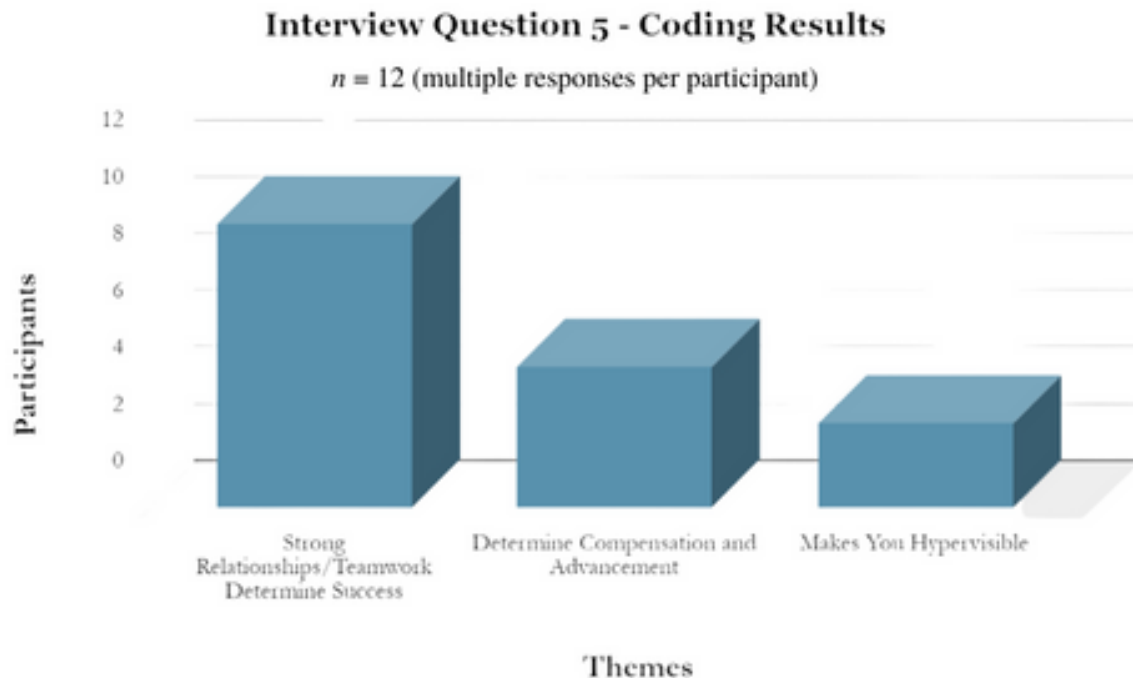
Note. This bar graph shows the results of participants' responses regarding the impact colleagues, supervisors and people with power and influence have on their success.

Determine Compensation and Advancement. Five participants (P1, P5, P9, P10, and P11), or approximately 42%, said that their relationships with colleagues and supervisors in the workplace have an impact on compensation and opportunities for advancement. P5 spoke of how supervisors determine whether or not she would be promoted based on her yearly performance, thus, giving her all in the workplace was critical for advancement. P11 indicated that she makes certain to cultivate relationships that will allow her to help those coming behind her to have an easier road than she had. She explained, "I take relationships very seriously. Again, I try to pay it forward. So not just pulling from executives that can lift me, but lifting as I climb and bringing people along." P10 was very clear that relationships make way for opportunities, and conversely,

when you do not have relationships, or a history with certain people, you miss out on opportunities. She asserted,

> Let's be honest, those relationships can sometimes identify who's on what project or, in some instances, with places where you know the crew, [people were] then brought on and reduced. it's those relationships that identified who got to stay on while everyone else got let go.

P9 professed, "I have been placed in several leadership projects'' that were "highly visible" because of the relationships she forged.

Strong Relationships/Teamwork Determine Success. Ten participants (P2, P3, P4, P6, P7, P8, P9, P10, P11, and P12), which is approximately 83%, stressed the importance of strong relationships and embracing teamwork as a catalyst for success. These women recognized that there is no chance for promotion and movement without the support of a team or the advocacy of people with influence. Understanding this fact, the women worked within the corporate system to build and sustain positive relationships with everyone they encounter in the workplace. P2 pointed out that as difficult as it is sometimes to be a part of the "in-group" or certain cliques at work, "they can influence the people of power." P3 asserted, "It takes teamwork for success." P4 and P6 said that it is important to "establish relationships." P8 acknowledged, "So as a Black woman…knowing that I have to work extra hard to have those relationships and be really thoughtful about who are my allies." P11 admitted that she needs to have

> one on ones and lunches with people that I need to do business with regularly, to have them get to know me and me get to know them outside of an ask or an urgent situation, so that we can develop rapport and trust. Diminishes friction in daily interactions.

Makes You Hypervisible. As a downside for three participants (P7, P10, and P12), or 25%, they acknowledged that the relationships that they have with various people can be problematic for them as Black women. P12 spoke of how she felt that, because she was the only Black woman in her unit, she stood out among her colleagues as a Black woman and was hypervisible. She explained, "So those relationships, in the way that we manage and navigate were different per person, right? Whether it was my colleagues or my boss, it was just different per person." For her, this meant that relationships between her and her colleagues or her boss had a different connotation in comparison to her non-Black colleagues. Her boss saw "everything" she did. P7 expressed a similar sentiment. She shared that as a Black woman, it's not just enough for her to be present. She explained,

> When you are a woman of color… you got to show your work. You got to show it. Everybody don't have to show their work, they just got to show up. We got to show our work and that's the difference. We can't just show up and act like we're going into the office and work. We got to physically show up and show out every single time.

She even mentioned how hypervisible she is to her White colleagues. She mentioned how noticeable it is if she gets an opportunity that they feel that she does not deserve. She recalls that "there have been a few questions where I've been told, 'Why you? Oh, you got that? Why they pick you?'" The focus her colleagues have on her makes her feel like she has to pay an "emotional tax."

Summary of Research Question 1

Research Question 1 revealed various challenges that Black female entertainment industry executives encounter on their journey toward executive levels, including reasons why the challenges may occur, and how people in the workplace influence the participants' upward

mobility. The participants' lived experiences that cause them anguish, unease, helplessness, and hopelessness as they maneuver tactics that could thwart their ability to promote and ultimately have an impact on others' professional journeys. Participants' perspectives as to the impact people have on their success was a revelation of the juxtaposition of the reliance female Black entertainment executives have upon the people who work with them and the fact that they may be the same people who cause problems for them in the workplace.

Research Question 2

Research Question 2 asked: *What strategies and best practices are employed by Black women executives to overcome the challenges faced on their path to reach executive levels in the entertainment industry?* This question identifies the strategies that Black women executives in the entertainment industry enlist to navigate in their ascension up the corporate hierarchy. To better comprehend these best practices, interview questions that correlated to the research questions were asked. The following five questions were asked and will be reviewed individually:

6. Going back to your most challenging time example, how did you overcome the challenge(s) you faced?

7. How did you overcome other challenges in your ascent to your current leadership position?

8. How did your mentors, friends or allies guide you through navigating these challenges?

9. Were there any organizational resources available to you?

The perspectives and strategies that the participants provided are useful to chronicle the various paths that can be taken to overcome challenges faced.

Interview Question 6

Question 6 asked, *Going back to your most challenging time example, how did you overcome the challenge(s) you faced?* The participants shared the strategies and paths they took to overcome obstacles during their most challenging time. The responses were dispersed among five themes: (a) seek out support from friends/colleagues, (b) narrow my career focus, (c) guide the narrative/perception of black women, (d) maintain a positive outlook, and (e) self-advocate (see Figure 10).

Figure 10

Interview Question 6 – Frequency Response Bar Chart
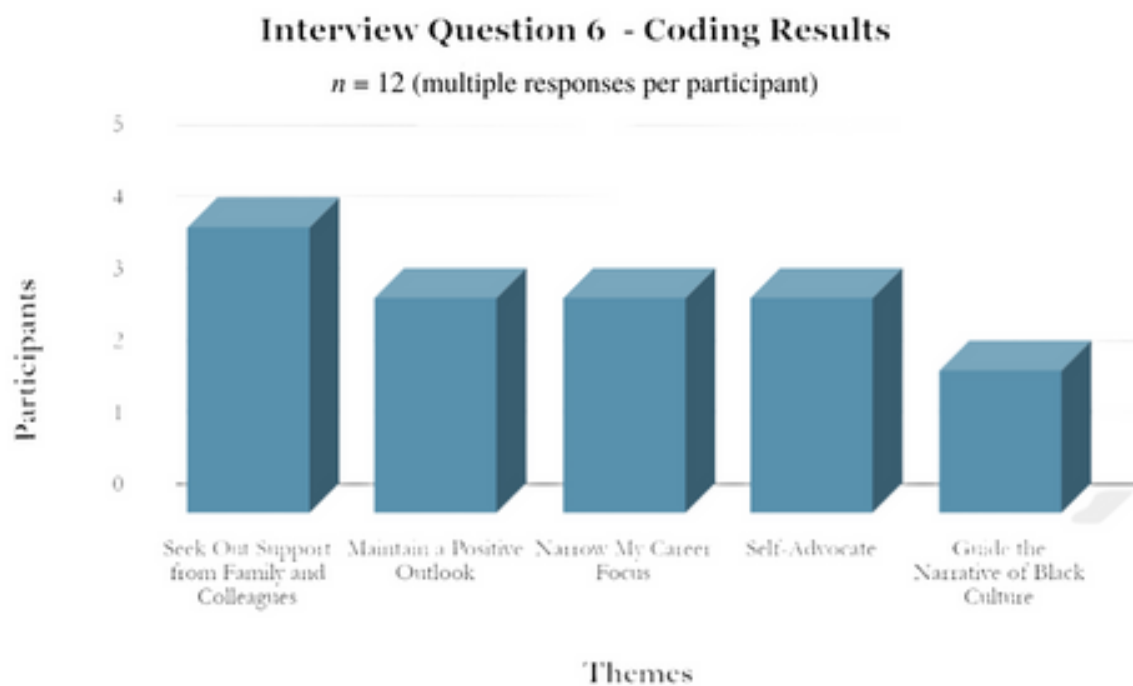
Interview Question 6 - Coding Results

n = 12 (multiple responses per participant)

Note. This bar graph shows the results of participants' responses regarding how they overcame challenges during their most difficult time.

Seek Out Support from Friends/Colleagues. Four participants (P5, P6, P8, and P11), or approximately 33%, stressed the importance of utilizing their circle of support to get through their most difficult challenge in their ascent to the executive level. P11 specifically

acknowledged getting support from her family during her most challenging time. She shared, "I leaned on outside support; my family, my mentors to help balance that negativity." Also, she pointed out the fact that having someone within the workplace with whom she could be vulnerable and share her innermost feelings was useful to her. She said, "I leaned on that person and the other Black woman…a lot of tears and lunch sessions." In addition to getting emotional support, participants shared that they get advice on career moves as well. P8 said, "And I remember speaking with another person at a sister company, who was partially responsible for my being here…but he gave me an insight into how they negotiate their promotions and their compensation." P8 indicated that getting advice from White people gives insight into the difference in how they interact with their supervisors when compared to Black people.

Narrow My Career Focus. Another strategy that three participants (P2, P4, and P11), or 25%, described, was how they reflected on their careers and considered taking another direction or working to decipher exactly what they wanted to do. These participants indicated that they sought to make alternative career moves to navigate their challenges. P4 spoke about how when she was faced with her challenge, she made moves that would provide her with more options. She asserted, "I invested in me, and so I joined a board readiness program. I was like, I'm going to use this time to see if I can get a corporate board seat." P11 talked about how there are instances where staying is not beneficial from a mental health perspective. She discussed that working on a "plan and an exit strategy" is another option.

Guide the Narrative/Perception of Black Women. Two participants (P3 and P7), or approximately 17%, felt that it was important to help colleagues who had misconceptions about Black women and Black culture. These challenges involved biases or misperceptions of Black women or Black people in general. P3 and P7 both felt that in order to navigate their challenges

it was important to address others' misperceptions. P7 said that she addressed the bias that she faced by using it as a "teachable moment." It was important to her to try to redirect the mindset of the White man she encountered. P3 shared that she felt like she had to ensure that Black culture "doesn't get prostituted or taken advantage of, to make sure that we're properly represented."

Maintain a Positive Outlook. Three participants (P1, P4, and P6), or 25%, expressed the importance of navigating challenges by maintaining a positive outlook on the situation. Maintaining a positive outlook is how Black female entertainment executives manage their way through some of the most difficult times in the workplace. P1 expanded on the notion that remembering her purpose and that she was working for a greater good because her work opened opportunities for people of color. P4 and P6 engaged in positive self-talk and affirmations to endure the challenges. When she was overlooked for an opportunity, P4 said that she told herself that another opportunity would come up. P6 advised that "you keep going because you believe that you are going to get there, and that has to be the mindset."

Self-Advocate. Four participants (P8, P9, P10, and P12), or approximately 33%, felt that it was important to speak up for themselves when they were faced with challenges. Speaking up for themselves is essential for Black women in a corporate setting. P9 recalled, "I did talk to my supervisor about some of the concerns, with backed up with evidence." Likewise, P12 said she made sure that she was "advocating for myself using my records to support my advocacy." P10 said that she felt that because she had created and nurtured relationships between her and her supervisors, she made sure to "capitalize on relationships to communicate feelings." P8 simply stated, "I advocated for myself."

Interview Question 7

Participants described the strategies that they used to overcome their most challenging encounter in response to Interview Question 6. Interview Question 7 asked, *How did you overcome other challenges in your ascent to your current leadership position?* It should be noted that some of the same strategy themes to overcome challenges that arose from this question were mentioned in Interview Question 6, and there are also new challenge strategy themes that emerged. The themes were: persevere, seek out support from friends/colleagues, self-advocate, work within corporate culture/systems, and rely on faith (see Figure 11).

Figure 11

Interview Question 7 Frequency Bar Chart
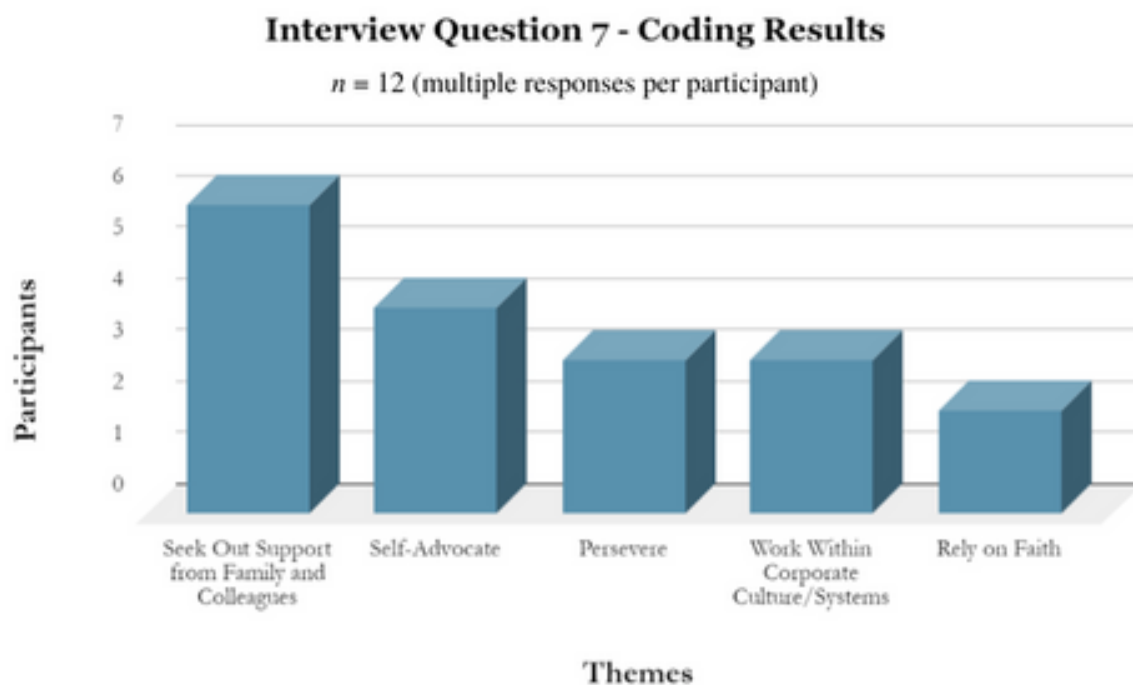
Note. This bar graph shows the results of participants' responses regarding how they overcame other challenges.

Persevere. Three female executives, or 25%, discussed navigating their other challenges by persevering despite the obstacles they have to navigate. P5, P6, and P10 said they persevered

through their respective challenges. P5 said she works to "be the best I can be." P6 said as a way to encourage herself she would tell herself "just keep going despite obstacles, hardships, people telling you no and then secondly [tell] yourself to not quit." P10 said that when you cannot leave the company, "find a way around the challenge." That last strategy is often an option that has to be enlisted when there are no other options.

Seek Out Support from Family/Colleagues. Another strategy implemented by 50% participants (P1, P2, P4, P7, P11, and P12) to overcome challenges was seeking support from family and colleagues. Accessing support offered advice, direction, and a way to be vulnerable in a safe space. P1 described how her mother supported her. She reflected,

And I remember coming home to my mom. I was like, "Wow mom! I think they hired me because I'm Black"…and I was feeling real sorry for myself. So, it was one of those, like oh, I think that that's my only qualification. And in my mother's, who is the wisest person that I know, she didn't even flinch, and she was like, "Yeah. Could be, but you show them who you are."

P4 mentioned the importance of accessing what she called a "support group", which for her was *"*people that you can go to speak honestly to about the things that you want to say to people, but you are just going to say to your group." In the same vein, P7 spoke about how it was important to "tap into support and encouragement from mentors." P12 acknowledged, "I had a support system in my spouse at home, who would encourage me and tell me, and remind me of what's most important right outside of that space."

Self-Advocate. Four participants (P2, P8, P9, and P11), or approximately 33%, felt that self-advocating was a way to navigate their other challenges. Participants shared the strategy of self-advocacy in response to both Interview Questions 6 and 7. P2 decided the best way to

navigate her challenges was to speak up for herself. She said sometimes you have to "complain that you need more help and make it known." P9 said that when she was overwhelmed with too much work, she admitted to "saying no and speaking up to what you can and cannot do." When P11 experienced her superiors giving her disparate treatment as compared to her White colleagues, she said, "I expressed…frustration and that I noticed it, [and]…I was aware." Even though her superiors did not change their treatment of her, she had the courage to let them know what she was experiencing.

Work Within Corporate Culture/Systems. Three participants (P2, P9, and P10), which is 25%, indicated that there are various strategies related to having to work within the confines of the company's culture. The participants discussed how they have to learn to maneuver the obstacles they face as they rise to the executive level by working within the corporate structure and understanding the implications surrounding the culture and systems in an organization. Though P2 was challenged with an excessive amount of work and few people to accomplish the expectations, noting her "understanding that finances often drive company policies." Therefore, she understood that often companies try to save as much money as possible, even if it means that their employees are overworked. P9 said that sometimes "you can't" overcome the challenge and in those events, you may need to try to align yourself with someone else in the company who can support you.

Rely on Faith. The final theme that emerged as a strategy to overcome challenges was participants relying on their faith or religious beliefs. Two participants (P11 and P12), or approximately 17%, mentioned how their faith was a big part of their lives and thus served their ability to navigate challenges they faced. P11 said, "I'm very spiritual and I do what God has [for me to do]. You know, nobody can stop, so God just finds you a different path. People think

they're blocking, but they can't block what God has for you." This is what keeps her moving forward. Similarly, P12 said, "I'm a believer so I carry my light with me wherever I go, so I know that I'm going to encounter dark spaces." Both of these women are confident that, despite the challenges they face, they feel like what is meant to happen will happen.

Interview Question 8

This question asked, *How did your mentors, friends or allies guide you through navigating these challenges?* Participants had the opportunity to share how people in their personal orbits provide support for them as they navigate their challenges. From the responses of these female entertainment industry executives, three main themes surfaced: (a) family provides encouragement, (b) colleagues use influence to give exposure, and (c) colleagues provide advice/understanding (see Figure 12).

Figure 12

Interview Question 8 Frequency Bar
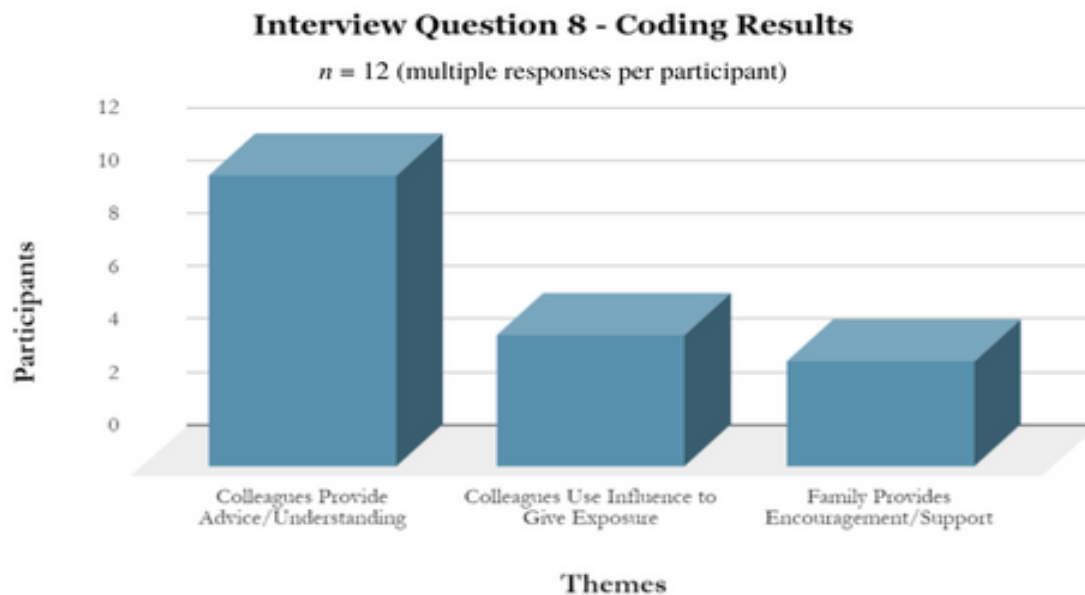
Note. This bar graph shows the results of participants' responses regarding how their mentors, friends, or allies guide them as they navigate challenges.

Family Provides Encouragement/Support. Four participants (P1, P3, P6, and P12), or approximately 33%, mentioned how their families provided encouragement and support when the women encountered challenges as they rose up the corporate hierarchy. P1 and P12 spoke about the support their husbands gave them. P1 said her husband reminded her why she was dealing with the obstacles she faced. She said,

> My husband for sure. A thousand percent, because I needed someone that didn't work
> within the industry… [He said,] "You are doing this for a higher purpose. Don't forget
> who and what you are in this, and how much and how valuable you are to it for them.
> Stop focusing on it for the people that you have to fight with every day. Focus on the
> people that you help when you look at a TV show and it says, 'written by' and you were
> part of helping them write that episode or directed by or the actors you have helped."

She said she appreciated his words of encouragement. In the same way, P12 recalled how her then-husband helped her through a difficult time. She talked about how her ex-husband connected her to someone who could impact her career path. P12 said that her "ex-husband worked with her and was like, 'Oh my wife could definitely use some support from you' and connected us. She's still my mentor to this day." P3 emphasized that women should "have a village that you can lean on and be transparent with; that can support you."

Colleagues Use Influence to Give Exposure. Five participants (P1, P4, P7, P8, and P11), or approximately 42%, discussed how colleagues help them navigate challenges by using their influence to give Black female entertainment executives exposure to other opportunities. The women made it clear that often the colleagues were often White men and women. P1 beamed as she spoke about how "an executive producer also… spoke my name in rooms where I wasn't there." P4 also spoke of such an experience. She said, "I've had people who have been

true sponsors to me, who have put me up for jobs or for opportunities…that happens, so that's how some people have helped." In addition, P8 said it is priceless:

> having someone who can tell you, "We've been here before. We're sitting in rooms, where your name is coming up," or where I'm bringing up your name, and this is what is being said. So this is how you navigate that. It's invaluable.

In a more subtle way, P7 and P11 have said that they have been guided to certain people. P11 said that she has benefited from people "introducing me to people in roles or roles of influence for things I wanted to be doing."

Colleagues Provide Advice/Understanding. One hundred percent of the participants said that their colleagues or supervisors gave them advice or understanding as they navigated the challenges they faced. Participants talked about the various forms of advice they received, including how to negotiate compensation, what direction to take next, and how to self-advocate. P2 said that mentors "tell you to speak up." Related to advice on compensation, P3 said, "[I] called another woman to say, 'Hey this is how much money they're gonna offer me. What should I be asking for?'" P3 said it was difficult for her to be vulnerable and ask for that advice because oftentimes women do not want to share how much they make with another person. However, reaching out was beneficial to her in navigating this dilemma.

P4 was a part of a group of Black Vice Presidents whom she convened as a support group for one another. Of the group she said,

> You know we can talk about…small things, we could talk about big things, we could talk about economic things. We could talk about all things without anyone feeling like, "Ooh, I don't really want to talk about this with this person, because they also are struggling to get to this next level, they don't care about my issues."

It is important to note that most of the women said they received advice and understanding regarding direction and how to navigate the challenge from other Black women. There was one instance when the advice came from a White woman. This finding speaks to the emotional safety Black women need in the workplace and the need to be vulnerable and share their hearts.

Interview Question 9

Interview Question 9 elicited responses regarding whether organizational resources were available to Black female entertainment executives when they sought to work around obstacles as they rose up the corporate hierarchy. By responding to the question, *Were there any organizational resources available to you?,* many of the women mentioned the organizational resources, but based on their responses, these resources were used minimally for certain challenges, especially when they relied on being given exposure to certain people of influence. The responses also show that participants interpreted the word "organizational" in two ways: (a) the organization they work for, and (b) professional affiliation organizations, e.g., The Bar Association. Nevertheless, four main themes came out of responses to this question: mentoring programs, employee resource groups (ERGs), professional groups, and not as entry level Black women (see Figure 13).

Mentoring Programs. Three participants (P2, P3, and P10), or 25%, mentioned having access to mentoring programs. P2 and P10 discussed mentoring programs with their respective companies; however, P10 noted that the mentors were available for lower-level executives. That means for her, at her current level, there is no in-house organizational mentoring resource. P3 mentioned that although there is a program, she does not take advantage of it at her level. She feels more like she is a mentor for younger employees. Ultimately, part of the problem with

navigating challenges for Black female entertainment industry corporate executives is that corporate mentorship programs are either not available or in place for these women.

Figure 13

Interview Question 9 Frequency Bar

Interview Question 9 - Coding Results

n = 12 (multiple responses per participant)
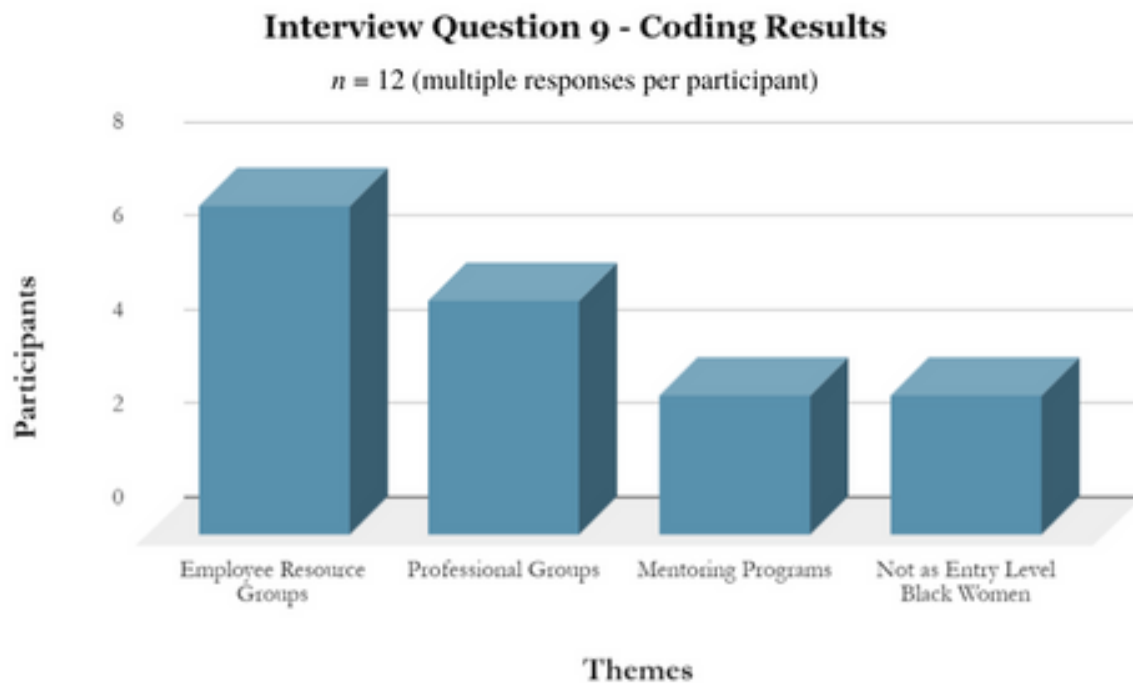
Note: This bar graph depicts participants' responses regarding organizational resources available to them.

Employee Resource Groups. Seven participants (P4, P6, P8, P9, P10, P11, and P12), or approximately 58%, mentioned either starting and/or being affiliated with certain groups. ERGs, which are known in some companies as employee network groups, are groups that cater to employees with similar classifications. For example, participants spoke about being a part of groups that include being for Black women, women, working mothers, and LGBTQ employees. P4 provided some history of ERGs, stating:

> There are various resource groups for different categories of folks. Actually, it's a
>
> protected thing. During the time of desegregation, this was something that was protected.

People could gather, you know, like Black people… you can create a group within your organization. It's an affinity group.

P9 said,

I highly suggest anyone, particularly those of color, to engage in their employee resource group and also other minority resource groups, too. Because that way, you have, you know, those networking opportunities that you also learn about what other people are talking about.

Professional Groups. Five participants (P5, P6, P7, P8, and P11), or approximately 42%, mentioned professional groups as a resource for them. Participants discussed professional groups as a resource for them and described them as affinity organizations geared toward people with common professional interests. However, none of the five participants spoke of their professional groups in the context of a way to navigate their challenges, instead describing them more as a way to network and connect with like-minded professionals in their field. P5 said that she was affiliated with the Black Women Law Association, The Link, and the Bar Association. P8 described her connection with the professional groups to which she belongs by saying, "The professional organizations, they create a community for me, but they haven't necessarily been avenues to me advancing my career internally at the companies I've worked at." P11 commented on the professional groups to which she belongs, saying, "I'm part of a like elite legal fellowship that one of my leaders appointed me to so that was an honor to be appointed and then creates a national network of outside resources to tap into."

Not as Entry Level Black Women. Three participants (P8, P11, and P12), or 25%, noted that when they arrived at their companies, there were no real resources available to them as entry level Black women. P11 indicated that she received resources "over time," but initially, there

were no resources to whom she could speak. P12 started at her company at its inception, and

although it is currently a major entertainment promotion company, when she began in the

company's infancy, there were no resources available to her. P8 revealed that although there may

have been some resources that she could have accessed, she made a clear distinction between

resources to which she had access and resources to which her White counterparts had access. She

admitted,

> I have a lot of resources, but going back to the relationships, in a person of color, I can
>
> see it looks different. Like the junior White lawyer versus a junior lawyer of color, the
>
> folks that make themselves available to give them the feedback and the training. You
>
> know there are resources for all of us, but it takes people giving time and dedicating time
>
> and singing that you are worthy.

As a result, for P8, it is as though some resources do not exist.

Summary of Research Question 2

By soliciting the participants' descriptions of their lived experiences, Research Question

2 sought to determine the best practices and strategies that they enlist to navigate their

challenges. The strategies that these women employ proved to be useful, based on the fact that

they have been able to move up the corporate hierarchy and not only influence their departments,

organizations, and industry, but also sustain themselves for many years in the entertainment

industry. The responses show the women's resilience to challenges that seem unfair and

disparate in comparison to their White and male counterparts. The responses also revealed that

participants utilize individuals and organizations both inside and outside of their respective

companies to seek out support, guidance, and opportunities.

Research Question 3

Research Question 3 asked: *How do Black women executives in the entertainment industry identify, measure, and track success?* The Black female entertainment industry executives who participated in this research provided responses that offered information about how they view their success based on their individual professional journeys. Participants answered two questions that deepened the understanding of what success looks like to Black women executives in the entertainment industry:

10. What would happen/happened in your career to indicate that you've "made it"? If you have difficulty determining "made it" is for you, what would you want your professional legacy to be that proved you had an impact in your career/industry?

11. How have you been able to keep track of your progress towards your career goals?

Interview Question 10

Interview Question 10 asked, *What would happen/happened in your career to indicate that you've "made it"?* The question sought to determine if Black female entertainment industry executives have a sense of what factors they take into consideration when they have reached the pinnacle of their career. Five themes were derived from responses related to this question: (a) work impacts organization or industry, (b) something you never know, (c) making a difference in the lives of others, (d) reaching a certain position/level, and (e) acknowledgement from family/peers (see Figure 14).

Work Impacts Organization or Industry. Seven participants (P1, P2, P3, P4, P10, P11, and P12), or approximately 58%, indicated that they would feel like they made it in their career if their work influences their entire organization or the entertainment industry as a whole. P1 said that her work with diversity, equity, and inclusion "is no longer an afterthought, but it is at the

forefront of everything that we do at the network." She stated that this is currently taking place, but ultimately, she wants for people to say, "What would [Angel] do?" P3 said that people would begin to seek her out for her expertise in certain areas, which she says she is experiencing, specifically her work regarding equitable practices for Black people in the industry.

Figure 14

Interview Question 10 Frequency Bar Graph
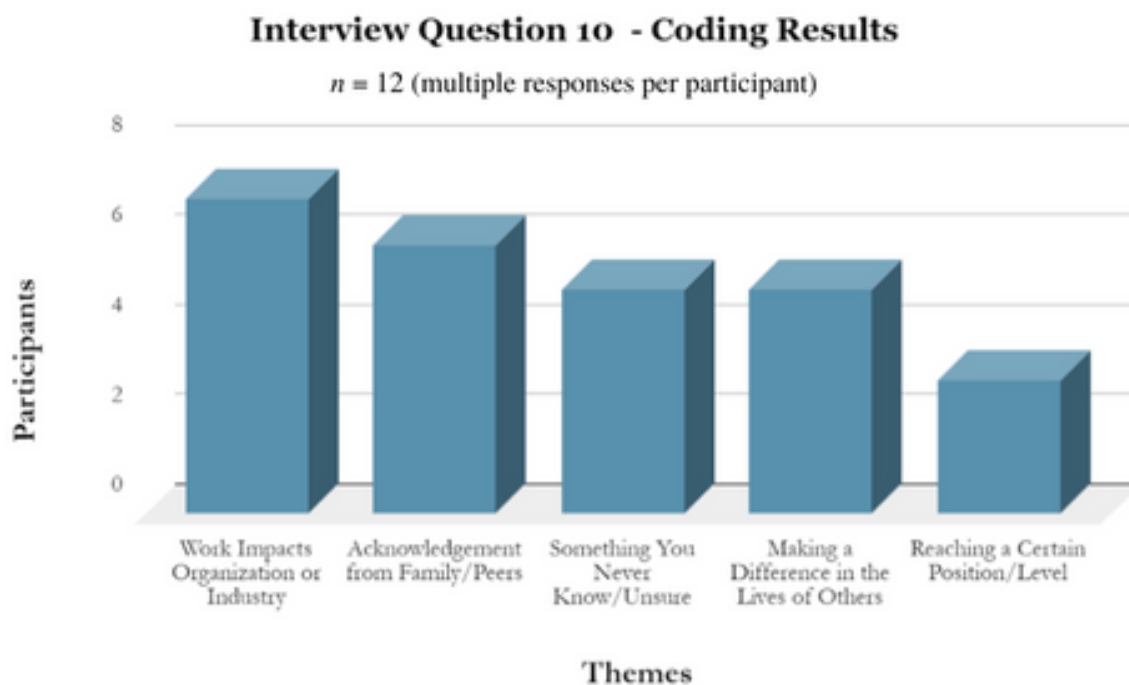
Note. This bar graph depicts participants' answers regarding what happens in their career to indicate they have "made it."

P4 said that once she has made it, she will be able to influence companies that have strong impacts. P11 also talked about the level of influence. She said, "In the right conversations having a voice at the table and being heard and seeing those things being acted on," would be an indicator for her that she has made it. For her it means traveling in specific circles of influence. P12 also thought that it would result in how she is viewed in the industry. She said, "Being in an

industry at a high level…where I'm respected in my own right" will be a sign for her that she has made it.

Something You Never Know/Unsure. Five participants (P2, P4, P6, P8, and P9), or approximately 42%, said it would be exceedingly difficult to know if they had "made it" definitively. All of the interviewees either said that was "something you never know" or felt like it was something they could not readily assess. Nevertheless, once they made that statement, they were prompted to stretch themselves to think about it, and gave responses after reflecting. Three participants (P4, P6, and P8) said that they have not made it. P9 simply said, "I don't know."

Making a Difference in the Lives of Others. Five participants (P1, P4, P6, P7, and P8), or approximately 42%, said that they wanted to influence those coming behind them or whom they supervise, most specifically Black people. When participants had difficulty determining if they could state whether or not they had "made it," they were then asked what they wanted their professional legacy to be or what they wanted to be remembered for from a professional perspective. P1 has influence and provides support and advocacy for people of color. She said, "I see that in television. I'm seeing that on screen. I'm seeing that in our writers' rooms. I'm seeing that with our directors. I'm seeing that across the board and…the seed that I planted is bearing fruit now."

P4 said, "My legacy at [my company] or in the entertainment business would be the number of people that I brought in on the business side of it all." Likewise, P6 said, "That I tried to make a difference in the lives of people around me and that I worked hard to open doors of opportunity for young Black lawyers coming after me and that I tried to give back." P7 and P8 said that they wanted people to remark on how they made a difference in others' lives. P8 said that she wanted people to say that she "really pushed the envelope to create space for more

people who look like her, and to create equity for those folks in these corporate spaces. That will make me happy." P7 said that she would know she had made it "when women of color congratulate me and say they see me supporting women."

Reaching a Certain Position/Level. Three participants (P4, P11, and P12), or 25%, said that they would know they have "made it" when they reach a certain level, position, or notoriety. P4 indicated that she knew she made it when she became vice president at her current company. P12 said for her, making it would be "being in an industry at a high level…where I'm respected in my own right." P11 said for her she would be traveling in circles of people admired or considered "higher" than she is, for example, politicians and people in high level positions from other companies.

Acknowledgement from Family/Peers. Six of the Black female entertainment industry interviewees (P1, P7, P8, P9, P10, and P11), or 50%, said that receiving acknowledgement from family and peers lets them know that they made it. P1 said that she feels like she has made it because her work efforts are "respected and utilized" by her department, her colleagues, and the company. P8 said that if her colleagues said, "[Carla] did a lot for the young people who were coming up, who were interested in arts," she would know she had made it. P9 said for her, "it's always been validation from my parents and my family" that makes her feel like she is most successful and has made it.

P10 said that oftentimes, she is unaware that she has made it, until someone else identifies it for her. She reflected,

> So what happened to make me think that I made it was not the multitude of credits that are on my IMDB or anything along those lines, it was actually that somebody else saw it, and then, I finally heard it and was like, "Oh I'm that person."

P11 reflected on a recent situation when she told her supervisor that she needed a position or department that was her own and one where she could cultivate from its inception. When he agreed with her without question, that was, for her, an "I've made it moment. Like I didn't have to fight for that. I don't have to prove to anybody…no one! Everyone got immediately on board."

Interview Question 11

Participants provided insight when asked, *How have you been able to keep track of your progress towards your career goals?* With the participants' answers, a deeper understanding of Black female entertainment industry executives' view of their career progress became more apparent. From the responses, three themes manifested: data analysis/metrics, correlation between personal and work goals, and through documentation (see Figure 15).

Data Analysis/Metrics. Three participants (P1, P2, and P12), or 25%, said they measure their progress related to their career through data analysis or some form of metrics. P1 said that she looks at her professional progress through the lens of her progress with her team and department. Based on the number of people of color she is able to open opportunities for, P1 monitors these data points as markers for her career progression. She explained, "It's much more of what is authentic to the show, what is authentic to our writers' rooms, and how we are really being…parallel to the industry itself." Being a fairly new entrepreneur, P12 said, "As an entrepreneur I keep metrics and data insights." P2 indicated that the need to discuss diversity, equity, and inclusion less over time would let her know that the work she has put in is moving her career forward.

Figure 15

Interview Question 11 Frequency Bar Graph

Interview Question 11 - Coding Results

n = 12 (multiple responses per participant)

[Bar graph showing Participants on the y-axis (0 to 6) and Themes on the x-axis. "Correlation Between Personal and Work Goals" ≈ 4, "Through Documentation" ≈ 3, "Data Analysis/Metrics" ≈ 2.]
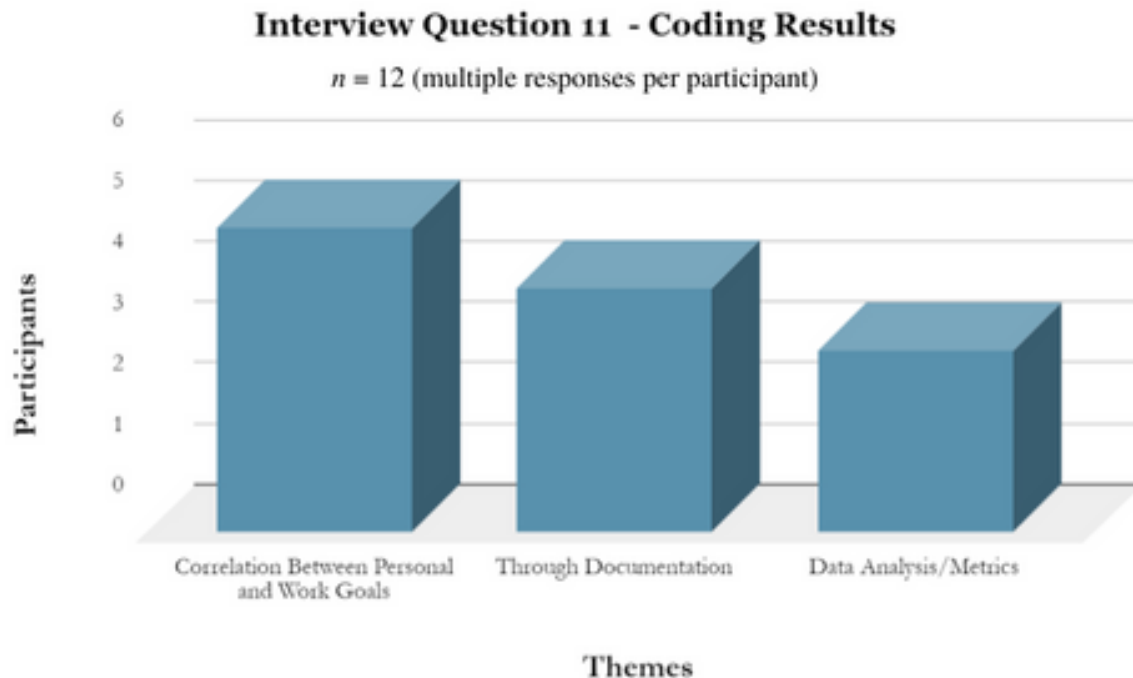
Note. This bar graph depicts participants' responses regarding how they keep track of their progress toward their career goals.

Correlation Between Personal and Work Goals. Fifty percent of the participants (P1, P4, P5, P6, P8, and P11) looked at the relationship between their personal and work goals to make an assessment of their success. When asked how her team's work correlates with her career progress, P1 said, "I have personal goals myself. But as far as working in the industry, it is one of those that I can't have those goals done by myself, I need my team also." P8 said that she looks at what she has accomplished in comparison to what is necessary to reach her next goal. She explained, "You know, am I kind of monitoring that. Okay, what do I need to do in order to be promoted to" the next position or level she is trying to reach. The remainder of the participants said that they use their annual reviews or evaluations as a way to monitor their progress in their career. P4 expounded upon this saying, "What I do is, I look back at my career.

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I have been focused on goals that are specific to what I'm doing in my role until I no longer see whatever the next step is as a goal." P5 said that she reviews her personal goals every year. Similarly, P6 noted that she keeps track through her yearly performance review.

Through Documentation. Some participants (P7, P9, P10, and P11), or approximately 33%, described either keeping a personal journal or using personal documentation to keep track of progress. P7 stated,

> You know, I do write a lot of stuff down, and I do a lot and write things down…I gotta figure out a way to make it [my success] even bigger than it was the year before. You know, I got to make sure that it is beyond what it was the year before.

P11 explained that, up until recently, she kept track of her progress via her yearly review. However, in this higher position, she is not required to keep track of her accomplishments for her yearly review, so she instead keeps a journal of what she has produced and achieved for her own benefit. P9 says that it is easy for her to track her progress by keeping her resume updated. This way, at any point in time, when an unexpected opportunity arises, she can have it readily available. P10 noted that her goals change over time. Her title and pay are the main way that she keeps track of her progress in her career.

Summary of Research Question 3

Research Question 3 examined how Black female entertainment industry executives tracked their progress and success in the industry. Because some of the participants indicated that the entertainment industry was not made for Black women, these successful women have found ways to navigate their challenges and rise to high levels in their organizations. The participants shared strategies and methods for determining when to make a transition in their careers. The

various strategies and insights regarding how they tracked their progress and proved that they made it show the depth and complexity of these professional women.

Research Question 4

Research Question 4 asked, *What recommendations would Black women executives in the entertainment industry have for entry-level Black women who desire to reach executive levels in the entertainment industry?* Although the Black female entertainment industry executives who participated in this research offered various forms of wisdom and advice throughout their interviews, this question goes to the heart of their experience as Black women who have ascended to executive levels. Based on the many lessons they have encountered, they were able to provide a playbook or a map for entry-level Black women in the entertainment industry with their responses. More detailed information about their personal experiences was captured as they responded to the following questions:

12. How do you determine when it's time to make a lateral or vertical move in your career? What factors are considered to make that determination? (For example, time, experience, or a combination of multiple factors).

13. Looking back on your career, if you had the opportunity, what would you do differently to reach executive levels in your organization or industry?

14. What is one piece of wisdom you have gained that you would want to share with Black women who aspire to reach leadership positions in the entertainment industry?

Interview Question 12

Interview Question 12 asked: *How do you determine when it's time to make a lateral or vertical move in your career? What factors are considered to make that determination?* In addition, they provided responses that demonstrated how they evaluate factors that tell them that

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it is time to move on from their current position, whether it is a vertical or horizontal transition.

From their responses, five themes emerged: (a) need for professional development or challenge,

(b) need to make a greater impact, (c) hit a glass ceiling, (d) company decisions do not benefit

me, and (e) right opportunity arises (see Figure 16).

Figure 16

Interview Question 12 Frequency Bar Graph

Interview Question 12 - Coding Results

n = 12 (multiple responses per participant)
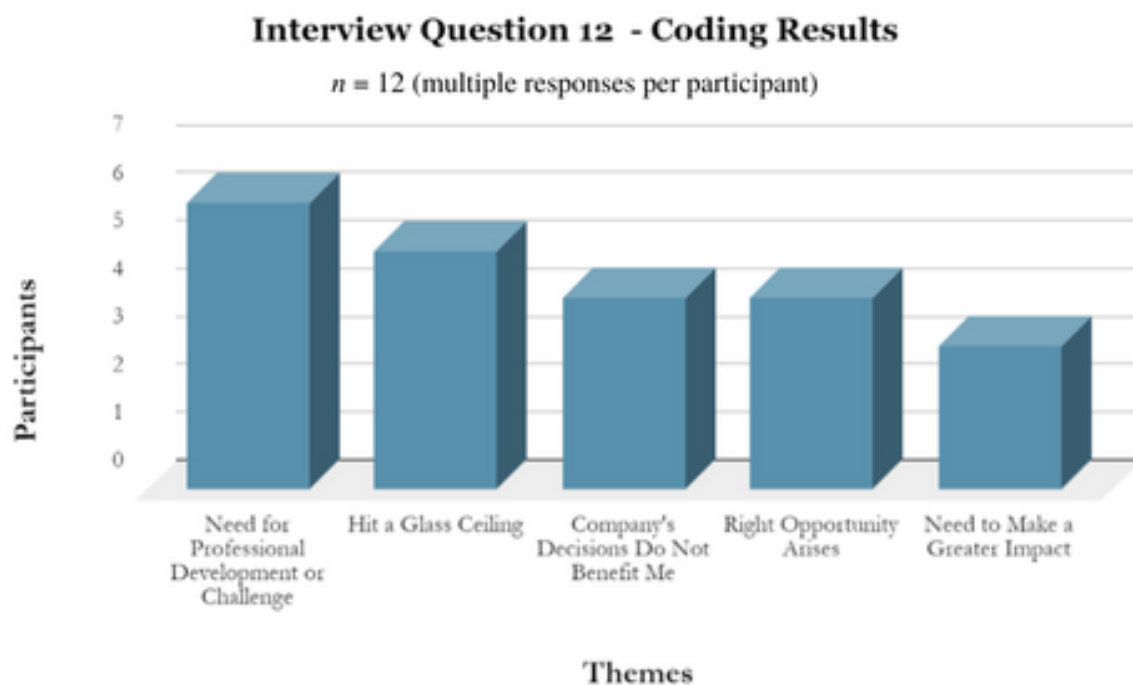
Note. This bar graph depicts participants' responses regarding how they determine when a vertical or lateral move should be made.

       Need For Professional Development or Challenge. Five of the participants (P1, P5, P8,

P9, P10, and P11), or approximately 42%, indicated that they move out of their position when

they need growth or a challenge. The participants indicated that there are occasions when they

may feel like their professional growth is stagnant or they have mastered their current position

and need a new professional challenge or new learning. P1 expressed that when she finds that the

industry is evolving, it is appropriate for her to make a move. P1 said,

As I witness the industry changing it was one of those where it was time to have more

purview into what we were doing so now that we are merged company, it was one of

those where I was like you know what I need to have my hand …

in some of the companies that were newly merged to her company. Acquiring a greater scope

provided her the opportunity to grow, "not only my personal position, but [also] my entire

department."

Three participants (P8, P9, and P11) indicated that they felt a move was necessary when

they were either bored or needed a challenge. P8 said, "I was just feeling tapped out with doing

the same thing. I wanted more of a challenge. I wanted to stretch more." Likewise, P9 explained,

"I'm always looking for the next challenge. You know I think they're even if you make a lateral

move there's still an opportunity to you know expand on your skill set." Finally, P11 indicated

that whether it is a vertical or horizontal transition, she moves "when I'm ready…[and] I feel like

I've mastered something and I'm ready for a new challenge."

Need to Make a Greater Impact. Three participants (P3, P4, and P11), or 25%, stated

that when they desire to make a greater impact, they seek to make a move to another position. P4

said, "You know I spend a lot of time supporting other people. And so there's a time for me to do

that." When she met her greatest challenge, she was taken away from being able to support

people as she desired, which is why she considered leaving her current company. P11 described

her thought process for moving vertically, explaining,

So vertically, I look at what I've been responsible for, what was in my original job

description, and what I was told I was going to be responsible for when I was hired, and

what I'm doing now. And, as I see what I'm doing now, in comparison to what others are

doing now, are they similarly titled or are they titled above me, and I should be making

the argument to be elevated because I'm now handling these things?

For her, if she is making a greater impact with her work but not being placed in certain positions

or paid for the work, she seeks out a promotion.

Hit a Glass Ceiling. Five participants (P3. P4, P8, P9, and P12), or approximately 42%,

suggested that the best time to move vertically or horizontally is when you hit a glass ceiling or

when your company offers no other opportunities for growth or upward mobility. P3 said it was

time for her to make a move when "there was no place for me to go." P4 reflected on several

factors that determine when it is time for her to make a change. She asked, "What are my

relationships like these days with the people around me? Because I can't continue to grow,

unless I have allies, or like people who are sponsoring me or people who are invested in my

growth." No other participant mentioned considering people in position to assist in such

transitions. P8 advised leaving a company when there is a feeling of being stuck. She recalled,

"So, I didn't want to get stuck there in, like a room, in a company where [there] wasn't really a

whole lot of room for me to grow." P12 recommends making a move "when promotion

opportunities stop." None of the participants who provided these responses spoke based on

conjecture; instead, their responses were based on their personal experience at some point in

their careers.

Company's Decisions Do Not Benefit Me. Four participants (P2, P8, P10, and P12), or

approximately 33%, said they decide to move when the company for which they work makes

decisions that do not have their best interest at heart. Based on the responses given, their best

interest could be from a professional perspective or a social perspective. At the time of the

interview, P2 alluded to being considering whether or not she should seek employment

opportunities with another company. She said about her company, "They just make bad decisions, uninformed decisions, and I think they don't trust us enough." She put her comment in context, explaining that when she offers suggestions to her supervisors, they do not consider them. P8 said that she would consider moving if the company lacked social responsibility or did not practice what they preached. She said Black women should ask, "who is the company? Who am I working for? What is the culture of the company? Who is the company as, like a 'citizen'? You know, what are they giving to the world in comparison to what they're taking?" Similarly, P10 suggested that Black women should ask, "Am I aligned to the company?" P12 spoke from a professional perspective and recommended that one should make a move when "no one in the company supports you." This thought was provided based on the challenge she described in Question 1.

Right Opportunity Arises. Based on the responses of four participants (P3, P6, P7, and P9), or approximately 33%, when the right opportunity arises, it is the best time to make a vertical or horizontal move. Some of the participants stated that even when there are challenges in the workplace, patiently awaiting the right opportunity is the best strategy. About her situation, P3 said,

> There was no place for me to go. But I knew that to me, I felt like I wasn't in a rush to leave to take anything. Because of that, I would rather wait for the right thing for me.

P9 said she desires to "find something that kind of interests me." P6 recommended, "Look for a job when you don't need a job." Being in this position, she proposed that you could negotiate "ridiculous things." She went on to say, "You interview with a different air when you're completely content." Based on her experience as a negotiator, she said,

I get reps asking for amounts of money, and White guys don't think twice about it, whether they think they deserve it or not. But, you can. It gives you this confidence that I can ask for the sun, the moon, and the stars, because if they say no, I just stay where I'm at.

P6 also encouraged "making connections and talking to people when you don't need it so that when the opportunity comes along," people with whom you made connections may call you when you least expect it. She made this suggestion based on a situation that happened to her.

Interview Question 13

Interview Question 13 asked, *Looking back on your career, if you had the opportunity, what would you do differently to reach executive levels in your organization or industry?* This question gave participants the opportunity to think about their journey and the steps and missteps they took. Then they indicated what they would change if they could go back. Having a clear view of their careers in retrospect, the participants used their knowledge to determine what, if anything, they would redo. The themes that resonated most with the interviewees are: (a) taken risks, (b) solidified career path earlier, (c) nothing, (d) networked more, and (e) been true to self (see Figure 17).

Taken Risks. Two participants (P3 and P10), or about 17%, asserted that they should have taken risks if they could have done something differently in their past. P10 indicated that she was reluctant to apply for positions that were outside of her amassed experience. She talked about how she did not pursue certain titles faster. In her explanation for not doing so, she professed, "So sometimes I rationalized myself, and probably the Black woman in me, and rationalized myself out of trying. And I said the 'no' before they said the 'no.'" P3 expressed, "I would definitely take some risk early on in my career."

Figure 17

Interview Question 13 Frequency Bar Graph

Interview Question 13 - Coding Results

n = 12 (multiple responses per participant)
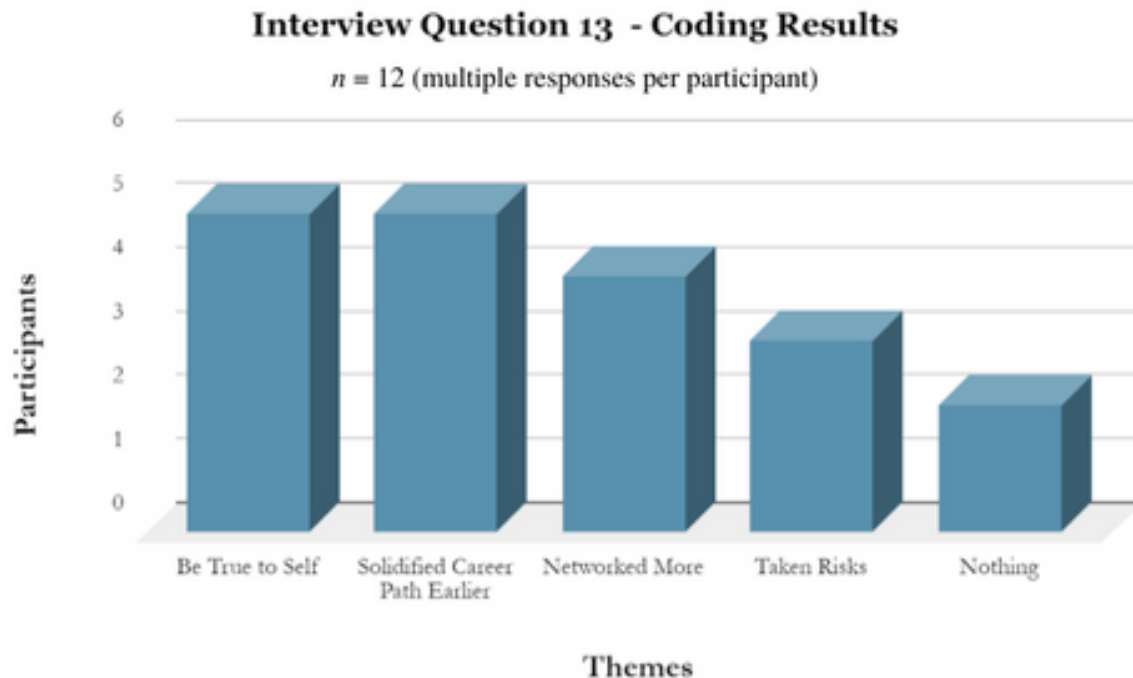
Note. This bar graph depicts participants' responses regarding what they would do differently in their career.

      Solidified Career Path Earlier. Some of the participants (P2, P4, P8, P10, and P12), or approximately 42%, acknowledged that they made decisions about their career that may have delayed certain opportunities; if they had not done so, they felt that they would have solidified their career paths earlier. Both P8 and P12 felt like they stayed at companies that presented them with a lot of challenges much longer than they should have. P8 stated that she "would have left the first place much earlier." Similarly, P12 said that she would "transition out of the company that I was in a little bit earlier." Feeling like she did not have a lot of say in her early career path, P2 said, "I should have had more say in what my job is." She also felt as if she moved along too many paths and admitted, "I would have picked a lane and stuck with it." P10, feeling like she let

certain opportunities pass her because she lacked confidence, said, "I should have tried to promote faster." For all these participants, the sentiment mirrored some semblance of regret.

Nothing. Two participants (P6 and P11), or approximately 17%, said that they would not have done anything differently if they had the chance to do it again. P11 reviewed the steps that she took in her career and how everything that happened led to the next, ultimately leading her to where she is now. Being a woman of faith, she noted,

> I wouldn't change a thing. It's all like I said, where God wanted me to be at any given time. But, I recognize if I did have the drive that I wanted to do something differently, that's where that would have occurred.

P6 shared a similar sentiment when she responded, "I feel that even the seeming missteps opens up to where that I would not have otherwise gone through had the misstep not happened." She continued, "sometimes in the moment you don't understand why something's happening. Later, you can look back on it and realize, if that thing hadn't happened, then I wouldn't be sitting right here." Both participants believe they are exactly where they would have ended up with the way their lives have happened, and everything they have experienced was meant to be. Their expressions indicated that there were no regrets.

More Networking. Making connections with people with influence was a theme that resonated with approximately 33%, or four participants (P4, P7, P9, and P10). The value of relationships was critical to these executives, and they currently understand the benefits of making those connections. P9, who now understands the importance of networking, said, "I don't think I did it enough early in my career. Network earlier." P10 recalled how, because she lacked connections in her past, she would be laid off when projects arose because she was not a part of the "cliques" or the in-group at her job. She admitted,

I didn't acknowledge the clique that was there. So, I held out too long. So, by the time I came to that realization that, oh, they're not keeping me or oh, I guess, I do really need to find another role, those production jobs, had already been filled because I waited too long.

For P10, not networking meant opportunities lost. P4 said, "I just honestly didn't have any mentors." As a result, she did not have anyone to guide her in some of the toughest decisions about certain positions or paths to take as an entry-level employee.

True to Self. Five of the participants (P1, P2, P3, P5, and P10), or 42%, mentioned that they did not display their true selves due to fear of being misinterpreted or aligned with a stereotypical trope. P1 said that she would have "met people where they are." She continued,

I would have been me much more instead of sugar coating or trying to be nice or whatever that it might have been. That is the biggest thing that I would have been, much more of myself in the beginning.

Describing that as being too respectful, when asked if she felt like it would have affected her journey negatively, she replied, "Possibly, but…I regret that. I really feel that, yeah, it could have, but how do I know if I didn't do it? I might have been really respected. You know? You never know."

P5 said that as she broke into the entertainment industry, she faced her biggest challenge, but did not recognize the stress that it caused her. So, she disregarded her mental health and pushed herself too hard. P3 said,

I would've bet on myself more. I don't think I'm betting on myself. I think I doubted myself along the way. For a long time, until you know, I'd say, probably the last 6, 7 years, is [when] I finally realized, "Okay, I don't have to doubt myself."

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It took her about 18 years into her career before she felt like she could trust herself and the knowledge that she had accumulated. For P2, even though she had interests in different areas, she simply went with what her superiors said as far as positions are concerned. With regret, she stated,

> I kind of feel like I got placed in certain jobs. I feel like I should have had more say in what my job is, and you know I definitely would have been something more on the creative side. I mean I love art and fashion.

Interview Question 14

Interview Question 14 asked, *What is the one piece of wisdom you have gained that you would want to share with Black women who aspire to reach leadership positions in the entertainment industry?* This question specifically asked the women to share one piece of wisdom that they would share with anyone who desired to reach leadership positions in the industry. Most of the women's experiences were so broad that they could not limit their responses to only one piece of wisdom. These responses summarize and synthesize the lessons they acquired in spite of the challenges they faced. The themes that emerged from the responses were: (a) trust yourself, (b) take risks, (c) get a mentor/support, (d) clearly and calmly communicate, and (e) work hard and don't quit (see Figure 18).

Trust/Believe in Yourself. Six participants (P1, P3, P6, P8, P10, and P11), or 50%, said their piece of wisdom is for participants to trust themselves. Black women can have a lot of self-doubt when working in a male- and White-dominated industry. In response to both this and other interview questions, participants brought up moments of doubt. P6 simply responded, "Believe in yourself." P1 said that self-doubt is often linked to being the "only one" and lacking allies. She explained, "We second guess ourselves and we're worried because we don't have allies,

because there's always one of us in the damn room. There's only one, and so it's very lonely. So, I would really say, trust yourself." Similarly, P3 said, "Trust themselves. Trust that they know and don't let fear intimidate them and talk them out of the things that they know."

Figure 18

Interview Question 14 Frequency Bar Graph
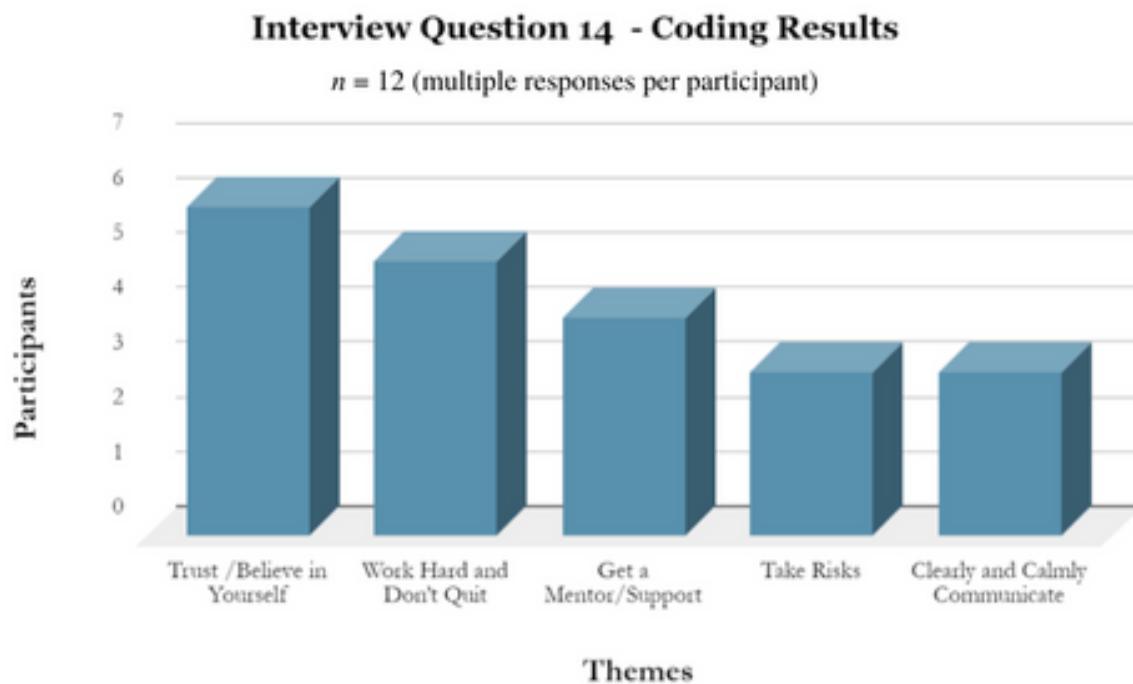
Note. This bar graph depicts participants' responses regarding what wisdom they would share with aspiring Black female entertainment executives.

P10 said that whoever you are as a Black woman, it is okay to be your authentic self. She advised,

> We're not a monolith, so don't feel like the burden of being the Black woman. Just be
>
> you as a Black woman. You know, your version of a Black woman is different than my
>
> version of a Black woman, but still be a Black woman

P8 warned against those who may try to thwart your movement. She said, "There are a lot of no's and naysayers, but you just have to follow your path and what you want."

Take Risks. Four of the participants (P3, P7, P8, and P10), or approximately 33%, asserted that risk-taking is wise. P3 felt like she waited too long to take risks in her career. She shared, "I definitely would take some risks early on in my career." P10 said that as Black women come into the entertainment industry, in the current social context, there is "an interest in bringing these voices into the entertainment industry;" therefore, "if that's the entry point still, step through the door and then, once you're in that door, make it your own." P8 said that Black women should try without taking much thought into what is ahead and encouraged them to "just go for it." In the same way, P7 said, "Never be afraid to bring things to the table." She continued,

> My whole journey has been to bring things to the table, knowing that people…may not be as passionate about it as I am or may not react the way that or may not think that this could be a very popular thing or a… money making thing or what have you. But I was never afraid to continue to bring it to the table. So, I say just basically do what you feel needs to be done in a way that fits your environment. Know your environment. Know your environment and that will tell you how you need to approach, what you need to say, but you need to know your environment you're sitting in and it may take you a minute to observe and figure that out, but I just say don't be afraid to do anything.

Get a Mentor/Support. Finding a mentor was a piece of wisdom approximately 33%, or four participants (P3, P4, P5, P6), provided. Having someone who is reliable and able to provide Black women with guidance, support, encouragement, and advice in difficult times is essential to being a successful executive. P3 spoke more about enlisting the support of people who are in other industries and those who may not be Black as well so be a part of Black female executives' support network. She admonished, "Reach across the aisle to different industries and different companies and build your village." P6 also spoke about the importance of sponsors and

explained that they may not necessarily be Black, but they are just as important to accessing opportunities because of their influence. She stated simply, "Look for role models, mentors, and sponsors." P5 recommended Black women who aspire to be in a leadership position in the entertainment industry to "lean on resources and make the most of the relationship that you have." Finally, P4 said, "Get a mentor to help you navigate your career path early on."

Clearly and Calmly Communicate. Black female entertainment industry executives must contend with the way their message comes across more than its content. As a result, 25%, or three participants (P2, P9, and P12), emphasized the importance of communicating clearly and calmly. Regardless, P2 stressed that it is important to "have a voice." At the same time, she advises for Black women to "express yourself and express your creativity and your thoughts, without being you know the loud crazy person in the room." Essentially, Black women should be aware of the stereotypes that White people have of them and project onto them in the corporate setting. Based on her biggest challenge, P12 instructed, "Advocate for yourself strategically and tactfully by keeping and maintaining records." For her, the communication must be accompanied by documentation in order to make a solid case when Black women have to defend themselves in situations of disparate treatment. Furthermore, P9 shared that Black women should "speak up; speak your truth." In spite of the angry Black woman trope, Black women need to feel comfortable to speak up for themselves as they elevate to leadership positions.

Work Hard and Don't Quit. Four participants (P6, P7, P9, and P11), or approximately 33%, provided the wisdom to always work hard and don't quit. P9 said that it is important to show up every day. In addition to that, one must dress for success. As an assistant, she said, she dressed like the VP. She emphasized, "I made sure every day. I was there, I did my work." While in that particular position, she said she did it for only 6 months, because she showed up

and worked hard. She was ultimately promoted. P11 proposed, "Know your craft executed really well. Don't ever give anyone an opportunity to say that you fell down on the job from a substantive standpoint."

Summary of Research Question 4

Research Question 4 asked the participants to reflect on their career and journey. In their reflections, the Black female entertainment industry executives took the opportunity to revisit their choices and paths that got them to their current executive levels. The women shared what they would do differently if they had the chance to. Most of the women said they would make a change in the choices they made and paths they took to get them to where they are today. Two of the women believed that altering their reality would not change their current status. As such, they believed that they were exactly where they were meant to be. The women also shared at least one piece of wisdom from which they felt women coming behind them could benefit to make their journey easier than those of the participants who participated in this study.

Due to the overlapping responses from the interview questions related to each research question, Table 6 shows a summary of themes that emerged from the four research questions:

Table 6

Summary of Emerged Themes by Research Question

RQ 1 Challenges and Obstacles	RQ 2 Best Practices and Strategies to Overcome Challenges	RQ 3 Tracking Success and Progress	RQ 4 Recommendations for Success
Lack of Mentorship/Connections/ Sponsorships	Seek Out Support From Friends/Colleagues	Work Impacts Organization or Industry	Need for Professional Development or Challenge
Biases, Stereotypes and Discrimination	Narrow My Career Focus	Making a Difference in the Lives of Others	Need to Make a Greater Impact
Seen as Incompetent	Rely on Faith	Reaching a Certain Position/Level	Hit a Glass Ceiling

RQ 1 Challenges and Obstacles	RQ 2 Best Practices and Strategies to Overcome Challenges	RQ 3 Tracking Success and Progress	RQ 4 Recommendations for Success
Penalty for Being Black	Maintain a Positive Outlook	Acknowledgement from Family/Peers	Company Decisions Do Not Benefit Me
Mental/Emotional Fatigue	Self-Advocate	Data Analysis/Metrics	Right Opportunity Arises
Being the Only One	Persevere	Correlation Between Personal and Work Goals	Taken Risks
Makes You Hypervisible	Seek Out Support from Friends/Colleagues	Through Documentation	Solidified Career Path Earlier
	Family Provides Encouragement		Networked More
	Colleagues Use Influence to Give Exposure		Been True to Self
	Colleagues Provide Advice/Understanding		Trust Yourself
	Mentoring Programs Professional Groups		Get a Mentor/Support
	Employee Resource Groups (ERGs)		Clearly and Calmly Communicate
			Work Hard and Don't Quit

Note. This table presents a summation of the themes that emerged from the interviews.

Chapter 5: Conclusions and Recommendations

Black female entertainment industry executives face various challenges and obstacles on their journey up the corporate hierarchy. The purpose of this study was to determine options and pathways for Black female executives to navigate barriers and challenges they encounter as they ascend the corporate ladder in the entertainment industry. This study involved the participation of Black women who work in various sects of entertainment, specifically, music, television, and film. This phenomenological study exposed the lived experiences of these women who, though all Black and faced similar journeys, offered varying insights into the challenges and barriers that they navigated as they ascended.

All of their stories are unique, yet there is a common thread among the women that goes beyond that of the intersectionality of their race and gender. These women have stood up to a multitude of obstacles, including encountering bias, discrimination, being disregarded as leaders, being overlooked for advancement opportunities, and having no one to come to their defense in the most isolating moments. Many of the women may have missed walking through doors of opportunity for fear of potentially living up to stereotypes and tropes, based on their response or reaction. The women walked a fine line between who they are and who people negatively perceive them to be. This chapter will reveal the conclusions and recommendations of this study, including a summary of the study, its findings, potential future studies related to this body of research, and a practical application of the data.

Summary of the Study

This phenomenological qualitative study was designed to add to the existing literature regarding the lived experiences of Black female entertainment executives as they ascended the corporate hierarchy. The purpose of the research was to determine the most practical courses of

action and strategies for Black women to navigate the challenges they encounter when climbing the corporate ladder in the entertainment industry. Because of the limited data regarding women on the corporate side of entertainment that exists in scholarly articles, journals, and other literature, the data gathered in this study will provide extensive information on this topic. The research was guided by four research questions:

- RQ1: What challenges are faced by Black women executives on the path to reach executive levels in the entertainment industry?

- RQ2: What strategies and best practices are employed by Black women executives to overcome the challenges faced on their path to reach executive levels in the entertainment industry?

- RQ3: How do Black women executives in the entertainment industry identify, measure, and track success?

- RQ4: What recommendations would Black women executives in the entertainment industry have for entry-level Black women who desire to reach executive levels in the entertainment industry?

The best way to close the gaps of unknown information about this topic was to conduct a qualitative study (Creswell, 2012). This study was coordinated to interview a sample 12 Black female entertainment executives who were found on LinkedIn.com. These highly qualified executives held positions that ranged from Director to CEO. The women had experience that spanned from 15-30 years in the entertainment industry.

Once these participants were selected, semistructured interviews were conducted over the span of approximately 2 months on secure Zoom virtual platforms. The interviews ranged in length from approximately 32 minutes to approximately 1 hour and 4 minutes, with an average

interview time of approximately 47 minutes. Interviewees were asked 14 questions that correlated to their respective research questions. Once interviews were completed, they were transcribed. Following the transcription of the interviews, the researcher coded the data by disassembling the data, ultimately revealing themes that emerged from the interviews (Boeije, 2010; Creswell, 2012, 2014). In the analysis of data, relationships among participants' responses are placed into themes (Boeije, 2010). The themes for each research question were assembled and summated into 14 bar graphs.

Discussion of Findings

This study sought to determine how Black female entertainment industry executives navigated the challenges they faced as they ascended the corporate ladder. The following discussion will highlight the findings related to the research questions. In addition, there will be a discussion of the research questions and the findings as related to the existing literature.

Results for Research Question 1

Research Question 1 asked, *What challenges are faced by Black women executives on the path to reach executive levels in the entertainment industry?* Most of the challenges that the participants identified were consistent with the existing literature.

Discussion for Research Question 1

Research Question 1 inquired about the challenges that Black female entertainment executives faced as they moved up to executive positions. The responses to Interview Questions 1 and 4 specifically revealed that the responses align with the current literature. The women's responses underscore that bias, discrimination, and stereotypes influence Black women in the corporate setting. Various examples of bias—including being disregarded, receiving disparate pay compared to White male colleagues, and being overlooked for promotion opportunities,

despite qualifications and experience—are familiar to Black women in the workplace. Personal perspectives of Black female entertainment industry executives indicate that at its inception, not only was the entertainment industry a place that was not meant for Black people in any capacity, but also that the biases that Black women encountered were often "conscious" in order for White men, in particular, to maintain the upper hand, influence, and power in the entertainment industry.

Likewise, in the literature, various forms of bias, discrimination, and stereotypes impact Black women's ability to smoothly elevate to higher levels of a corporate setting (Button, 2006; Christo-Baker, 2012; Glass & Cook, 2020; Lewis, 2013; Wells, 2017). The blatant disregard that the participants spoke of manifested in several scenarios, including asking, "Where is the man who is running this event?" (Eagly & Karau, 2002; Koenig et al., 2011), not being acknowledged for the hard work (Hite, 2004) that was the result of being handed responsibilities above her position and pay grade (Lewis, 2013), and being overlooked for promotion opportunities (Glass & Cook, 2020; Hite, 2004). These practices resemble that of a penalty simply for being Black, which reflects findings in the current literature (Hawkins, 2017; Thomas et al., 2008). Also, many of the female executives reported being the only Black woman in the department or level (Cook & Glass, 2014; Dickens et al., 2019), causing them to be hypervisible, which also confirms findings in the literature (Dickens et al., 2019). These women are held to a different standard from that of their gender and racial counterparts. Coincidentally, Black female entertainment executives feel invisible and hypervisible simultaneously (Dobbs & Leider, 2021). Furthermore, being the only Black woman can cause feelings of isolation and mental anguish and fatigue (Dickens et al., 2019; Sewell et al., 2016). This leads to self-doubt and a propensity to not take risks. Furthermore, this mental anguish and fatigue may cause Black women to leave

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a company that does not show them appreciation and acknowledge their contributions to the company (Okello et al., 2020; Pizarro & Kohli, 2020). This finding will be elaborated upon in the discussion of Research Question 4.

In addition, there was a consensus that the challenges are based on misconceptions about them as women; the women further indicated that these challenges may not have been presented if they were not Black (Hite, 2004), thereby causing Black women to feel like they were paying a tax that no other group or gender had to pay (Dobbs & Leider, 2021). In congruence with the literature, the women stated that many of the challenges that they faced were unique to them as Black women (Thomas et al., 2008), even differing from other minorities, specifically Asian and White women (Hite, 2004). Finally, in the same context of misconceptions about them, these women spoke of the lack of connections, mentorships, and sponsorships and the importance of forging these connections (Cortland & Kinias, 2019). For these women, not having mentors and supports proved to be to their detriment, especially in their early career. With no one to guide them or be a sounding board for them, the female executives admitted that they made many errors in career choices, including staying far too long in toxic, stressful, and stagnant work environments. In addition, upper management exhibited impatience with their lack of knowledge.

Although the female Black executives were new to the workforce, they observed their White counterparts receiving support and guidance, thus allowing them to advance much quicker and further than them. Finally, it was also observed that Black female executives were held to a different level of scrutiny on the job, confirming the current literature (Quaye et al., 2020). Such scrutiny placed an unbearable amount of emotional and mental stress on the female executives, which is also in alignment with the literature that speaks of the impact racial battle fatigue has on

Black women over time (Franklin, 2019; W. A. Smith et al., 2011). In some cases, this level of stress made the women feel like they were constantly in a boxing match with their non-White counterparts to prove their worthiness to be in the position, demonstrate their competence to do the job, and dispel any misgivings about Black women and Black people as a whole (Constantine et al., 2008).

Other points that emerged in the literature were Black women mentioning teamwork as a catalyst for their success. This finding was specifically in reference to having mentors (Candia-Bailey, 2016; Erskine et al., 2021; Hall et al., 2012) or sponsors (Candia-Bailey, 2016; Erskine et al., 2021). Many of the participants recognized that relationships and teamwork influence their level of success. The relationships the women mentioned were not limited to purely vertical relationships, but extended to horizontal relationships as well. The women pointed out the importance of understanding that it takes everyone on a team to help build success and ultimately elevation. Although relationships and connections that relate to mentors and sponsors were prevalent in the literature, teamwork as a means to elevate was not observed.

Results for Research Question 2

Research Question 2 asked, *What strategies and best practices are employed by Black women executives to overcome the challenges faced on their path to reach executive levels in the entertainment industry?* The strategies that will be highlighted in the discussion that are most useful to Black female entertainment executives show limited alignment with existing literature.

Discussion for Research Question 2

Black female entertainment industry executives named many of the strategies that current literature mentions, which includes relying on faith (Bacchus, 2008; Thomas et al., 2008) and utilizing family and colleagues as support and encouragement (Haynes et al., 2016; Spates et al.,

2020). One strategy that should be employed to navigate challenges that was not mentioned in literature was self-advocacy. Because these women are often in spaces where they are the only Black person or the only Black woman, they have to rely on their ability to articulate any disparate treatment that may be presented in the form of discrimination, conscious or unconscious bias, or blatant disregard. Being the only Black woman and feeling isolated and alone with no one to advocate for Black women is a way the women experience aversive racism by their supervisors (Dovidio & Gaertner, 1999). It is important to not only self-advocate, but also have solid documentation to substantiate claims of disparate treatment, being overlooked for promotions (Hall et al., 2012), and being disregarded for hard work.

When Black women rely on supervisors or sponsors to provide them with opportunities that they may not otherwise have with their limited connections, they receive exposure in unfamiliar settings (Erskine et al., 2021). Sponsorships provide the impetus for optimal professional advancement. Having a person of influence make a phone call or speak a name in spaces where Black women are not invited was one of the best forms of connection to opportunities. The relationships that White men have in particular often span years. White men operate with the mindset of quid pro quo, which benefits Black women who aspire to rise up the corporate hierarchy.

Another contrast between the current literature and this study is that, although the literature speaks of the importance of mentorships for Black women, there were minimal responses indicating that mentorships, particularly in the workplace, were available for the Black female entertainment industry executives. What is even more concerning is that there appear to have been few instances when the women were able to comment on experiencing mentorships in the early stages of their careers. Ironically, mentors are more prevalent as women rise to mid-

level management and higher. Still, as found in the literature, the women who discussed mentors almost always spoke about mentorships outside of the company. Even in the case where a Black entry-level female was treated unfairly and a Black female executive spoke up on her behalf, there was no change in the treatment of the entry-level Black woman. This may suggest that the executive had limited influence or was not in a high enough position to have an impact on the mistreatment that was witnessed (Erskine et al., 2021).

Finally, ERGs were mentioned as work resources in the study, but not in the literature. These affinity groups are an ideal setting for people with similar interest and backgrounds, such as gender, race, and sexual orientation. ERGs were mentioned as a resource, but further conversation uncovered the notion that these groups were not used as a resource for navigating challenges. Those conversations were reserved for more trusted friends, colleagues, or mentors, and not used in a less intimate setting for Black female executives.

Results for Research Question 3

Research Question 3 asked, *How do Black women executives in the entertainment industry identify, measure, and track success?* Black female entertainment industry executives were clear on how they tracked and viewed success. There is limited literature surrounding Black female entertainment executives and their identification of ways in which women determine what success looks like or strategies to achieve success. None of the instances aligned with responses, nor did they reveal ways to determine success.

Discussion for Research Question 3

Success is important to Black female executives. The literature suggests that success is achieved through advanced degrees, such as a Master's in Business Administration (MBA), being able to display leadership characteristics and appearances, based on the type of attire that is

worn, and possessing the ability to network with women who are also in executive positions, regardless of the industry (Davies-Netzley, 1999). Those three examples are considered congruent with being a male. Only the last example was mentioned in this research. Another example of a factor that fosters success that was mentioned in the research is being able to work in entertainment and, whether by choice or force, be able to start an entertainment business and be successful and impactful in it (Dates, 2004).

Other ways of achieving success for Black female entertainment executives did not appear in the literature. Black executives' experiences as they move toward executive levels and beyond directly influence the way they view success. In some cases, these women's challenges and how they navigated their challenges affect their perspective of what success is. When Black female entertainment executives are at a level where their work has a clear connection to their organization or industry, this is one way they define success. The idea that they are affecting so much change may include making a difference in the diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) movement. This would be manifested in how the women create diverse teams in their department or organization, how they work to make systemic changes in racist and discriminatory practices, specifically for Black people and people of color, and how they seek to advocate for the hiring of Black people. This is important for Black executives because they encounter conversations with White upper-level executives to which there are no qualified Black people to give opportunities. In their advocacy for Black people, Black female executives guide the conversation to challenge White people, who are their superiors and possess influence, to employ different practices to hire Black people. Although commonly and not readily embraced, based on systemic, organizational, and institutionally racist practices (Erskine et al., 2021), these practices may include limiting

giving opportunities to people who look like them, with whom they are most comfortable working, or with whom they have worked with in the past; and recruiting at HBCUs.

It should be noted that though these Black female entertainment industry executives have found ways to document, attain, and measure success, it did not preclude them from dealing with the glass and concrete ceilings (Erskine et al., 2021). As mentioned in the discussion of Research Question 1, the disparity in treatment, promotional opportunities, and pay for these women were obstacles they had to fight through as they broke through the invisible barriers known as glass and concrete ceilings (Cotter et al., 2001; Erskine et al., 2021).

Methods of documenting success were not present in literature either. Nevertheless, success is based on the relationship between Black women's personal and work goals. When Black women's yearly evaluations highlight certain action steps that may result in their promotion or an increase in pay, this is considered to be a form of tracking their success. In addition, any documentation that delineates Black women's track records, innovative practices. or work beyond their current position with success is another indicator of success. It was also noted that reaching a certain level or position, salary, and perks are clear indicators that they have achieved success.

Results for Research Question 4

Research Question 4 asked, *What recommendations would Black women executives in the entertainment industry have for entry-level Black women who desire to reach executive levels in the entertainment industry?* Black female entertainment industry executives offered various recommendations for entry-level Black women aspiring to move to executive levels in the entertainment industry. Again, due to a paucity of literature related to Black female

entertainment industry executives, there was no literature that spoke to what recommendations they could provide for entry-level Black women.

Discussion for Research Question 4

Black female entertainment industry executives have many recommendations for entry-level Black women who aspire to rise to executive levels. These recommendations are based on their personal experiences and journeys in this industry. Taking risks is a part of life; nothing is guaranteed, whether or not a risk is taken. For Black female entertainment industry executives, they advise entry-level women to take risks. It is observed how White women commonly apply for positions for which they may not be qualified, but Black female executives are more apt to apply for positions when their experiences and the position's qualifications align. With there being nothing to lose, Black women should take a chance and apply for positions that will broaden their knowledge and experience base. In addition, applying for jobs, even if they are not necessarily in need of a job, is another way to take risks. This is an ideal opportunity for Black women to see just how much they can ask for in negotiation. It is a win-win situation, because there is no level of desperation or sense of urgency to get another job.

Sometimes Black women do not take risks because they feel an organization does not value them (Erskine et al., 2021). This study found Black women do not want to take risks due to their lack of self-trust. Being in an environment where they are hypervisible (Dickens et al., 2019; Glass & Hook, 2020), held to a different standard (Hall et al., 2012; Erskine et al., 2021), and often misperceived (Dovidio et al., 2002), Black women experience a sense of self-consciousness (Constantine et al., 2008; Haynes et al., 2016) that is a result of living in a society that places them under a microscope. This manifests as prejudices and biases toward them and being excessively stereotyped and discriminated against in the workplace. It is recommended

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that they should cultivate more trust in themselves, which includes realizing they have a knowledge base in their industry that is just as solid as that of their White and male counterparts.

Even if Black women are not exactly sure what path they want to travel on as entry-level executives in the entertainment industry, they suggest solidifying their career path as early as possible. Doing so prevents them from staying in a position or company for longer than necessary. Sometimes hoping that things will change soon, or that disparate treatment will stop because it is mentioned to upper-level executives, does not mean that there is an obligation to stay to witness the change. Especially with clear and calm communication of concerns and observations, it may still mean that the message falls on deaf ears. Nevertheless, clear and calm communication is important to ensure that the messaging is not lost in the tone. Even when Black female entertainment executives are passionate about a topic, the angry Black woman trope (Kilgore et al., 2020; Knoxville & Neville, 2015; Lawson, 2017; Lewis et al., 2016; McPherson, 2018) is projected onto them by their non-Black colleagues, thus impeding success or forward movement on an issue. Sometimes moving to another company or position sooner than later is important in taking acquired knowledge and experience into a space that may prove to be more beneficial to Black female executives' careers.

Networking is critical to the success and elevation of Black female entertainment executives. Networking leads to acquiring mentors, allies, and sponsors who can open them up to opportunities to which they may not otherwise have access (Glass & Cook, 2020). Furthermore, without these influential people, Black women are limited in their ability to have upward mobility and reach executive levels in the entertainment industry. It is critical to understand from the beginning of a career in the entertainment industry that without the assistance and support of people, there is little chance for success, opportunity, and elevation.

Sponsorships came to light in a way that the current literature does not give recognition to from Black women's perspectives. The women who spoke about sponsorship from a personal perspective, indicated that they would not have achieved the success that they had if it was not for sponsors (Holder et al., 2015; Smith, 2021). Most of the women indicated that it was White males who were responsible for assisting them in gaining access to certain positions and levels in their respective entertainment companies. Inevitably, White males, who predominantly hold positions of influence and power in entertainment, were responsible for helping Black women rise to executive levels (Chow, 2021). This reality is inevitable when there is a lack of gender and racial diversity in executive level corporate positions (Tijanji et al., 2022). This access was despite, and in some cases, in addition to, the women's level of intellect, proactivity to attain new opportunities, and experience that the women possessed to be considered by these men. Though mentors may simultaneoulsly sponsor Black women (Cohen et al., 2020), Black female entertainment executives almost always mentioned sponsors exclusive of mentors.

Black female entertainment executives emphasize the relationships that White males have with one another, sometimes for generations, are the impetus for many Black women's opportunities, which include having certain positions, receiving equitable pay, and being able to navigate the challenges they encounter. Oftentimes, a Black woman's opportunities are based on the word of her sponsor convincing friends or colleagues to give the woman a chance (Chow, 2021; Smith, 2021). These opportunities may be opened after an interview or without an interview. The nuances of the relationships that White males have with one another impacts the path that Black women's careers will take (Chow, 2021). Sponsorships places women in conversations and rooms they may not otherwise be included. This is why there is such a high

value placed on an invaluable way for Black women to rise up the corporate hierarchy in entertainment industry companies.

In addition, there is a significant importance to Black women whether the people they work for have their best interest at heart. Black female entertainment executives stressed the importance of making sure that there are allies in the department or company who will make sure that they are elevated appropriately and are concerned about their professional welfare (Smith, 2021). In the same light, corporate social responsibility is also valued. This means that when Black women find themselves working for companies whose social stance and values do not correspond to their needs as Black women, it may be time to change companies. Even if the company's public persona speaks to social issues that affect Black women, it may still be necessary to leave the company if the behaviors, attitudes, and sentiments within the company do not match the public message and branding.

Finally, there is a level of hard work and perseverance that Black female entertainment executives must display in order to be considered for opportunities. Showing up daily, being dressed for success, and knowing the job well enough to address minimal problems is critical. Especially, Black woman must be committed to excellence, so that if anyone says that work is subpar, no one would believe it because of the track record that they have established.

Figure 19 presents a summary of the information captured in this research. On the left side, the model shows all of the components that a motivated and determined Black female in the entertainment industry needs to navigate challenges so that elevation (shown in the center), can occur. Elevation results in success (shown on the right), which allows the women to have impact on multiple levels, thus enabling them to make a difference as executives in the corporate setting.

Implications of the Study

The purpose of this research was to examine the lived experience of Black women entertainment executives as they sought to rise to executive levels and on to C-suite positions. Specifically, the research was designed to reveal the types of challenges that the women encountered and navigated as well as the strategies they employed to not only navigate the challenges, but also be sustainable in a biased and discriminatory setting. These biases and discrimination were based on the intersectionality of these women's race and gender.

Figure 19

Determinants of Elevation and Success for the Black Female Entertainment Executive
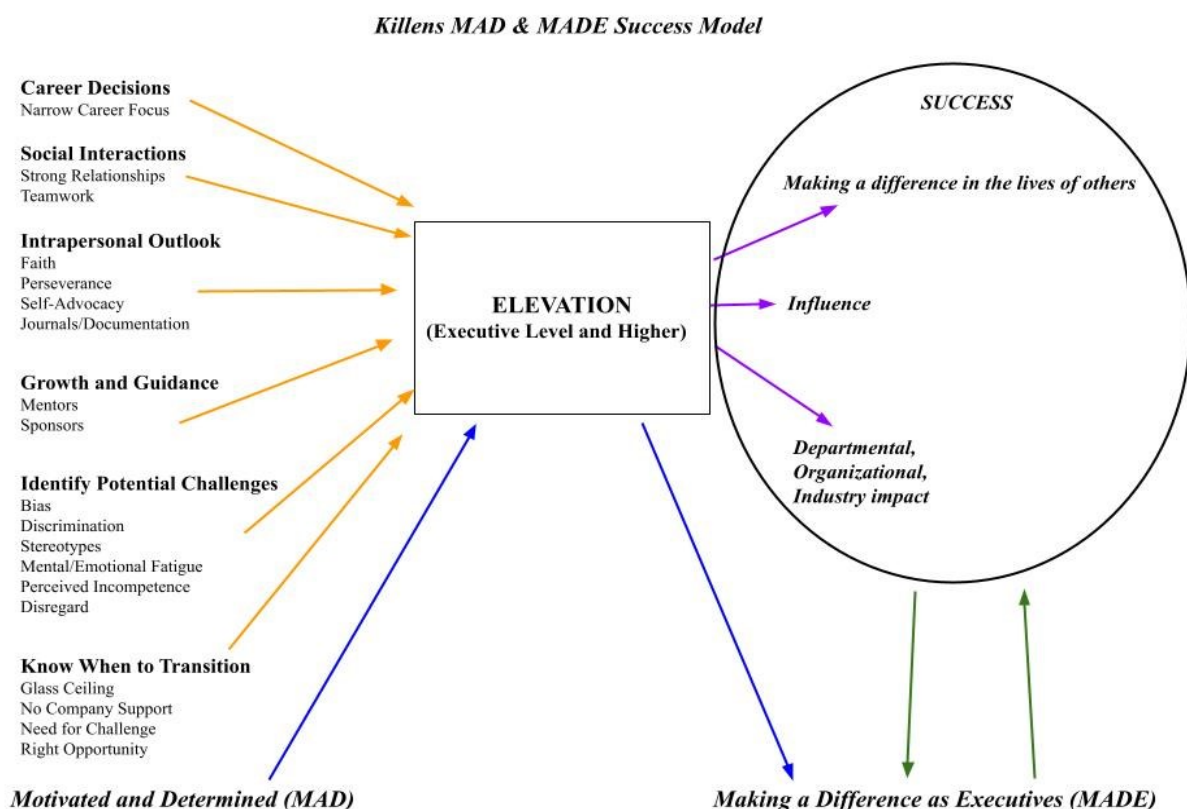
Note. This figure delineates how Black female entertainment executives can navigate challenges to elevate to executive levels and beyond.

The current literature does not delineate the strategies Black women can enlist to navigate challenges effectively as they rise to executive levels and beyond. Rather, such strategies as relying on family and friends, discussing challenges with a mentor, or relying on faith are viewed more as ways to cope than strategies to rise up the ranks. Changing their perspective regarding these strategies and seeing them as valuable tools to navigate encountered barriers will help Black women be more intentional about how they work their way up the corporate ladder. It will also make the journey, though difficult, seem more manageable because tools and resources are available to them. These strategies are not only useful to Black women; they are also beneficial to executives in these entertainment industry companies, particularly White males, who have maintained power, control, and influence in the entertainment industry for decades. Educating human resource personnel and entertainment corporate executives on something as simple as changing their recruiting strategies to include applicants from HBCUs can begin to open up opportunities for more Black women and Black people overall.

Practical Application

Based on the findings from this phenomenological research study, a training program could be implemented to support various groups, specifically: (a) Black female graduating college-seniors or entry-level Black women who aspire to work in the entertainment industry, (b) anyone who mentors Black female women who work in corporations in the entertainment industry, and (c) human resource personnel or upper management White executives who are decision makers in these companies. Though these trainings are similarly aligned, Black female women should participate in both the MAD (Motivated and Determined) and MADE (Making a Difference as Executives) in Entertainment training. Human resource personnel and executives will only participate in the MADE in Entertainment training. These trainings will lay out the

necessary information to be able to sustain and elevate or support those who desire to rise up the ranks in entertainment industry companies. Table 7 delineates the training titles and components.

Table 7

Training Components and Outline

Training Title	MAD & MADE in Entertainment	MADE in Entertainment
Participants	Black entry-level or hopeful female entertainment employees	Corporate Executives (Executive Vice President and higher) and HR personnel
Goals	● Empower Black entry-level female entertainment employees to feel prepared to anticipate and navigate challenges ● Encourage Black entry-level female entertainment employees to be successful in the industry ● Develop Black women who will be future mentors	● Make conscientious effort to eliminate biased practices that negatively impact Black female entertainment employees ● Understand the importance of mentoring and sponsorships for Black females ● Replace harmful practices with strategies that support Black women's professional journey
Objective: Participants should be able to	● List challenge they may face as they ascend the corporate hierarchy ● Explain how to implement strategies support upward mobility ● Make a distinction between mentor and sponsor ● Develop a career plan that delineates intended path	● List challenges Black female employees face ● Recall methods and strategies needed to support Black female employees ● Define implicit bias and identify how they negatively impact Black female employees' production in the workplace ● Apply strategies to create a mentoring program to support Black women
Deliverables	● Career Plan that includes identified mentors, success-trackers, potential pivotal career moves, and action-steps to mentor others	● Draft of a mentoring program for Black female employees that includes rollout, recruitment, attracting mentors, and metrics to gauge success of program
Timeframe	● Three 8-hour sessions	

Training Title	MAD & MADE in Entertainment	MADE in Entertainment
Requirements	- Commit to full engagement in both sessions - Complete the deliverable within two weeks of training's end - Commitment to attend follow-up training a year after training and check-in yearly for five years - Commit to support/mentor entry-level Black female executive hopefuls	- Commit to full engagement in both sessions - Complete the deliverable within 2 weeks of training's end - Commit to funding mentoring program - Commit to implementing plan within one year of attending and sustaining for at least 5 years - Commitment to attend follow-up and check-in yearly for 5 years - Allow observation of mentoring program - Allow feedback of mentees on program
Day 1 - Training Contents	- Overview - Challenges and Strategies to navigate - Define mentor, sponsor - Using people as a resource	- Overview - Challenges and Strategies beneficial to Black women - Define implicit bias and impact on how Black women are perceived - Define mentor, sponsor - Current corporate culture re: Black women
Day 2 - Training Contents	- Tracking success - Development of MAD and MADE Career Plan	- Mitigating bias and harmful practices - Attracting mentors and sponsors - Creation of MADE in Entertainment Mentoring Program
Day 3 - Training Contents	- Development of MAD and MADE Career Plan - Sharing Plans/Feedback	- Creation of MADE in Entertainment Mentoring Program - Share Plans/Feedback

Note. This table depicts the components of the two trainings that emerged from this study.

The contents of the training will be taken directly from the responses and data obtained from this research study. Participants in both training will participate in training that includes simulations, discussions, lectures, case studies, and personal reflection. Hodell (2016) suggests having various ways for participants to receive information when being trained.

Recommendations for Future Research

Because there was so little literature related specifically to Black female entertainment industry executives, the data from this research can take many paths. Future research could add to or seek to go in other directions from this body of work. Some of the topics for future research to be considered are:

1. Challenges that other minority women navigate in the entertainment industry, in comparison to the data from Black women in this research. This could include Latinos, various Asian ethnicities, and Native Americans.

2. Challenges that Black men navigate as they elevate to executive levels and higher in the entertainment industry.

3. Taking a closer look at Black women in corporate America in relation to the Eurocentric view of beauty to explore if hair, facial and physical features, and complexion influence opportunities for growth and advancement.

4. Examine what kind of impact having access to mentoring programs in companies has on Black women's professional trajectory.

5. Exploring this topic through the lens of DEI and belonging.

Researcher's Observations

A few unexpected factors also arose from the research, such as the level of calm the women showed when discussing the various unfair practices they faced. Despite identifying and articulating the unjust treatment they received, there was a mindset that what they went through was necessary, and worth it, if they wanted to change the experiences of the Black women who came behind them. An awareness that was a common thread among all of the women was that, although the talk of DEI and belonging should not be a topic up for discussion in 2022, the fact

that it was gave them a determination and resolve to work their hardest to break down systemic

barriers in the entertainment industry. The participants demonstrated a greater sense of purpose

and advocacy that went beyond the position, experiences, pay, and connections they made in the

industry.

The other unexpected factor was the amount of support and sponsorships the women

received from their White counterparts. Although White males are the predominant and most

influential group in entertainment, there was a contingency of women who described how their

names were spoken in spaces to which they were either not invited or made privy. Most of the

Black women mentioned men helping to propel their careers and push them toward elevation.

There was also mention of a White woman of influence and power taking a chance to allow one

of the Black women an opportunity that was borne from the Black woman's mind.

Final Thoughts

Black women have had to navigate challenges in various industries to rise toward, and

excel in, positions of power. These challenges have been put into play since the birth of the

United States and the enslavement of Africans in America (Hinson, 2018; Okello et al., 2020;

Sue et al., 2019). From grade school students (B. N. Anderson, 2020; G. Gay, 2002) to the

workplace (Linnabery et al., 2014; Motro et al., 2021), Black women have had to contend with

racism, discrimination, and inequities that have been impediments for them despite their level of

education and experience (Alliance for Board Diversity, 2021; Sanchez-Hucles & Davis, 2010;

Wells, 2017). With little literature specifically documenting the experiences of Black women

who work on the corporate side of the entertainment industry, the data acquired from this

qualitative phenomenological study provides a great deal of insight into these women's lives.

The study disclosed some of the challenges that Black women entertainment industry executives encountered as they moved up the corporate hierarchy to executive levels and beyond. The participants described their lived experiences, revealing how they moved beyond barriers despite the societal stereotypes and perceptions of them as Black women. These professional women provided examples of challenges, strategies to overcome challenges, and recommendations for not only being able to sustain a long-term career in the industry, but also how executive hopefuls can mitigate the obstacles that the participants have highlighted. From this study, a training was developed based on participants' responses and collected data. The trainings will be beneficial to Black aspiring executives and current corporate and human resource executives to be able to optimally support Black female entry-level entertainment executives in their careers.

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APPENDIX A

Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI) Certification

Completion Date 30-Mar-2020
Expiration Date 30-Mar-2023
Record ID 30396494

This is to certify that:

Has completed the following CITI Program course:

Not valid for renewal of certification through CME. Do not use for TransCelerate mutual recognition (see Completion Report).

Graduate & Professional Schools HSR (Curriculum Group)

Graduate & Professional Schools - Faculty Human Subjects Training (Course Learner Group)

1 - Basic Course (Stage)

Under requirements set by:

Pepperdine University

Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative

Verify at www.citiprogram.org/verify/?w31ea2002-e8e8-4fc4-8b2f-858e70f8c384-30396494

Informed Consent

PEPPERDINE
— UNIVERSITY —

IRB #: 21-10-1675

Formal Study Title: SHE'S NOT ANGRY, SHE'S M. A. D. (MOTIVATED AND DETERMINED): A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF BLACK FEMALE ENTERTAINMENT INDUSTRY EXECUTIVES' CHALLENGES AND PATHS TO ELEVATION

Authorized Study Personnel:

Principal Investigator:

Key Information:
If you agree to participate in this study, the project will involve:
- ☑ Females between the ages of (18-80)
- ☑ Procedures will include (Contacting participants using the recruitment script, informed consent, data collection via structured interview, transcription of data, analysis of data, documentation of findings)
- ☑ One virtual visit is required
- ☑ This visit will take 60 minutes total
- ☑ There is minimal risk associated with this study
- ☑ You will not be paid any amount of money for your participation
- ☑ You will be provided a copy of this consent form

Invitation

You are invited to take part in this research study. The information in this form is meant to help you decide whether or not to participate. If you have any questions, please ask.

Why are you being asked to be in this research study?

You are being asked to be in this study because you are a leader in the entertainment industry. You must be 18 years of age or older to participate.

What is the reason for doing this research study?

The purpose of this study is to determine the most viable options and strategies for Black women to navigate the challenges they face when trying to climb the corporate ladder in the entertainment industry. With so many barriers that are encountered, the various years of experience and strategies may prove to be useful applications for Black women who deal with the similar obstacles. This study should not be considered to be a formula that is deemed as a *one-size-fits-all* solution to a perpetual problem. Because there are so many factors that determine what barriers Black women will face, each woman's unique experience, though similar to other's experiences, has different entry points, levels of intensity and impact on the physical and physiological well-being of those who participate in this study.

This study is also a way to add to the discussion and strategies to support Black women in navigating the obstacles they face to reach executive levels. The underrepresentation of Black women in executive levels may be addressed with the findings of this study, as ample Black women have the education and qualification to promote (Wells, 2017). Therefore, to identify society's perception of who Black women are from a social and professional perspective is critical information to note as the basis of why they face the barriers they do in the corporate environment.

This research may also serve as an impetus to highlight the future of corporations looking to diversify executive position placement with, and include, Black women as a part of changing the narrative for them in their professional journey and aspirations. Strategies and suggestions from the women involved in the research should serve a primary resource when corporations are looking at how they improve their organizational practices and culture to better reflect the proportionality of the population at large. With so many Black women who receive undergraduate, graduate and doctoral degrees, there should be programs and policies set up to be

more inclusive of Black women who are qualified to fill positions of Vice President (VP), Senior Vice President (SVP), and any C-suite positions.

What will be done during this research study?

You will be asked to complete a 60 minute semistructured virtual interview. The PI will ask you a series of questions aimed at figuring out what strategies are used by leaders in your field. While the research will take approximately 26 to 52 weeks, your interview will only take 60 minutes.

How will my data be used?

Your interview responses will be transcribed, analyzed, and aggregated in order to determine the findings to the established research questions.

What are the possible risks of being in this research study?

This research presents minimal risk of loss of confidentiality, emotional and/or psychological distress because the interview involves questions about your leadership practices. You may also experience fatigue, boredom, or anxiety as a result.

What are the possible benefits to you?

You are not expected to get any benefit from being in this study.

What are the possible benefits to other people?

The benefits to society may include better understanding of leadership strategies used within your industry. Other emerging leaders might also benefit from any additional recommendations that are shared through this process.

What are the alternatives to being in this research study?

Participation in this study is voluntary. There are no alternatives to participating, other than deciding to not participate.

What will participating in this research study cost you?

There is no cost to you to be in this research study.

Will you be compensated for being in this research study?

There will be no compensation for participating in this study.

What should you do if you have a problem during this research study?

Your welfare is the major concern of every member of the research team. If you have a problem as a direct result of being in this study, you should immediately contact one of the people listed at the beginning of this consent form.

How will information about you be protected?

Reasonable steps will be taken to protect your privacy and the confidentiality of your study data. The data will be deidentified and stored electronically through a secure server and will only be seen by the research team during the study and until the study is complete.

The only persons who will have access to your research records are the study personnel, the Institutional Review Board (IRB), and any other person, agency, or sponsor as required by law. The information from this study may be published in scientific journals or presented at scientific meetings but the data will be reported as group or summarized data and your identity will be kept strictly confidential.

What are your rights as a research subject?

You may ask any questions concerning this research and have those questions answered before agreeing to participate in or during the study.

For study related questions, please contact the investigator(s) listed at the beginning of this form.

For questions concerning your rights or complaints about the research contact the Institutional Review Board (IRB):
Phone: 1(310)568-2305

Email: gpsirb@pepperdine.edu

What will happen if you decide not to be in this research study or decide to stop participating once you start?

You can decide not to be in this research study, or you can stop being in this research study ("withdraw') at any time before, during, or after the research begins for any reason. Deciding not to be in this research study or deciding to withdraw will not affect your relationship with the investigator or with Pepperdine University.

You will not lose any benefits to which you are entitled.

Documentation of informed consent

You are voluntarily making a decision whether or not to be in this research study. Signing this form means that (1) you have read and understood this consent form, (2) you have had the

consent form explained to you, (3) you have had your questions answered and (4) you have decided to be in the research study. You will be given a copy of this consent form to keep.

Participant Name: _____

(First, Last: Please Print)

Participant Signature: _____

                    Signature   Date

APPENDIX C

Recruitment Script

PEPPERDINE
— UNIVERSITY —

Dear [Name],

My name is _____. I am a doctoral student in the Graduate School of Education and Psychology at Pepperdine University. I am conducting interviews as part of a research study seeking to determine how Black women navigate challenges as they elevate to executive level positions and higher in entertainment industry companies. Because you have the qualifications that meet the criteria of this study, you are in an ideal position to provide a valuable personal account of how you navigated these challenges to elevate to executive levels in the entertainment.

The interview takes around 45 to 60 minutes. Your participation is voluntary. The interview will take place via Zoom video chat and be recorded. Your identity as a participant will remain confidential during and after the study. Confidentiality will be maintained using a series of security measures, including password protected email communication using university firewall protections, a password protected zoom meeting, deidentification of data using pseudonyms as well as compartmentalization of the various data elements, keeping all information separate. If you have questions or would like to participate, please contact me at _____.

Thank you for your consideration and participation.

Sincerely,

Pepperdine University
Graduate School of Education and Psychology
Doctoral Candidate

APPENDIX D

Interview Protocol

PEPPERDINE
— UNIVERSITY —

Interview Protocol

IQ 1: At that time, what challenge(s) or difficulties are you facing?

IQ2: Did any of these challenges relate to a misperception of you as a Black woman?

IQ3: Would these challenges been different if you were not Black? How?

IQ4: What other challenges did you face in your ascent to your current leadership position?

IQ 5: How do relationships with colleagues, supervisors, and/or people with influence and power within your department or organization impact your level of success?

IQ6: Going back to your most challenging time example; how did you overcome the challenge(s) you faced?

IQ7: How did you overcome other challenges in your ascend to your current leadership position?

IQ8: How did your mentors, friends or allies guide you through navigating these challenges?

IQ9: What organizational resources were available to you?

IQ 10: How do you determine when it's time to make a lateral or vertical move in your career? What factors are considered to make that determination? (For example, time, experience, or a combination of multiple factors).

IQ 11: What would happen/happened in your career to indicate that you've "made it"?

IQ 12: How have you been able to keep track of your progress towards your career goals?

IQ 13: Looking back on your career, if you had the opportunity, what would you do differently to reach executive level in your organization or industry?

IQ14: What is the one wisdom you have gained that you would want to share with Black women who aspire to reach leadership positions in the entertainment industry?

APPENDIX E

Interview Protocol – Header

Participant #	Years in Entertainment	Formal Title	Interview Date
P1	28	Sr. Executive VP, DEI	March 23, 2022
P2	20	Executive Director, DEI	April 4, 2022
P3	25	Head of Strategic Partnerships	April 12, 2022
P4	17	VP of Business and Legal Affairs	April 15, 2022
P5	16	Director, Physical Production	May 2, 2022
P6	24	Director, Business and Legal Affairs	May 12, 2022
P7	25	Sr. Director of Community Affairs	May 13, 2022
P8	15	Director, Human Resources	May 17, 2022
P9	16	Director, DEI	May 20, 2022
P10	15	Director, Business and Legal Affairs	May 27, 2022
P11	30	VP of Programming Acquisitions	June 8, 2022
P12	18	CEO and Founder	June 9, 2022

APPENDIX F

Peer Reviewer Form

Dear Reviewer:

Thank you for agreeing to participate in my research study. The table below is designed to ensure that my research questions for the study are properly addressed with corresponding interview questions.

In the table below, please review each research question and the corresponding interview questions. For each interview question, consider how well the interview question addresses the research question. If the interview question is directly relevant to the research question, please mark "Keep as stated." If the interview question is irrelevant to the research question, please mark "Delete it." Finally, if the interview question can be modified to best fit with the research question, please suggest your modifications in the space provided. You may also recommend additional interview questions you deem necessary.

Once you have completed your analysis, please return the completed form to me via email to angela.killens@pepperdine.edu. Thank you again for your participation.

Research Question	Corresponding Interview Question

RQ1: Placeholder	Placeholder
	
	    a. The question is directly relevant to Research question **- Keep as stated**
	    b. The question is irrelevant to research question – **Delete it**
	    c. The question should be **modified as suggested**:
	
	_____
	
	_____
	
	I recommend adding the following interview questions:

Research Question	Corresponding Interview Question
	_____ _____ _____

RQ2: Placeholder	Placeholder
	
	    a. The question is directly relevant to Research question **- Keep as stated**
	    b. The question is irrelevant to research question – **Delete it**
	    c. The question should be **modified as suggested**:
	_____
	_____
	
	I recommend adding the following interview questions:
	_____
	_____
	_____

RQ3: Placeholder	Placeholder
RQ4: Placeholder	Placeholder