

EXPLORING THE PERCEPTIONS OF AFRICAN AMERICAN WOMEN ON HOW
DIVERSITY TRAINING HAS IMPACTED THEIR UPWARD MOBILITY INTO
SENIOR LEADERSHIP

by

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A dissertation submitted to the faculty of
The University of North Carolina at Charlotte
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Education in
Educational Leadership

Charlotte

2016

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ABSTRACT

WILLIAM E. CREWS. Exploring the perceptions of African American women on how diversity training has impacted their upward mobility into senior leadership. (Under the direction of DR. LISA R. MERRIWEATHER)

The purpose of the present study was to explore the perceptions of African American women on how diversity training impacted their upward mobility into senior leadership positions. Understanding diversity training impact on career progression can help determine diversity training overall effect on the career development process. The absence of African American women representation in senior leadership positions continues to be an enormous dilemma in today's workforce. Henderson (1994) reported African American women along with other minorities account for over 50% of the workforce, but less than 5% were in a leadership position. A phenomenological interview design approach was used and revealed three themes: Professional Growth, Professional Relationships, and Inclusiveness. The findings also revealed three salient outcomes participants believed were essential in diversity training: training accountability, mentorship and policies. Overall, the findings revealed a mixture of opinions among the eight participants surrounding the impact diversity training has on African American women upward mobility into senior leadership.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, because he makes all things possible. I would like to thank my wife (Cassandra), son (Jordan), daughter (Mia), mother (Earlin), father (Vinson), sisters (Tammie, Vickie, & Tamika) and their families for all your love and support throughout this process. I would like to thank my extended family, in-laws, friends, and military family who have also help on this unbelievable journey. Collectively, you all have helped me in one way or another to get to this point. I want to give a special recognition to Dr. Lisa Merriweather, whose guidance and mentorship helped tremendously in this process. I would also like to thank Dr. Mark D'Amico, Dr. Bettie Butler, and Dr. Brenda McMahon for giving up their time and guidance. Special thanks to the University of North Carolina–Charlotte and graduate school for giving me this opportunity to reach this incredible milestone. Special thanks to my classmates, who made the experience rewarding and educational. Special thanks to all of my professors, who challenged me and provided a top-tier educational experience. A special thanks to those individuals who provided direct assistance during this process. There are too many of you to name. Lastly, thanks to two of the most influential women in my life. Thanks and rest in peace William “Bill” Frazier and Susie A. Frazier (Granny)!

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION	1
Diversity in the Workplace	5
Affirmative Action	5
Equal Opportunity	9
Human Resources Management	11
Problem Statement	12
Purpose of the Study	14
Research Questions	14
Significance of the Study	14
Theoretical Framework	15
Method	16
Assumptions	16
Limitations	16
Delimitations	17
Definitions and Key Terms	17
Summary	18
CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF LITERATURE	19
Theoretical Framework	20
Critical Race Theory	20
Symbolic Racism Theory	23
Black Feminist Theory	25
African American Women	26

Colorism	29
Glass Ceiling	30
Leadership	31
Valuing Diversity	34
Diversity Training	36
Summary	37
CHAPTER 3: INTRODUCTION	39
Research Methods	40
Research Questions	40
Methods	41
Research Design	41
Participants	43
Data Collection	45
Interview Questions	46
Data Analysis	47
Trustworthiness	48
Privacy and Confidentiality	49
Summary	50
CHAPTER 4: RESULTS	51
Participant 1 (Mary)	52
Participant 2 (Lisa)	53
Participant 3 (Ann)	53
Participant 4 (Kelly)	54

Participant 5 (Michelle)	54
Participant 6 (Sharon)	54
Participant 7 (Pamela)	55
Participant 8 (Beverly)	55
Themes	56
Theme 1: Professional Growth	56
Theme 2: Professional Relationships	65
Theme 3: Inclusiveness	68
Summary	72
CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS	74
Research Question 1: What role does diversity training have in the advancement of African American women into senior leadership positions?	
Research Question # 2: What are the Salient Outcomes of Diversity Training Programs?	
Training Accountability	80
Mentoring	82
Policies	84
Recommendations for Future	86
Conclusion	87
REFERENCES	89
APPENDIX B: CONSENT LETTER	100
APPENDIX C: CONSENT FORM	102
APPENDIX D: EMAIL RECRUITMENT LETTER	103

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Throughout history, the American workforce has consigned African American women to positions that impede their upward mobility. Even today, some professions continue to subjugate African American women and other women of color to traditional secondary roles based on race and gender (Combs, 2003). As a result of being relegated to positions that have minimal to no access to senior leadership positions, a number of African American women have hit the proverbial “glass ceiling.” This denial of opportunities could be due to an environment that continues to perpetuate racial and gender inequality.

Historically, all women, regardless of race, have experienced gender inequality in the workforce (Saltzman, 1991). As a whole, women consistently have had fewer opportunities to hold positions of leadership in the labor force. They typically worked jobs that were not as likely to provide a pathway into senior executive leadership positions. When compared to men, women were more likely to work in positions that conformed to female gender stereotypes (Hughes & Dodge, 1997). Jobs such as secretaries, teachers, and nurses were consistent with the duties women performed in the home, and drew on the characteristics most often attributed to women caring, nurturing, and supporting (Rubin, 1997). Those jobs not only reflected gender biases, but also were perceived as less challenging than the jobs of their male counterparts (Robinson & Dechant, 1997).

Coleman (2011) contended that inequities between males and females in senior leadership positions were evident across many industry spectrums. For example, only seven women—Carly Fiorina, Anne Mulchay, Patricia Russo, Marce Fuller, Andrea Jung, Eileen Scott, and Marion Sandler—held senior executives positions in Fortune 500 companies in 2009 (Coleman, 2010). Coleman noted, “Despite increasing feminization of the workforce, women were more likely to be found in certain professions and in occupations at middle and lower levels in the workplace” (p. 20). The huge disparities between men and women in corporate board positions continue to persist even though the overall representation of women in the workforce has increased.

The 1960s gave birth to the feminist movement that began to examine gendered divisions of labor. This movement resulted in women questioning their second-class status in the workforce (Breines, 2006) and was the catalyst to changing beliefs about the woman’s place in the workforce. As a result of the feminist movement, more women became part of the workforce and entered into occupations once considered inappropriate for females (Leonard, 1989). For example, in 1963, women represented 38% of the labor force (Women’s Bureau, 2012), but by 2012, that number had increased to 58% (Women’s Bureau, 2012). For management and professional careers, women accounted for 51% of the total workforce in 2011 (see Table 11).

The feminist movement helped to breakdown gendered divisions of labor; this greatly benefited White women, but was not as beneficial to African American women, who continued to experience both a gender and a race division of labor (Breines, 2006). According to Taylor and Smitherman-Donaldson (1989), African American women have been the most alienated group in the workforce as a result of historical traditions and

regulations in society. African American women have faced barriers based on gender and endured a continuous battle because of their race (Hughes & Dodge, 1997). Their inheritance of being Black and a woman created a real and sometime recurring probability of double discrimination (Mitra, 2003). Because race and gender are two openly observable markers of identity, these women have often been the victims of inequality in society (Sinclair, 2000). Being born Black and female has created additional disadvantages for African American women in the workplace (Scales-Trent, 1997). Hughes and Dodge (1997) noted, “Work experiences (and factors that influence it) may be distinct among African American women as compared to their White female counterparts, due to African American women’s dual status as both women and minorities” (p. 582).

A variety of factors rooted in gendered and racial discrimination—i.e., marginalization, negative stereotypes, and misinterpretation—have contributed to work-related outcomes of African American women. Marginalization has resulted in African American women experiencing disadvantages across a number of occupations, in spite of the passage of legislation to combat gender and race inequalities (Jones, 2006). Marginalization has also limited the opportunities afforded to African American women, and continues to regulate them to stereotypical roles. According to the U.S. Department of Labor, African American women ranked behind Whites, Asians, and Latina women in sales, office occupation, production, transportation, management, and professional related occupations in 2012 (Women’s Bureau, 2012). Furthermore, African American women had the highest unemployment rate of all women in the labor force from 1972-2012 (Women’s Bureau, 2012). Marginalization, negative stereotyping, and misinterpretation

may be directly related to the minuscule number of African American women in senior leadership positions (Bell, 2004), making them the most marginalized and disadvantaged group in a number of occupations.

Historically, negative stereotypes have contributed to the economic exploitation of African American women and their regulated roles as domestic maids and caretakers of White children. Negative stereotypes and images like “Mammy” have degraded, discriminated, and showed African American women in subservient roles. Bryant et al. (2005) explained, “Mammy was to provide domestic service, characterized by long work hours with little or no financial compensation” (p. 314). This image, along with others, created stereotypical beliefs that continue to plague African American women to this day. According to Bell (2004), “conditions created by race, gender, and class oppression have had powerful effects on perceptions of Black women” (p. 153). Despite African American women exemplary credentials when applying for positions, they still encounter resistance and harsh criticism due to perceptions caused by negative stereotypes.

Misinterpretations of African American women’s behavior are consistent barriers. Often, society perceives these women’s attitude and behavior through distorted perceptions perpetuated by negative stereotypes. For example, a workplace may misconstrue displays of assertiveness, independence, and strength as contempt for other employees (Bryant et al., 2005). These faulty assumptions are damaging, inflammatory, and have resulted in constant conflict and challenges for African American women. These barriers have been duly documented and have significant impact on the career progression of African American women (Kilian, Hukai, & McCarty, 2005).

Diversity in the Workplace

Over the last 50 years, policies and regulations in organizations have shifted from embracing diversity to promoting diversity inclusiveness in the workforce (Ipsaro, 1997). These changes have required organizations to embrace diversity, and not just highlight gender and race (Loden, 1996). This evolution has championed the idea that embracing diversity allows corporations to tap into new talent, increase market dividends, and meet legal mandates (Hansen, 2003). Diversity in the workplace allows companies to discover improved ways of analyzing the cost of Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) complaints and implement real equality in the workforce (Sinclair, 2000). Ewoh (2013) noted that diversity is a facet of human resources management that emphasizes the criticality of accessing a diverse pool of applicants with array of knowledge, skills, and abilities. Diversity also represents a wide range of regulatory and moral issues that enhances an organization's ability to obtain its goals and objectives.

Affirmative Action

Affirmative action is a continuous string of legislation laws passed by Congress to eliminate unfair discriminatory practices regarding public and private accommodations, schools, public facilities, and employment. Nonetheless, a constant debate on whether affirmative action accomplishes its intended goals continues today. For example, antagonists of the legislation oppose the regulation because they believe it causes *reverse racism*, *reverse discrimination*, and allow organizations to hire unqualified individuals (Taylor & Smith-Donaldson, 1989). On the other hand, proponents of the law have highlighted that practical approaches are needed to level the playing field and allow unabated access into the workforce for African American women and other minorities

(Jayne & Dipoboye, 2004). In the end, the majority of the discussion centers on the fairness, effectiveness, and the continued need for affirmative action policies (Holzer & Nuemark, 2000).

The Office of Federal Contract Compliance (OFCCP), an agency of the U.S. Department of Labor, is tasked with the day-to-day responsibilities of reviewing federal contractors' affirmative action programs. In 1961, President Kennedy signed Executive Order 10925, which prohibited federal contractors from discriminating and ensured affirmative action, with the penalty of being debarred from future federal contracts (Leonard, 1989). The agency is tasked with enforcing Executive Order 11246 (EO 11246), as amended; Section 503 of the Rehabilitation act of 1973 (Section 503), as amended; and Vietnam Era Veteran's Readjustment Assistance Act of 1974 (VEVRAA), as amended (U.S. Department of Labor, 2014). These regulations formed the foundation for federal contractors' and sub-contractors' compliance obligations. Passed by President Lyndon B. Johnson, EO 11246 prohibited federal contractors and subcontractors from discriminating based on race, color, sex, religion, or national origin. OFCCP ensures those companies with federal government contracts are not discriminating against protected groups to include women, in the areas of recruitment, hiring, training, promotion, and termination (U.S. Department of Labor, 2014). Unfortunately, it was not until the passage of Executive Order 11375 that women received coverage under affirmative action (Leonard, 1989). Collectively, equal opportunity and affirmative action policies have been the leading legislation for opening doors for African American women in government, economics, and societal issues.

Leonard (1989) concluded, “modest employment gains made under affirmative actions have come at substantial cost in terms of political symbolism. It has been painted as a policy of institutional discrimination against White men, rather than as an antidiscrimination program” (p. 61). Furthermore, some opposition has used the legislation as a way to portray White men as victims. The ongoing deliberation makes it onerous to determine how affirmative action affects African American women through policies and personnel decisions in companies (Holzer & Nuemark, 2000). Regrettably, several organizations have miscalculated the purpose of affirmative action and diversity creating an environment of chaos, opposition, and support (Loden, 1996). These miscalculations continue to fuel the debate against affirmative action and support weak arguments and mythologies. For instance, opposition of the legislation has utilized 10 mythical points to support eliminating affirmative action (Plous, 1996)”

1. The only way to create a color-blind society is to adopt color-blind policies;
2. Affirmative action has not succeeded in increasing female and minority representation;
3. Affirmative action may have been necessary 30 years ago, but the playing field is fairly level today;
4. The public doesn't support affirmative action anymore;
5. A large percentage of White workers will lose out if affirmative action is continued;
6. If Jewish people and Asian Americans can rapidly advance economically, African American should be able to do the same;
7. You can't cure discrimination with discrimination;

8. Affirmative action tends to undermine the self-esteem of women and racial minorities;

9. Affirmative action is nothing more than an attempt at social engineering by liberal Democrats;

10. Support for affirmative action means support for preferential selection procedures that favor unqualified candidates over qualified candidates. (p. 25-29)

These disagreements are counterproductive and neglect to address the ongoing underrepresentation of African American women in senior leadership positions.

Although still underrepresented, more African American women have gained entry into new job markets, careers, and organizations as a result of legislation. Leonard (1989) noted that more Black women are working in federal contractor facilities, and that there has been an increase in employment in all occupations except technical, craft, and white-collar fields. Leonard noted that between 1974 and 1980, African American women saw an increase of 1.5% in employment among federal contractors. In contrast, White women only saw an increase of 1.2%. Unfortunately, this minor 0.3% difference has not transferred to the private sector and senior leadership positions. For example, Catalyst (2012) concluded that only 1.6% of total board directors of Fortune 500 companies were African American women. In comparison, White women accounted for 13.2% of board directors (Catalyst, 2012). Affirmative action has failed to address job advancement, satisfaction, retention, and other important issues to African American women (Niemann & Dovidio, 2005). The diversity among African American women, their value and the advantages companies gain from their skills receive little to no attention (Gilbert & Ivancevich, 2000).

Equal Opportunity

Executive Orders, along with other legislation, have been instrumental in the concept of equality. Ironically, none of the early legislation before 1963 included the idea of sex or gender. In fact, the notion of equality for women was not present until the Equal Pay Act (EPA) of 1963. The EPA guaranteed women the same wages for the same work as men (Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, 2014). Unfortunately, this equality in pay has yet to materialize. The U.S. Department of Labor highlighted that women still only earn 77 cents to the dollar of every man (Women's Bureau, 2012). To understand why this wage inequality still exists requires a detailed examination of economic gender differences and human capital theory. According to Cohn (2000), the human capital theory implies that women's sporadic work tenure due to pregnancy and childbirth justifies the discrepancy in wages. Therefore, the return on investment is not cost effective and not beneficial in the financial capital of the organization.

The very notion of Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) was to open doors that were previously closed to women and minorities. Regrettably, EEO failed to guarantee mentoring, training, development and respect (Loden, 1996). This allowed White males to continue to occupy the majority of all senior leadership position in corporate America, the armed services, schools, government, financial sector, Supreme Court, and television (Ipsaro, 1997). However, during the presidency of John F. Kennedy, America's 35th President, a message was conveyed to Congress regarding new civil rights legislation that would be pivotal in the fight for equal opportunity and access. This message was the

foundation for Title VII of the Civil Rights Act (CRA) of 1964, signed into law by President Lyndon B. Johnson on July 2, 1964. The CRA's major purpose was to ban employers from discriminating in the area of equal employment opportunity. The Act required any decision regarding employment to be free of an individual's race, color, religion, or sex (Jayne & Dipoboye, 2004). EEO reinforced nondiscriminatory decisions and it also formed the basis for combating practices of historical exclusion and discrimination within organizations (Loden, 1996). Unfortunately, the continued mistreatment and discrimination of some Americans prompted legislators to pass additional legislation in an attempt to promote greater inclusion and opportunities. For example, Congressional legislation included the following laws in an effort to eradicate discrimination and promote equal employment. These legislations would make the federal government the major advocate for removing obstacles that impede equality in employment.

1. Title VII of the Civil Right Act of 1964 – prohibited discrimination based on race, color, religion, or national origin (Shilling, 2010);
2. The Civil Rights Act of 1968 – ensured all citizens had right to inherit, purchase, and lease real and personal property (EEOC, 2014);
3. The Equal Employment Opportunity Act of 1972 – prohibited discrimination in any personnel action affecting federal employees (Shilling, 2010);
4. The American with Disabilities Act of 1990 – prohibited discrimination against individuals with disabilities (Shilling, 2010);
5. The Civil Rights Act of 1991 – allowed jury trials for intentional practices of discrimination (Shilling, 2010).

Consequently, compliance, laws, and legal mandates became the driving force behind organizations embracing diversity and inclusion (Gilbert & Ivancevich, 2000).

Human Resources Management

With the emergence of globalization of businesses, Childs (2005) suggested that “today’s workforce diversity is a global workplace and marketplace topic. Any business that intends to be successful must have a borderless view and an unyielding commitment to ensuring that workforce diversity is part of its day-to-day business conduct” (p. 73); therefore, diversity initiatives must not only fulfill federal mandates, but they must also align with the strategic goals of the organization (Friedman, 2007). The principle functions of human resources is to assist managers with recruitment, training and development, employee relations, and diversity initiatives to ensure the company is in compliance with labor laws, operational, and able to produce a profit in their respective industries. The different functions together make up what is commonly known as the human resources system. The human resources system requires daily attention and provides the necessary resources needed to accomplish organizational goals (Barney & Wright, 1998).

Human resources management has been accused of not giving diversity the attention it deserved (Gilbert & Ivancevich, 2000). This accusation has been detrimental and counterproductive to human resources practitioners who attempt to utilize all of the human resources systems and diversity initiatives to improve organizational effectiveness. When human resources professionals manage diversity, they embrace and highlight all employees’ racial, cultural, and gender differences. They also contribute to building a more heterogeneous culture that fosters new ideas and a more competitive

spirit (Sinclair, 2000). The new culture and ideas are developed through diversity training that typically promotes attendees sharing personal experiences within a group (Loden, 1996). In most cases, diversity training attempts to increase employees' awareness surrounding issues of diversity (Kilian et al., 2005). However, Kalev, Dobbin, and Kelly (2006) discovered that only a small fraction of organizations showed an increase of African American women in management because of diversity training. Furthermore, Kochan (2003) noted that there is limited anecdotal evidence showing results of positive return on the investment of diversity training programs (Kochan, 2003). Therefore, human resources practitioners must consider additional diversity initiatives if they expect to increase African American women representation into senior leadership.

Problem Statement

Today's business leaders have gained an understanding of America's diverse labor workforce and have advocated that diversity policies should create windows of opportunity for people of different races, religions, languages, genders, national origin, ages, abilities, and sexual preferences (Jones, 2006). Overwhelmingly, White males in the American workforce continue to occupy the majority of senior leadership positions, board chairs, lead directors, committee chairs, and compensation chairs (Jones, 2006). White men accounted for 80% of all Fortune 100 companies board seats, and 73% of all Fortune 500 companies board seats in 2012 (Catalyst, 2012). Although women have witnessed a steady increase in upper echelon positions in the last 20 years, "most of" those senior leadership positions not held by White males are held by White women and not African American women." African American women continue to lag behind their White and Asian female counterparts in top senior level positions in Fortune 500

companies (Mitra, 2003). In 2013, African American women held 33.5% of management, professional, and related occupations, whereas White women occupied 42.7% and Asians occupied 48% (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2013). Catalyst (2012) noted, “Minority women remained underrepresented at the decision making table of Fortune 500 boardrooms” (p. 7), and Levin and Mattis (2006) highlighted that African American women only held 3% of all Fortune 500 board seats compared to 13.6% of White women. These statistics demonstrated that White and Asian women are more likely to obtain a high management or professional job compared to African American women. As a result, a significant portion of companies are dedicating a growing specific number of resources to increasing the number of African American women entering the workforce. In spite of additional resources, diversity training, and inclusion initiatives, African American women have yet to see a representation increase.

African American women aspiring for senior leadership positions are the least likely to benefit from diversity training. In fact, a number of companies still fail to promote African American women into high profile positions, because they may have concluded that African American women are deficient in the necessary abilities and skills to be effective leaders (Bell, 2004). Regrettably, senior leadership positions held by African American women in the 21st century are not significantly different than those held at the end of 19th and 20th centuries (Bell, 2004). Even with the increased attention on diversity, African American women are still underrepresented in corporate America’s senior leadership (Ridgeway, 2001), and little is known about how diversity training improves opportunities for them to enter into senior leadership. Hughes and Dodge

(1997) noted that “empirical knowledge about how diversity training influences job experiences among African American women is limited” (p. 582).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the present study was to explore the perceptions of African American women on how diversity training has impacted their upward mobility into senior leadership positions.

Research Questions

The following questions guided the research:

RQ1: How has diversity training impacted the advancement of African American women into senior leadership?

RQ2: What are the most salient outcomes of diversity training programs that increase African American women’s ability to obtain senior leadership positions?

Significance of the Study

Empirical research on African American women in senior leadership positions in the professional workforce is minimal at best, and has not been the topic of previous research studies (Larwood & Gutek, 1987; Larwood & Wood, 1977). Understanding the impact of diversity training on career progression will help determine its value in career development succession programs. It may highlight strategies and approaches for designing diversity training that more effectively meet the needs of African American women. Consequently, professionals may use the results of the study to improve corporate-sponsored diversity training and establish a foundation for future research on the impact of such programming on Asians, Latinas, and other minority groups.

This research is important because it will (a) help to uncover if corporate-sponsored diversity training has been beneficial in the upward mobility of African American woman, (b) provide data-driven answers to why African American women continue to lag behind other groups in senior leadership positions, and (c) provide information that could help human resources managers and diversity trainers revise the organization policies and practices regarding diversity training. The past studies still have a number of unanswered questions regarding diversity training and its relationship to African American woman's struggle to obtain top leadership positions in larger numbers. Therefore, the current study will provide a baseline for future research to determine the effects of diversity training on African American women's progression into senior leadership positions.

Theoretical Framework

The researcher's study regarding the perceptions of African American women on how corporate-sponsored diversity training has impacted their upward mobility into senior leadership positions required a thorough review of a combination of theoretical frameworks. Although a variety of theoretical frameworks may apply to the research question, the theoretical frameworks in this study consisted of critical race theory, symbolic race theory, and Black feminist theory. Collectively, these theories provide a conceptual foundation regarding the epistemological view of a group that has experienced racism, sexism, discrimination, and marginalization (Bernal, 2002). Each theory will illustrate the importance of race and gender as it pertains to African American women's slow progression into senior leadership positions.

Method

The researcher selected a phenomenological interview design approach, because it helped to describe “what all participants have in common as they experience a phenomenon” (Creswell, 2007, p. 58). Ritchie (2003) stated that qualitative researchers often select the use of interviews because they allow a deeper examination and understanding of the participants’ perspective. Therefore, the researcher reduces the volume of raw information, sifts trivia from significance, identifies significant patterns, and constructs a framework for communicating the essence of what the data reveal (Patton, 2002).

Assumptions

While the responses were solely based on participant’s experience as shared through interviews, there was an assumption that participants would be honest and forthcoming during interviews. The assurance of confidentiality throughout the study allowed participants to speak freely because they knew their identity would not be compromised (Miller & Glassner, 2007). Another assumption was that the African American women selected for the study were representative of the population to be studied.

Limitations

Future study results may differ depending on the population and region of the country. Researcher bias may have been a limitation during the qualitative phenomenology study because the researcher was the main source for data collection and analysis. The researcher used triangulation and member checking to reduce the impact of researcher bias.

Delimitations

The researcher conducted the study in Charlotte, North Carolina, a city with a population of 2 million and the home of the second largest financial banking industry in the United States. The qualitative study was restricted to African American women in leadership positions who had participated in a corporate-sponsored diversity program. The study was also limited to African American women holding positions in leadership, but not currently in senior leadership. Other human resources programs such as mentoring and succession planning may have a direct impact on the careers of participants but was not explored in this study.

Definitions and Key Terms

The following terms were frequently used throughout the study.

Diversity training: Training provided by companies to employees regarding diversity issues in society.

Culture: The value, attitudes, customs, beliefs, and habits shared by members of a society.

Culture comprehensiveness: The showing of extensive knowledge and understanding of different cultural entities.

Diversity: The inclusion of the traits, physical characteristics, backgrounds, and beliefs of various groups.

Prejudice: A system of negative beliefs, feelings, and action orientations regarding a certain group or groups of people.

Race: A categorization in which a large number of people sharing visible physical characteristics regard themselves or are regarded by others as a single group on that basis.

Stereotypes: An oversimplified generalization attributing certain traits of characteristics to any person in a group without regard to individual differences.

Summary

Although the number of women in leadership positions has risen over the years, African American women's representation in leadership remains stagnant (Mitra, 2003). Penetrating the highest level of leadership continues to be a major stumbling block for many African American women employees. African American women's lack of upward mobility has been attributed to lack of mentoring, lack of knowledge of informal rules, and the imposition of negative stereotypes (Jayne & Dipboye, 2004). The resources available to other groups seem to continuously elude African American females. In spite of the fact that companies in the United States spend millions of dollars on diversity initiatives and training each year, artificial barriers still impede African American women and other minorities from ascending to the highest level of corporate America (Kilian et al., 2005). Using a qualitative phenomenological approach, the researcher examined the perceptions of African American women on how diversity training impacted their career progression into senior leadership positions. Chapter 2 presents a historical review and current literature related to African American women and corporate-sponsored diversity training.

CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Throughout the corporate world, many companies uniformly champion equal access to upper leadership positions regardless of race, color, religion, national origin, or gender. Unfortunately, African American women have not been recipients of this equal access. Historically, they have been relegated to second-class citizens in America's social, political, and economic systems (Feagan, 2000), and are traditionally recruited and hired to work in subordinate roles to their White male and female colleagues (Coleman-Burns, 1989). Their representation in lower paying jobs and positions of less authority have perpetuated the myth of equal opportunity and access, by recruiting African American women in meaningless jobs that had no real path to leadership (Bell, 2004).

There is an adequate amount of empirical and theoretical evidence on diversity training programs and how they promote an inclusionary work environment for all employees (Harrison, Price, & Bell, 1998; Chavez & Weisinger, 2008). Mitra (2003) noted that at the time, African American women only accounted for 3.8% of private sector management positions. In effort to combat the small percentages of African American women in senior leadership, companies have begun to incorporate diversity initiatives and efforts. Though workplace equality can be a difficult challenge, Kilian et al. (2005) found that organizations have begun to address the issue through diversity initiative measures. Unfortunately, Jones (2006) found that African American women

continue to experience exclusion in career progression in spite of these diversity initiatives. Therefore, the purpose of the present study was to explore the perceptions of African American women on how diversity training impacted their upward mobility into senior leadership positions. The breadth of topics affecting African American women go well beyond the principal objectives listed in the current literature review. However, the researcher determined the theoretical frameworks and listed topics would provide the greatest findings on the two posed research questions.

Theoretical Framework

The researcher drew the study's theoretical framework from three theories: critical race theory (CRT), symbolic racism theory (SR), and Black feminist theory. Each theory will illustrate why it is important to explore African American women's minuscule progression into senior leadership positions. CRT is "interested in studying and transforming the relationship among race, racism, and power" (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012, p. 3). SR implies that "White prejudice toward Blacks consists of negative attitudes toward Blacks as a group combined with the perception that Blacks violate cherished American values" (Brandt & Reyna, 2012, p. 42), and Black feminist theory centers around "the ways in which others have shaped Black women's identity have been erroneous and stereotypical" (Howard-Hamilton, 2003, p.19).

Critical Race Theory

One of the theoretical frameworks instrumental in this study is critical race theory. As one of the founders of Critical Race Theory, Derrick Bell believed improvement in racism, discrimination and race relations in America was slow-moving (Delgado, 1995). Parker and Lynn (2002) noted that CRT "is a legal theory of race and

racism designed to uncover how race and racism operate in the law and in society” (p. 7). CRT is a combination of legal work that emerged from critical legal studies. Professor Derrick Bell, a political activist, civil rights attorney, and legal scholar wrote numerous books, articles, and legal reviews on CRT. Delgado and Stefancic (2012) wrote that Bell implied the gains in the civil rights movement was a result of economics and White interest, and was not solely for the betterment of Black people. He also theorized that the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision was less about social decency and morality and more about the U.S. image as a world power (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). Crenshaw, Gotanda, Peller, and Kendall (1995) expressed that CRT was a result of “rises during the ascendance and as a challenge to the ideology of colorblindness in law, which asserts race, like color, should be irrelevant to the determination of individual opportunities” (Muta, 2010, p. 275). CRT was founded on the premises of social justice and the removal of gender, race, and social class oppression (Ortiz & Jani, 2010). CRT provides an appropriate foundational basis for an epistemological view of a group of individuals who have suffered tremendously from concurrent discrimination, racism, and marginalization (Bernal, 2002).

Delgado and Stefancic (2012) described the tenets of CRT as: (a) racism is normal and an everyday occurrence for minorities; (b) the majority of citizens would agree the current system gives Whites power over minorities; (c) racism continues to flourish, because society does not acknowledge it; and (d) society has invented race and racism without any biological or genetic factual basis. Harris (1993) suggested that CRT is an endemic of American society that has embedded race into American ideology and determines how people think about race, law, and justice. Consequently, “as long as

people who benefit from the system are those in power, we will never change the system. But we will never get other people in power until we change the system” (Rush, 2004, p. 233). Delgado and Stefancic (2012) wrote that “CRT contains an activist dimension. It tries not only to understand our social situation but to change it; it sets out not only to ascertain how society organizes itself along racial lines and hierarchies but transform it for the better” (p. 7). According to critical race theory, society must overcome its inability and unwillingness to discuss a system that is beneficial for some and oppressive to others, so that the oppressive system can be targeted and abolished for the greater good of all humanity (Rush, 2004). Ortiz and Jani (2010) noted, “CRT promotes a structural approach to addressing the problems of a diverse society, rather than merely expanding access to existing resources and opportunities” (p. 176). Some European scholars have begun to use CRT theory to understand equality in business and educational forums (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). As a theory, it addresses problems surrounding a diverse country and strives to eliminate unfair barriers to opportunities and access (Ortiz & Jani, 2010). Despite its success and vocal critics, CRT has yet to change a system that perpetuates a system of exclusion of upward mobility for African American women (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). CRT provides a framework for understanding the experiences of African American women relative to how diversity training has impeded or enhanced their progression in the workforce. CRT set a foundation for the development of a counter narrative which assisted in rectifying the erroneous stereotypical images of African American women in the workplace.

Symbolic Racism Theory

The second theoretical framework instrumental in this study is symbolic racism theory. Symbolic racism theory (SR) “is the expression by suburban Whites in terms of abstract ideological symbols and symbolic behaviors of the feeling that Blacks are violating cherished values and making illegitimate demands for change in racial status quo” (McConahay & Hough, 1976, p. 23). SR is composed of three models: Black individualism, legitimizing ideology, and non-racial ideology. Brandt and Reyna (2012) noted that Black individualism is “operationalized by modifying traditional measures of economic individualism to apply to Blacks in America” (p. 42). Black individualism suggests that hard work and independence are not traits or values of African Americans (Sears & Henry, 2003). According to Brandt and Reyna (2012), “SR theorists suggest that SR originates from Black individualism and represent a new form of racism” (p. 41), therefore insinuating that traditional overt in your face racism is a distant memory. Sniderman and Tetlock (1986) expressed that “this new racism, yoking together prejudice and traditional American values, both veils and legitimizes White racism” (p. 130). The authors contended that this often manifests itself through resistance to affirmative action programs, Black political leaders, and other socially conscious changes that attempt to correct past discriminatory practices (Sniderman & Tetlock, 1986). Brandt and Reyna (2012) noted that the legitimizing ideology model attempts to preserve a racial stratification system where Blacks are at the bottom. According to Sears and Henry (2003), a number of studies have concluded that SR is a product of White resistance to policies that attempt to ameliorate racial disparities. These racial disparities are commonly in education and job opportunities. Consequently, Gomez and Wilson (2006)

discovered the disparities affect all Blacks, compartmentalizing Blacks as one group with no individualism. Brandt and Reyna suggested that a non-racial ideology “is not a measure of racism, but rather participants who are highly individualistic or are strong supports of small government” (p. 43). For example, an individual who has conservative views and believes success comes from hard work may appear racist. These views “of race neutral ideologies such economic individualism and support for small government” fails to take recognize the impact of SR on groups (Brandt & Reyna, 2012, p. 43). In fact, the notion that group success is determined by a group’s work ethic continues to perpetuate traditional racism.

SR theory conceptualizes four different beliefs. The first belief is Blacks are subjected to less racism as a result of the civil rights. The second belief is overt racism has not diminished, but is more subtle and harder to identify. The third notion highlights that Blacks infringe upon American values of individualism, because they display a lazy work ethic, are undisciplined, and continue to make too many demands. Finally, the last belief is that Blacks have been more than overcompensated for the racism they experienced (Brandt & Reyna, 2012; Henry & Sears, 2002). These logical beliefs have continued to perpetuate stereotypes and discrimination against African American women in various arenas. As a result, SR’s contribution to racism research has been beneficial and could possibly be useful in future theoretical perspectives and understanding racial group attitudes (Brandt & Reyna, 2012). Therefore, providing further findings on new forms of racism and the subtle ways it continues to perpetuate policies that negatively affect African American women.

Black Feminist Theory

During the 1960s, young White women began demanding change that had relegated them to a second-class citizenship status. Breines (2006) wrote that these demands gave birth to movements that would result in the women's liberation movement or feminism. Collectively, feminism is composed of theoretical frameworks such as liberal feminism, lesbian feminism, and Black feminism, to name a few. Breines (2006) noted that these various forms of feminism highlight "gender contradictions in society and experiences as political activists contributed to the development of the women's movement and its goals of achieving equality with men" (p. 79). In the early stages of the feminist movement, White feminist assumed that Black women would embrace their cause and join their fight. However, African American women were more concerned with educating White women on the consequences that race, class, and gender had on their daily lives (Breines, 2006). This began an entirely new movement solely focused on the equality and fight for justice of the African American woman. Busia (1988) noted "Black women's stories teach and celebrate the role of women in communal survival (p. 29). The Black feminist movement was considered the third wave of the feminist movement of intersectionality. Carbado, Crenshaw, Mays, and Tomlinson (2013) wrote "Rooted in Black feminist and Critical Race Theory, intersectionality is a method and a disposition, a heuristic and analytic tool" (p. 303).

This study's framework originated from Black feminism. Black feminist theory has been instrumental in giving African American women a platform to articulate their experiences. Breines (2006) noted, "Black women begun their segment of their political journey for justice by substituting racial bonding for racial integration but gradually

realized they were on their own, facing dilemmas peculiar to their sex and race.” (p. 79). Their contemptible plight illustrates how Black women’s stories teach and celebrate the role of women in communal survival. “Like other subordinate groups, African American women have not only developed a distinctive Black women’s standpoint, but have done so by using alternative ways of producing and validating knowledge” (Collins, 2010, p. 2002).

Black feminists aim to simultaneously overcome several kinds of oppressions and collectively build a coalition of activists who are invested in their struggle (Keizer, 2007). McClaurin (2001) stated that African American women “have shared a common vision of social transformation, equity and justice,” and openly claim “a consciousness that identifies race as a social construction bolstered by a structural reality that is harsh and striking in its economic, political, and social ramifications” (p. 5). Furthermore, Keizer (2007) pointed out that Black feminism “highlights the obstacles to freedom for African American women, focusing in many cases on Black men’s physical and psychological oppression of Black women in the context of White-supremacist domination of all Black people” (p.155). Their encounters with leadership, power, development, and diversity are different than any other group of people.

African American Women

Historically, great leaders and leadership have been attributed to White heterosexual men (Chin, 2010). As a result, men receive greater status and are more likely to obtain a position of authority (Ayman & Korabik, 2010), whereas women continue to experience limited opportunities of obtaining leadership positions. When given the chance to compete for a leadership position, women typically are overlooked in

favor of a male candidate (Eagly, 2007). According to Chin (2010), “Although women and members of non-White racial and ethnic groups have been gaining access to leadership roles in the last couple of decades, they remain underrepresented relative to their numbers in the population” (p.150).

The African American woman experience has been distinguishable from any other group imaginable in the United States (Taylor & Smitherman-Donaldson, 1989). The economic, political, and social situation of Black women in America is bad, and has been such for a long time. African American women have endured hardship, racism, sexism, constant degradation, and the expectation of being subservient to other groups (Coleman-Burns, 1989). Centuries of discriminatory experiences has helped them develop independence, strength, self-confidence, and behavioral traits. In a system that still classifies them as minorities, African American women who seek senior leadership positions must adhere to the rules instituted by White males. For this reason, women of color, and African American women in particular, face a host of barriers when attempting to move up the corporate ladder. The minimal opportunities, meaningless assignments, and low representation of African American women in senior leadership positions to serve as mentors are just some of the barriers they encounter (Ragins & Cotton, 1996). And unlike White women, who can survive a mistake, Black women have expressed that a single mistake could be detrimental to their upward mobility (Catalyst, 1999).

Taylor and Smitherman-Donaldson (1989) noted that African American women have accounted for over half of all African American professionals since 1940, compared to White women, who account for only 40% of all White professionals. Unlike White women, many African American women have been restricted to lower-paying careers

such as teaching, nursing, and social work. In fact, Combs (2003) highlighted that African American women are subjected to less promotion opportunities, less training, and more discrimination.

In 2012, women made up of 51.5% of the workforce in the management, professional, and related occupations work sector. However, Black women accounted for only 34%, while White women accounted for 43%, Asians 47%, and Hispanics 26% in those occupations (Women's Bureau, 2012). The representation of African American women in Chief Executive Officer (CEO) positions was also disproportionately low. Of the 27.4% women represented in this CEO position, 14.8% were White, 4.7% were Hispanic, 4.2% were Asians, and only 3.7% were African American (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2012). These numbers are somewhat baffling considering that African American women are the only group to have surpassed their male counterparts in obtaining higher education in undergraduate and graduate degrees (O'Reilly & Roberts, 1973). These figures highlighted the constant struggle that African American women encounter while attempting to ascend to the highest levels of organizations.

Research has shown that African American women and minorities have a higher turnover rate than White males in the workforce (Cox & Blake, 1991; Hymowitz, 1989; Robinson & Dechant, 1997; Schwartz, 1989). Trost (1990) showed that women's probability of leaving the company was higher than male employees, which was predominantly a result of lethargic career progression compared to males. Fortunately, this was not the case for all female employees. For example, Asian and White women were 8-10% more likely to hold a position in management or professional occupations in 2011, whereas, African American women were 6-10% more likely to work in a service

occupational job (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2012). As a result, African American women are more likely to voluntarily resign and look for better opportunities.

Colorism

Empirically, skin color has been a consistent predictor of education, occupation, and income, even when taking into consideration social class differences in the respondents' backgrounds (Hunter, 2007). In the United States, African American women are particularly aware of the impact that skin color may have on their opportunities in life (Hall, 1992). Their skin tone can range from closer to white, lighter skinned, or darker skin, closer to black (Hunter, 2007). Unfortunately, their distinguishing variation in skin color has been a hindrance to darker-skinned African American women's success. African American women are a very diverse and unique group who should not be viewed as a monolithic group. The homogenous misconception depreciates the uniqueness and variation in African American women's hair texture, height, weight, skin complexion, and other physical characteristics.

This variation has led scholars of previous studies to coin the different shades of skin color as "colorism" (Hunter, 2007). Wilder and Cain (2011) defined colorism as "an interracial system of inequality based on skin color, hair texture, and facial features that bestows privilege and value on physical attributes that are closer to White" (p. 578). In the truest form, colorism perpetuates discriminatory behavior against African American women and other people of color based on skin complexion (Hunter, 2007). Regrettably, these deep-rooted behaviors continue a system of racial inequality that propagates undeserved privileges and power to Whites (Hunter, 2007), garnering certain opportunities to individuals based on the lightness or darkness of the skin color (Burke,

2008). The concept of colorism is not new and can be traced back to the slavery era (Hunter, 2007). For example, darker skin enslaved African American typically worked in the fields, while lighter skinned slaves were assigned to the European masters' plantation homes (Hunter, 2007). This color stratification among the African Americans slaves created a culture of distrust based on color differences (Hunter, 2007).

Researchers have questioned whether skin color has any major bearing on the upward mobility of African American women (Hunter, 2007). African American women are fully aware that skin color along with sexism and racism continues to hamper their career opportunities and progression (Hall, 1992). Since slavery, skin color has been a great forecaster of one's occupation, education level, and societal standing (Hunter, 2007). For example, Hughes and Hertel (1990) noted that "light-skinned African American are selected for jobs that allow them to earn significantly more than dark-skinned African American" (p. 1115). Already burdened with the handicaps of racism and sexism, darker skinned African American women must also endure the handicap of color in their struggle into top leadership positions (Thompson & Keith, 2001). For instance, darker complexion African American women continue to battle the Eurocentric prejudicial ideology of beauty. In spite of their education, intelligence, and competence, darker skinned African American women have traditionally received lesser opportunities for promotions than their lighter-skinned counterparts (Hall, 1992).

Glass Ceiling

Research evidence has shown that African American women and other minorities have encountered an artificial barrier commonly known as *the glass ceiling* in their careers. The term *glass ceiling* originates from the 1980s and represents a barrier that is

invisible, but sturdy enough to impede African American women and other minorities from entering into upper management position in large numbers (Morrison & Von Gilnow, 1990). The imaginary barrier impedes the upward career success of women and is twice as likely to negatively affect African American women (Mitra, 2003).

Companies' external support groups and recruitment sources have established a variety remedies to recruit, retain, and promote African American females. Nevertheless, the glass ceiling continues to hinder motivated African American women and people of color (Morrison & Von Gilnow, 1990).

Merriam, Caffarella, and Baumgartner (2007) posited that the attributes that perpetuate prejudice, discrimination, and oppression are race, class, and gender. Of the three, gender and race result in the greatest inequities. Labor division based on gender and race, when combined with the glass ceiling phenomenon, has relegated African American women to working low-paying part time jobs. These jobs have little opportunity for career progression and are traditionally deemed as women's careers (teaching, child-care, teacher, administrative assistance; Rubin, 1997). Mitra (2003) discovered that "although the proportion of women in supervisory and management positions has been rising during the last two decades, the number of Black women who hold top executive positions is very small" (p. 67). This has caused some scholars to "interpret these gains as dismal progress for women and emphasize the lack of substantial number of women at the top" (Davis-Netzley, 1998, p. 340).

Leadership

Gender stereotypes allow the in-group (males) to justify the low representation of the out-group (women) in leadership positions (Heilman, 2001). These stereotypes

around gender differences are based on unscientific beliefs that question whether women are capable of leadership in the highest positions within organizations (Eagly & Johannesen-Schmidt, 2001). Ultimately, this belief resides in the fact that there are biological differences between genders (Michie & Nelson, 2006).

Transformational leaders are typically visionary individuals, and their communication skills allow them to articulate the “big picture” of the organization to employees and understand their subordinates strengths and weaknesses. The term “transformational leader” originates from the work of sociologist James McGregor Burns (Northouse, 2010). In a highly global and diverse workforce, transformational leaders rely on their ability to create a culture change that evolves and opposes to maintain the status quo. Such leaders ensure that all employees have the opportunity to develop, so that everyone can contribute to the success of the organization (Bass & Avolio, 1993). Eagly and Johannesen-Schmidt (2001) found that women leaders performed better than male leaders when transformational leadership is required in the workplace. Using the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ), the researchers discovered that women exceeded men on “idealized influence, inspirational motivation, and individualized consideration.” The results suggested that women demonstrated characteristics that motivated, developed, mentored, and respected subordinates.

Chin (2010) emphasized, “Leadership theories need to be inclusive and incorporate explanations of how dimensions of diversity shape our understanding of leadership” (p. 151). An organization that embraces diversity and promotes cultural inclusion must ensure that the highest levels of the leadership are involved and support the process. Without the support of senior leadership, first and second level managers

may not feel the need to use dedicated resources on important diversity initiatives (Gilbert & Ivancevich, 2000). As stated by Chin (2010), “diversity should expand the traditional leadership paradigms of traits, situations, and systems to include those individuals from diverse identity groups” (p.152).

Diversity Programs Origins

Anand and Winters (2008) noted, “Rooted in social justice's philosophy, civil rights legislation, and more recently, business strategy, diversity has evolved into a rather amorphous field where the very word itself invokes a variety of meanings and emotional responses” (p. 356). To better understand diversity, one must first understand the early beginnings of diversity (Anand & Winters, 2008). The very ideal of diversity can be traced back to the Civil Right Act (CRA) of 1964 and the pivotal fight for equal opportunity and access (Jayne & Dipoboye, 2004). This extraordinary piece of legislation generated a need for diversity training regarding race relations, anti-Semitism, and racial equality (Anand & Winters, 2008). Therefore, the first forms of diversity can be seen with compliance oriented training after the passage of regulatory legislation.

In the 1970s, there was a greater demand for more representation of racial and gender diversity in the workplace (Anand & Winters, 2008). The change in the American population had not translated overtime into equal representation in the workforce (Kilian et al., 2005). This great demand for diversity created companies who intended on doing business with federal government to implement affirmative action plans (AAPs). These AAPs required companies to set realistic hiring goals of minorities, including African American women, into their workforce. The hiring goals enabled previously excluded workers a fair opportunity to gain access to all levels of the workforce and promote

diversity (Kalev et al., 2006). These initial efforts were the first beginning of diversity programs focusing on regulatory compliance (Anand & Winters, 2008).

Diversity has been a staple of corporate business world for over the last three decades (Anand & Winters, 2008). Berzukova, Jhen, and Spell (2012) found that during this period, more and more companies felt the need to put more emphasis on diversity (2012). Anand and Winters (2008) noted, “Workforce 2000 created a major shift in thinking about the future composition of the workforce and is credited with putting the term ‘workforce diversity’ into the business lexicon and creating an important rationale for the diversity industry.” Companies believed that this would increase employee morale, motivation, and productivity (Anand & Winters, 2008). Therefore, a majority of companies can attribute their diversity strategy and implementation to Workforce 2000 (Anand & Winters, 2008).

Valuing Diversity

Bryan (1999) defined diversity as “inclusion of all groups at all levels in the company” (p. 1). Consequently, whenever an organization portrays diversity as a priority and the behavior fails to acknowledge dignity and respect for all groups, it represents a misconception towards equality and opportunity (Bryan, 1999). Regrettably, diversity is often neglected, and companies receive minimal to no resources to accomplish diversity goals (Gilbert & Ivancevich, 2000). While diversity is not something new to the workplace, valuing diversity is a fairly new concept (Loden, 1996). Valuing diversity became the new concept during the late 1990s and a rationale for companies attempting to increase representation of women and other groups (Gilbert & Ivancevich, 2000).

Valuing diversity can be vital to any organization if implemented correctly. On the other hand, it can be disastrous if executed inappropriately (Loden, 1996). For example, having “flavor of the month” events that are entertaining, but have no real results, is not valuing diversity. Valuing diversity allows employees of different genders, races, ages, ethnicities, disabilities, sexual orientations, and other differences equal opportunity to succeed.

In an attempt to value diversity and highlight changes, companies have placed a few African American women into supervisory and leadership positions. Regrettably, a portion of these positions have no real decision-making authority. Several of these positions also can be considered symbolic positions, because they never prepare African American women for advancement and maybe seen as insignificant (Mitra, 2003). When companies promote valuing diversity as a goal, they must be inclusive of all employees. If not, they may fail to meet the needs of their customers (Childs, 2005).

Too often, diversity training fails to accomplish its intended goals and excludes the training needs of African American women and other minorities (Crawley, 2006). It is constantly “recognized as a social good and as key element in securing social justice and managing diversity has become an alternative approach to equality” (Jones, 2006, p. 150). If developed and implemented correctly, valuing diversity has the potential to enhance the creativity and innovation of employees, so they can meet the needs of the customers (Gutierrez, Kruzich, Jones, & Coronado, 2000). Valuing diversity allows organization to recognize the differences in employees and use them as positive assets. Gilbert and Ivancevich (2000) stated, “Greater acceptance of diversity is achieved by using multiple efforts, constant reinforcement, and broad scale change initiatives (p. 93).

Diversity Training

Kalev et al. (2006) noted that diversity consists of “affirmative action plans, diversity committees and taskforces, diversity managers, diversity training, diversity evaluations for managers, networking programs, and mentoring programs” (p. 590). Collectively, these programs attempt to capitalize on a diverse workforce through mentoring, teamwork, education, and leadership. Individually, each program aims to increase an organization's diversity goals. Without a clear diversity training and policy, the emphasis on diversity training may be nothing more than a façade to employees (Nemetz & Christensen, 1996). In fact, diversity training d has its critics and a number of them believe diversity training is costly and worthless (Anand & Winters, 2008).

Diversity training has been one of the most popular programs in the last 25 years, but some opponents have questioned the results (Bezrukova, Jehn, & Spell, 2012). Determining diversity training effectiveness and whether or not it has a direct bearing on leadership positions and African American women is very critical (King, Hebl, & Beale, 2009). Global organizations around the world have invested innumerable resources in diversity training, management, and programs in an effort to employ and maintain a non-homogeneous workforce. The early diversity training programs that focused on positive employee interaction, bias awareness, and inclusionary behavior fail to produce visible changes in in the hierarchy (Bezrukova et al., 2012). In fact, little has changed in senior leadership representation at the highest levels in a number of American companies. For example, White men still make up an overwhelming majority of all CEOs and board of directors positions.

Diversity training initiatives do not always guarantee better work conditions or increase in quality work life (Gilbert & Ivancevich, 2000). In fact, the arena of diversity can ignite conflict amongst employees. Some of the most contested conflicts arise from diversity and culture awareness training in an organization. Gilbert and Ivancevich (2000) noted that of all the Fortune 500 companies that have implemented some type of diversity initiative, 75% believe that educational diversity training programs are ineffective.

Unlike other forms of training, diversity training questions an individual's worldview (Hanover & Cellar, 1998). The emphasis on diversity training must be more than a highlight of employee's differences. In fact, diversity training should attempt to eradicate those barriers that impede upward mobility of African American women and others (Jones, 2006). For example, King et al. (2009) argued that "a valuable, yet overlooked, outcome of diversity training is its effect on the interpersonal experiences of ethnic minorities" (p. 33). This experience is often portrayed through additional racial and cultural stereotypes that perpetuate the underrepresentation of certain groups in leadership (Chin, 2010). The ultimate goal of diversity training should provide possible solutions to past or present problems (Savio & Nikolopoulos, 2010). However, it is imperative that organizations do not adopt a "one-size-fits-all" in diversity training and programs by managers.

Summary

Despite the increased numbers in hiring of African American women into senior leadership positions, there still is some concern when compared to White men, White women, and African American men. The ultimate goal of diversity training should be to prepare African American women and society as a whole for leadership positions in

education, government, and public and private businesses (Coleman-Burns, 1989).

However, more often than not, the diversity training only centers on awareness.

Therefore, the purpose of the present study was to explore the perceptions of African American women and to explore how corporate-sponsored diversity training impacted their upward mobility into senior leadership positions.

CHAPTER 3: INTRODUCTION

The experiences of African American women in the workplace have provided a distinctive picture of how race, class, and gender impede their progression up the corporate ladder (Sanchez-Hucles, 1997). When analyzing the plight of African American women in the workplace, it is important to understand the continued difficulties they encounter in career progression. A number of researchers have raised questions about the efficacy of company-sponsored diversity training on access to leadership positions for African American women. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to explore the perceptions of African American women on how diversity training has impacted their upward mobility into senior leadership positions.

Qualitative research had been associated with a historical contribution to the understanding of social structure, behaviors, and culture (Ritchie, 2003). Conducting a qualitative study allows practitioners to “provide an in-depth and interpreted understanding of the social world of research participants by learning about their social and material circumstances, their experiences, perspectives and histories” (Snape & Spencer, 2003, p. 3). Ultimately, the researcher was interested in understanding the social and material circumstances of corporate-sponsored diversity training experiences of African American women.

Creswell (2007) noted, “Qualitative research begins with assumptions, a worldview, the possible use of a theoretical lens, and the study of research problems

inquiring into the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem” (p. 37). The arduous struggles of African American women efforts to obtain elusive positions in senior management illustrates a societal dilemma. To fully understand the work experiences of African American women, “it is important to assess systematically the ways in which occupational conditions influence the quality of their job” (Hughes & Dodge, 1997, p. 584). To this end, the study provided results that describe the impact of corporate-sponsored diversity training programs relative to African American women’s ascension into senior leadership positions. (Snape & Spencer, 2003).

Research Methods

The ultimate goal of the research questions is to capture the whole intent of the research. Creswell (2007) noted that “qualitative research questions are open-ended, evolving, and non-directional; restate the purpose of the study in more specific terms; start with a word such as “what” or “how” rather than “why”; and are few in number (five to seven)” (p. 107). Therefore, the following research questions directed the research on the perception of African American women and how company-sponsored diversity training impacted their ascension into senior leadership positions.

Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to explore the perceptions of African American women and explore how corporate-sponsored diversity training impacted their upward mobility into senior leadership positions. The following questions guided the research:

RQ1: What role does diversity training have in the advancement of African American women in senior leadership?

RQ2: What are the most salient outcomes of diversity training programs that increase African American women's ability to obtain senior leadership positions?

Methods

Research Design

The methodology used in this study was phenomenology. To gain a proper understanding of phenomenology, understanding begins with the founder of the methodology, Edmund Husserl. Stewart and Mickunas (1990) noted that Husserl was “originally trained as mathematician, he later became a philosopher after meeting psychologist, Franz Brentano, who introduced Husserl to the field of psychology” (p. 9). The term *phenomenology* was first coined by German Georg Hegel. His description of the term “referred to the process of the development of the mind” (Stewart & Mickunas, 1990, p. 16). However, Husserl's meaning was different from Hegel; he believed that “each experience must be taken in its own right as it shows itself and as one is conscious of it” (Stewart & Mickunas, 1990, p. 22). Creswell (2007) pointed out that “phenomenological study describes the meaning for several individuals of their lived experiences of a concept or a phenomenon” (p. 57).

Patton (1990) stated that phenomenology may include a number of things, such as: “the phenomenon of relationships, marriage, or a job or the phenomenon may be program, an organization, or a culture” (p. 69). The diversity training and the impact it had on the careers of African American women in senior leadership positions was the phenomenon under exploration in this study. Moustakes (1994) concluded that the phenomenon is “rooted in questions that give a direction and focus to meaning, and in themes that sustain an inquiry, awaken further interest and concerns, and account for our

passionate involvement with whatever is being experienced” (p. 59). The researcher used the phenomenology approach to capture the real-life experiences of eight participants through interviews. Taking a closer look into phenomenology reveals that there are several approaches to phenomenology: hermeneutic and empirical, transcendental, or psychological. Transcendental or psychological phenomenology was the most appropriate approach for this particular study. Moustakas’ (1994) transcendental or psychological phenomenology focuses more on the lived experiences of the participants and less on the interpretation of the researcher. Moustakas suggested that researchers should use the following steps to conduct a phenomenology research study because it provides systematic steps in the data analysis (Moustakas, 1994):

1. Researcher determines if research problem is best suited for phenomenology research;
2. Researcher determines if there is a phenomenon of interest to the study;
3. Researcher must remove as much of their own experiences as possible;
4. Researcher collects data from an individual who has experienced the phenomenon;
5. Researcher asks participants two open-ended questions. What are the experiences in phenomenon? What situations have affected the experience of the participants regarding phenomenon? (p. 103).

In an effort to understand the perspective or experiences of the African American women who participated in diversity training, the researcher used phenomenology to focus on the experiences and perceptions of participants. The researcher selected phenomenology, because it provided the greatest opportunity to understand African

American women's experiences with corporate-sponsored diversity training and career progression from their own view.

Participants

Qualitative researchers often use purposeful sampling. In purposeful sampling, "the researcher selects individuals and sites for study because they can purposefully inform an understanding of the research problem and central phenomenon in the study" (Creswell, 2007, p, 125). Researchers normally elect to use purposeful sampling because they believe that a certain group of selective participants can provide an explanation or information to the research. Purposeful sampling allows researchers to locate and select information-rich participants that will provide crucial information to answer the research questions.

The participants in the study consisted of African American women from Charlotte business community. The researcher used purposeful sampling in this study. The researcher solicited participants through personal and professional contacts, professional organizations, and sorority organizations. The researcher emailed a recruitment letter (Appendix C) to potential participants. Some of the participants were referred by other potential volunteers who initially received the recruitment letter.

Creswell (2007) recommended that a researcher should conduct in-depth interviews with at least eight to 15 individuals. Therefore, the researcher sought to recruit 8 - 15 African American women who worked in various leadership positions in local private businesses, education, local, state, and federal government in the Mecklenburg County area. All participants who responded to the request of the current study were selected and interviewed. All eight individuals met the following criteria: (a) Identify as

an African American woman; (b) be between the ages of 28 and 65 years old; (c) have 5 years' experience of determining work assignments and directing the work of subordinate personnel in the respective organizations; (d) have supervisory responsibility for direct reports; (e) and have participated in diversity training within the last 15 years. The training could have been conducted by an internal trainer or external consultant, delivered in a classroom setting, computer-based learning, Webinar, or teleconference. Because the researcher was aware that African Americans represent a very diverse group with multiple skin complexions, the determination of race will be determined by allowing the participants to self-identify. Additionally, the researcher assumed that the age range would present a large enough window to account for the time and experience to assume a leadership position.

Eight African American women participated in the current study. The consent form described the study and highlighted the risks and benefits of participation. Listed below are participants' pseudonyms, job titles, years in profession, sector, and current education level.

Table 1: Participants' demographic information

Pseudonym	Job title	Years in profession	Sector	Educational level
Mary	Human Resources	10 years	Compliance	ABD
Lisa	Educator	3 years	Academia	M.S
Ann	Vice President	12 years	Corporate	MBA
Kelly	Educator	8 years	Academia	J.D.
Michelle	Career Coach	4 years	Corporate	M.S.
Sharon	Regulator	7 years	Compliance	M.A.
Pamela	Vice President	18 years	Corporate	M.S.
Beverly	EEO Manager	7 years	Corporate	M.A.

Data Collection

Ultimately, quality information in phenomenological research heavily depends on the researcher's ability to conduct a thorough interview. Marshall and Rossman (2006) posited that "the primary advantage of phenomenological interviewing is that it permits an explicit focus on the researcher's personal experience combined with those of the interviewees" (p. 105). Researchers have a variety of interview approaches to choose from during the course of an interview. A researcher can choose to use the informal conversational interview, standardized open-ended interview, or the general interview guide approach to collect data during a qualitative study (Patton, 2002). According to Patton (2002), the standardized open-ended interview "makes data analysis easier because it is possible to locate each respondent's answer to the same question rather quickly and to organize questions and answers that are similar" (p. 346). This allows researcher to ask the same line of questions to all participants and reduce any potential prejudicial outside influences of collected data (Patton, 1990). Because of this, the researcher determined that the standardized open-ended interview would be the most appropriate interview technique tool to use in this study.

To ensure qualitative interviews flow smoothly, researchers should use open-ended questions and attempt to create a dialogue that is conversational (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). Open-ended questions allow participants to give an elaborate response, whereas closed-ended responses limit the interviewees to providing yes or no answers. Legard, Keegan, and Ward (2003) noted that "the most effective questions are those that are short and clear, leaving the interviewee with no uncertainty about the sort of information sought" (p. 155). Patton (1990) concluded, "the purpose of the interviewing

is to find out what is in and on someone else's mind. The purpose of open-ended interviewing is not to put things in someone's mind" (p. 278). Sometimes interviewers in a phenomenological study can overlook or put less emphasis on the interview process, which is a mistake (Bevan, 2014). Therefore, the researcher used preliminary questions to entice responsive conversation and allow the interviewee to "frame and structure the responses" (Marshall & Rossman, 2006, p. 101). The quality of the data collected from participants during an interview is dependent on the researcher's ability to ask appropriate open-ended questions (Patton, 2002).

Interview Questions

1. What is your perception of the African American women leadership experiences in Corporate America?
2. What factors impact your career progression in leadership? Internal? External?
3. Describe the corporate-sponsored diversity training that you have had over the past 15 years.
 - a. What was meaningful to you?
 - b. What seemed to impact those around you most?
 - c. What difference did the training make in the workplace environment?
 - i. Attitudes
 - ii. Relationships
 - iii. Knowledge
 - iv. Experiences
4. How has corporate-sponsored diversity training influenced your opportunities to enter senior leadership positions?

All eight volunteers participated in a face-to-face interview lasted 60–90 minutes. Legard et al. (2003) stated that interviewees should be able “to give fulsome answers, to provide more depth when probing questions are asked, to reflect and think, and to raise issues they see as relevant but which are not directly asked about” (p. 147). The lengths of the interviews were determined by the length of responses given by participants. The researcher allowed each interviewee to determine the most convenient and safe place to be interviewed. This provided freedom, comfort, and safety for the interviewees to express their experiences, views, and opinions openly. Interviews began with the researcher explaining the purpose of the study in-depth to each participant. During each individual interview, the researcher recorded the interviews and transcribed the entire session at a later date. The questions sought to collect information from participants regarding the perceptions of African American women on how diversity training has impacted their upward mobility into senior leadership positions. Once all interviews were conducted, the researcher analyzed the data.

Data Analysis

One of the biggest obstacles for new qualitative researchers is the inability to “make sense of the massive amounts of data, reduce the volume of information, identify significant patterns, and construct a framework for communicating the essence of what the data reveal” (Patton, 1990, p. 371). Miller and Glassner (2007) noted that many reproductions or interpretations will take place from the initial interview to the final analysis and presentation of the research. The challenge of condensing the enormous amount of data to a more useable form typically warrants multiple modifications (Creswell, 2007). Unfortunately, there is no magic solution that transforms the data into

useable information. The analysis process is one in which the researcher converts raw data (interviews) into interpretive findings. To reach a conclusion that is trustworthy, the researcher must use a systematic process.

A systematic analytic procedure is instrumental in the interpretation of the immense amount data collected. It helps with initiating preliminary category formation and the development of potential coding schemes (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). Creswell (2007) noted that qualitative analysis entails “preparing and organizing the data for analysis, then reducing the data into themes through a process of coding and condensing the codes, and finally representing the data in figures, tables, or a discussion” (p. 148). As the coding schemes and themes begin to emerge, a framework of data analysis will capture details and provide clarification to newly developed themes (Creswell, 2007). These themes represent the transformation of the raw data rooted in the participants’ experiences to the findings. Patton (1990) noted that “description must be carefully separated from interpretation. Interpretation involves explaining the findings, answering “why” questions, attracting significance to particular results, and putting patterns into an analytic framework” (p. 375). The interpretation process involves taking raw data and transforming it into significant findings not just providing a summary description of the interviews. Patton (1990) stated, “There are no absolute rules except to do the very best with your full intellect to fairly represent the data and communicate what the data reveal given the purpose of the study” (p. 372).

Trustworthiness

Silverman (2000) stated, “Unless you can show your audience the procedures you used to ensure that your methods were reliable and your conclusions valid, there is little

point in aiming to conclude a research dissertation” (p. 175). The researcher used several strategies for ensuring trustworthiness of the findings in this study. Participants from research were given an opportunity to review the final findings and ensure the transcription of their interview responses was accurate (Patton, 2002). This is commonly referred to as member checking. By interviewing different participants across many industries the researcher was able to tap into multiple and diverse sources of data. This process is referred to as triangulation and allows researchers to corroborate from different sources (Creswell, 2007).

Creswell (2007) contended that researchers can obtain validity by ensuring they concentrate on descriptive and interpretive validity. First, descriptive validity requires researchers to not falsify or embellish any of the information obtained during the interviews. Therefore all interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim. Secondly, interpretive validity requires researchers to be cognizant of participant’s perspective (Creswell, 2007). Interviewing African American women provided a first-person account of their experiences and perceptions. Consequently, the researcher felt confident that the results of the data collection were trustworthy.

Privacy and Confidentiality

Participants in the study were asked to sign a consent form prior to participating in the study. Each participant read and voluntarily signed the consent form before actively participating in the research (Appendix A). The consent form provided details of the study, including any risks or benefits associated with the research. Furthermore, researcher assigned each participant a pseudonym name and number to ensure confidentiality to reduce any apprehensive feelings regarding the disclosure of

information about their current employer's diversity training programs. Once the research has been completed and dissertation has been defended successfully all the recording, transcriptions, and other notes will be properly disposed, therefore giving assurance to participants that interview confidentiality and protection of their identity will not be compromised (Miller & Glassner, 2007).

Summary

Patton (1990) wrote that all qualitative analysis have the first priority of answering the basic question put forth by the research while simultaneously producing some type of findings from the data collected. Collectively, African American women continue to obtain postgraduate degrees at higher rates, but very few have been able to break the glass ceiling into senior leadership. For this reason, this study explores the perceptions of African American women on how diversity training has impacted their upward mobility into senior leadership positions. The usage of qualitative analysis allowed the researcher to understand the experiences of participants (Bevan, 2014), and allowed participants to reflect on those experiences during the study.

Too often, new qualitative researchers prematurely come to a final conclusion regarding data before they complete due diligence of formulating a logical answer to research questions (Patton, 1990). However, by putting emphasis on a detailed description, the researcher reduced this common error (Creswell, 2007).

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

In this chapter, the researcher presents findings of data gathered during qualitative phenomenological interviews of eight African American women of their perceptions on how corporate-sponsored diversity training impacted their career progression into senior leadership positions. The purpose of the study was to gain a better understanding of diversity training's overall impact on African American women's career progression. The answers to the following two research questions were used as a basis to gain a better understanding.

1. What role does diversity training have in the advancement of African American women in senior leadership?
2. What are salient outcomes for African American women of corporate sponsored diversity training programs?

Table 2: Participants' work experience

Participant	Age	Education	Shade	Supervisor experience	Corporate job title	Diversity training
Mary	33	ABD	Light	9 years	Human Resources	Respectful Workplace
Michelle	50	M.S.	Brown	5 years	Technology	Working with Different Generations
Kelly	35	J.D.	Brown	8 years	Legal Compliance Representative	CSL-Diversity Training
Lisa	38	M.S.	Brown	10 years	Sales Support Team Lead	Core Lenses
Pamela	53	M.S.	Light	6 years	Vice President	Diversity Leadership Training
Ann	34	MBA	Brown	6 years	Vice President	Managing Diversity
Beverly	40	M.A.	Dark	15 years	EEO Manager	Diversity 101
Sharon	49	M.A.	Dark	7 years	Compliance	Valuing Differences

The researcher interviewed a total of eight participants and discussed their lived experiences with corporate-sponsored diversity training. All of the participants were African American women, and each participant was currently in a leadership position or held one within the past 10 years. In addition, they were either employed or had worked in corporate America during their careers. They attended some form of diversity training within the last 15 years. The researcher assigned a pseudonym to each of the participants to conceal their identity.

Participant 1 (Mary)

Mary is a 33 year old female who currently works in human resources and compliance. She was previously an Equal Employment Manager for an energy company.

She has held many positions in several organizations, and has been in her current role for 3 years. Mary worked in human resources for the last 10 years and attended numerous diversity trainings. She is currently pursuing her doctoral degree in business, and attributes much of her success to her personal connection and networking ability. She continues to invest in herself by attending conferences and seeking certifications to increase her marketability. She believes that diversity training cannot be taught in an hour-long class.

Participant 2 (Lisa)

Lisa is a 35 year old woman who currently works in academia and has been at her current job for 3 years. She served in the United States Air Force and is a war veteran. Lisa is currently pursuing her Master's degree in the health field. She describes herself as a “fast burner,” or someone who was promoted rather quickly, in the Air Force. She thinks diversity training is good and overall helps leaders become better leaders. Lisa has several years of leadership experience as a military member and in corporate America. As a Sales Support Team Lead for 3 years, at a banking technology firm she managed the work of several subordinates.

Participant 3 (Ann)

Ann is a 34 year old woman who is currently working in the diversity field. In her current role, Affirmative Action and Diversity Manager, she holds an important role in human resources and manages a small team. She has a Master of Business Administration degree and has been in several roles within the organization. She participated in several training programs specifically focused on diversity. She expressed that diversity is part of

her leadership development plan. She also feels that diversity training makes you a better leader and cultivates the ability to manage across differences.

Participant 4 (Kelly)

Kelly is a 35 year old female who is currently working in academia as a law professor. She has been working in the educational field for the last eight years at the graduate and undergraduate level. Her experience, as a senior legal compliance representative for a large commodities company, requires her to manage five to seven employees. Kelly expressed dissatisfaction with companies that have elected not to use professional diversity practitioners as trainers. Therefore, companies should reluctantly use in-house human resources personnel to conduct diversity training.

Participant 5 (Michelle)

Michelle is a 50 year old female who is currently working in a non-profit organization. She has a Master's degree, and has worked in corporate America in IT and marketing for over 15 years. However, she has worked in a non-profit organization for the last 4 years and attributes her departure from corporate America to corporate-sponsored diversity training. Michelle described her experiences with diversity training as less than stellar. She insinuated that companies are not serious about diversity, and that any changes as a result of diversity are not permanent. The changes are temporary and last for about 6 months before reverting back. As a supervisor at one of the largest financial institutions, she supervised several employees.

Participant 6 (Sharon)

Sharon is a 48 year old female who works in federal compliance. She has been working in compliance for 7 years, but was in corporate America prior to that. She has a

Master of Arts degree and has attended diversity training at two different companies in the same industry. Sharon indicated that one company was committed to diversity and the other was not. She has seen African American women and other women of color in leadership positions at one company. She acknowledged this inspires her to believe that senior leadership is obtainable. Sharon led a group of employees as a manager at one of the major telephone companies.

Participant 7 (Pamela)

Pamela is a 52 year woman who currently works as a Vice President of Affirmative Action and Compliance in corporate America. Even though Pamela is a Vice President of Affirmative Action (AA) and Compliance, Pamela does not consider herself a member of senior leadership. She has been AA and Compliance for over 18 years and in her current role for over 8 years. She has attended diversity training, but attributes her success to mimicking her White male counterparts' behavior of coming in early and staying late. This served her career progression well, but she later found out she was being paid less than her male colleagues. She was the supervisor for several employees at one of the nation's top financial institutions.

Participant 8 (Beverly)

Beverly is a 40 year old female who currently works in human resources management. She presides over equal employment opportunity and has a small staff. Beverly is different from other participants because she was responsible for providing the diversity training in her previous organizations. She has the unique experience of receiving and administering diversity training. She also was responsible for the upstart of the diversity, equal opportunity, and compliance section early in her career. Beverly

worked in that role for 6 years before assuming another position. She believes diversity training allows people from different background to have meaningful conversations.

Themes

The eight participants in the current study were open and very candid about their lived experiences. All participants gave their own accounts of how corporate-sponsored diversity training impacted their careers. The interviews were very informative and three themes emerged from the data. The researcher created these themes to understand the perceptions of the African American women participating in the current study. The three themes derived from the data analysis consisted of professional growth, professional relationships, and inclusiveness. Each theme had at least one component that provided further information on the theme.

Theme 1: Professional Growth

The theme of professional growth was generated from participants' responses regarding African American women and their perceptions on diversity training. The theme derived from the following questions posed to participants: (1) Describe the diversity training that you have had over the past 15 years? (a) What was meaningful; (b) What seemed to impact those around you? (2) What difference did the training make in the workplace? (a) in attitudes; (b) relationships; (c) knowledge; (d) experiences. (3) In what ways has diversity training better prepared you for leadership? (3) Tell me about the diversity training experience you found to be most and least beneficial? Within in the professional growth theme there were five components: increased dialogue, increased opportunities, increased knowledge and skills, increased advancement, and increased awareness. All components provided greater detail surrounding how diversity training

resulted in professional growth. The first component of the professional growth was increased dialogue. Participants viewed increased dialogue between senior leadership and African American women as a critically important outcome for diversity training, though they inconsistently reported this as an outcome. The African American women in this study expressed a real need for senior officials in their respective organizations to have meaningful and honest dialogue with them. Because the participants believed information on career progression was being withheld from African American women, dialogue on how to succeed would provide a firm foundation for their future development into senior leaders. Further, some participants believed that senior leadership should have honest conversations on everything from the “angry Black woman” stereotype to the gap between White men and African American women. In her interview, Ann, a vice president, said African American women should have the opportunity to provide a fair and honest narrative that portrays them realistically. If not, the faulty image portrayed by society will continue to depict participants and other African American women as merely, angry, defiant, and promiscuous. Ann also suggested that diversity training could be a tool that possibly closes the gap between White men and African American women by facilitating open and honest discussion with various input from all participants. In her interview, Ann noted:

There needs to be more effort made to have dialogue across differences to better understand why people behave the way they do. Sometimes, folks in leadership have a tendency to dismiss someone who may have the skills and experience needed to do a job because they don’t feel they have a personal relationship with them or that they don’t understand them.

The women in this study insinuated that discussions could improve communication, educate, and provide greater insight between African American women and White men. The participants saw increased dialogue with senior leadership resulting from diversity training as necessary step for professional growth. Regardless of the topic, participants felt that African American women should have a seat at the table to discuss issues that affected their career success. In her interview, Ann stated that organizations need to include African American women in all decisions affecting their careers.

Professional growth through increased dialogue with senior leadership ran parallel with increased dialogue between the women and their colleagues. These discussions, which are often difficult, between African American women, White men, and other groups can create different perspectives, ideas, and career progression plans that positively affect everyone. But engaging in difficult dialogue around sensitive issues results in a whole new set of concerns. For instance, some African American women may be more reluctant than others to disclose personal beliefs about certain diversity issues. The fear of reprisal for speaking honestly may inhibit some African American women from participating. For example, one participant stated that she did not like disclosing information regarding herself at work. However, through increased dialogue, African American women define their lived experiences on their own terms and help others to better understand them in the process. For some, the positive impact on the organization as a result of dialogue surrounding diversity training and its impact on certain groups outweighed the negatives perceived by individuals. Ann noted that diversity training and education could bridge the gap of difference that exists.

The participants evidenced their fear of sharing their own lived experience. When African American women witness unfairness and discrepancies in the workplace, it creates a sense of distrust of senior leadership and of their colleagues. Participants in the study voiced concerns regarding discrepancies they witnessed between them and their White female counterparts. Pamela stated:

I think they need to really talk with African American women and be real truthful about it. Most of us know they look at us as angry Black women when we voice something we believe in, but when a Caucasian female voice something, she is considered passionate and have aggression towards it. It's called passion! They really need to hone in on what we have is passionate as well, and it's not angry.

You are either angry or you're not and everybody is not an angry Black female. I think they need to be really real about it and tell what is really going on.

Inconsistencies in treatment and perception cause conflict within the organization and eliminate opportunities for African American women to feel valued and a part of the organization. Increased dialogue provides an avenue for greater understanding which can lead to professional growth for anyone attending the diversity training. It propels participants to be active in their professional development. Increased dialogue and truthfulness helps build confidence in leadership decisions and the organizational team.

The second component of professional growth was increased opportunities. Increased opportunities were a response that could be observed throughout most participants' responses albeit with varied contextual meanings. Some participants expressed increased opportunity for dialogue surrounding differences and experiences. Increasing opportunities for employees to have sensitive issue discussions not only

benefits employees professionally by allowing employees to build stronger and more trusting relationships, but it also benefits them personally by helping to break down barriers and address stereotypes in various social situations outside of the workplace.

Sharon mentioned increased opportunities from a different perspective than Beverly and Kelly. She talked about more tangible opportunities for advancement as a consequence of participating in corporate diversity training. She noted that she was selected as an assistant manager of a call center because of diversity training. Sharon went on to say that she only met the minimum qualification for the position, but was selected as the best candidate after her interview. She believed the organization's commitment to diversity provided her the opportunity to interview for the position.

In her interview, Pamela concurred with Sharon that her company's commitment to diversity was evident by the increase in opportunities afforded to African American women and other minorities. She also said diversity training "has allowed me to bring my whole self to work and people are able to see who I really am and that has open up doors for me...not only in my organization but in other organizations." According to Pamela, other organizations have contacted her about a variety of leadership opportunities as a result of diversity training. She attributed her current position as the acting president for a local employment association human resources group as an example. Unfortunately, these opportunities seem to escape a great number of African American women regardless of credentials and experience. In fact, a number of African American women are never given an opportunity or information that will lead to career progression. In the end, organizations should strive to provide African American women a fair and equitable opportunity to succeed like other employees.

The third component of professional growth was increased knowledge and skills. When companies incorporate diversity training into the company's educational curriculum, it demonstrates their commitment to the professional growth of their employees. This type of educational commitment affords more opportunities for African American women. As a result, African American women are better prepared to compete in the workplace with other colleagues. Pamela described an opportunity for gaining new knowledge and refining old skill sets. She noted, that diversity training provided her an opportunity to learn the informal rules for career progression. Pamela insisted that she was shocked to know that "there was a game in Corporate America and a lot of people don't even realize they are in it." Pamela's amazement is a prime example of how some employees, predominantly African American women, are almost never informed of the informal rules of engagement necessary to be successful. This lack of access reduces opportunities and plague participants upward career progression.

On a more positive side, Ann pointed to knowledge as the key to her professional growth. As a Vice President in corporate America, Ann described how her organization made diversity training a part of a manager's development. In her company, corporate diversity training "is a part of the company curriculum that all leaders must complete. Completing the training has helped me hone my leadership skills, which I believe has helped and will continue to help me advance my career within the organization." Ann noted that the company's diversity courses help identify diminutive decisions of leaders that could exclude employees. Ann also believed that the training helped her adjust her leadership style to the different circumstances and employees. She went onto say that the "diversity training made her look at herself and analyze how she led her subordinates." In

her interview, Beverly stated that she tended to get more opportunities in companies that had strong diversity programs and initiatives. She added that those companies focused on educating employees, held people accountable, and were more apt to promote African American women.

The fourth component of professional growth was an increase in self-awareness. Through diversity training, participants acknowledged professional growth by assessing their own fundamental values concept. Those concepts were illustrated through recognizing biases, differences, limitations, and personal assessments of each participant. During the interviews, five of the eight women confirmed that diversity training increased their self-awareness and contributed to their overall professional growth. Based on participants' responses, an increase in self-awareness led to more productive relationships and enabled participants to exhibit better leadership.

Through increased self-awareness, the African American women in this study forged relationships with people of other racial and ethnic groups, bridging some of their differences and building camaraderie amongst employees. Ann stated, "[Diversity] training focused on an increased self-awareness has been the most meaningful for me. Understanding who I am and how others see me has helped me develop better and more productive working relationships." She highlighted that those relationships taught her how to work effectively across different cultural backgrounds and opinions. Occasionally, diversity training allows employees an opportunity to recognize their bias through an increased self-awareness, but this is not always the case. Lisa expressed a different perspective during her training with colleagues. She noted that after diversity training, "attendees who spoke [during] the training didn't realize certain people thought

[certain] ways. [They] didn't know this was a part of [people's] history. [They] didn't realize it would affect them, so they actually made a personal pact to change their attitude toward certain people and situation.”

Most employees are unaware of the values, beliefs, or the lived experiences of their fellow colleagues. They are rarely given an opportunity to discuss and discover the cultural values of their colleagues. However, through controlled diversity training programs settings, employees are afforded a safe environment to openly discuss cultural values. This was evident when Beverly described an increased self-awareness helped her understand how colleagues beliefs and statements can affect the decisions of others. As a result of diversity training, some employees were motivated to make conscious effort to re-examine certain beliefs and refrain from making certain comments. Mary had neutral feelings regarding diversity training's impact on increased self-awareness. She felt that companies can make good efforts towards diversity, but their actual practices and policies are what counts. Another participant, Michelle, believed that any increased self-awareness was positive, but that the behavior is not permanent and most employees tend to revert back to comfortable behavior. In her interview, Michelle also stated she now realizes that “diversity training encompasses lesbian, gay, bi-sexual and transgender (LGBT) employees.” Pamela echoed Michelle, stating, “I would say the diversity training helps the understanding and accepting of all cultures. When you understand those cultures and are servicing different cultures as clients in the community, it opens up doors for me and my teammates.”

The participants in the current study acknowledged professional growth as an important part of their upward mobility. They expressed an increase in self-awareness as being salient characteristics of professional growth.

The fifth component of the professional growth was awareness surrounding regulatory compliance. An increase in awareness from participant's interviews revealed concerns around the perception of quota hiring. The participants identified quota hiring as a potential barrier to their career progression. In fact, four out of the eight women in the study alluded to quota hiring as an issue when discussing their success. Participants felt that quota hiring argument has perpetuated a faulty perception that unqualified African American women were being promoted to fill quotas. For example, one participant noted that corporate-sponsored diversity training brought their qualification into questions when companies allowed the perceptions of African American women promotions were a result of filling quotas. She went onto say, "Hopefully, during the course of the diversity training, they learn how not to do those things." She believed that the faulty argument surrounding quotas diluted African American women's qualifications, hard work, and earned promotions.

The continued belief that African American women in senior leadership are solely hired to fill a quota undermines these women's authority. Sharon noted, "To some degree, despite an organization's effort to maintain a conducive environment, it almost feels as if their [goal was] to remain in compliance versus the values it should really embrace." The constant undue burden of having their qualifications questioned and corporation's false need to fill quotas or adhere to regulatory compliance continue to stagnate some African American women's career progression. Kelly stated that corporate

America has a tendency to misinterpret diversity training with quotas and compliance. Participants believed that this misinterpretation led to the questioning of their skills and minimized their qualification and accomplishments. Regardless of their qualification, education, or credentials, participants believed that some colleagues' promotion were never questioned, whereas theirs and other African American women selected for senior leadership positions are often questioned or attributed to a quota hiring.

Theme 2: Professional Relationships

The second theme generated from participants' responses was professional relationships. This theme was result from the following question asked of participants. How has diversity training influenced your opportunities to enter into senior leadership? Within this theme there were two components: mentorship and peer-to-peer relationships. When African American women seek out professional relationships, they are typically attempting to find guidance to assist with their careers. Through this guidance, African American women receive direction, assistance, and training opportunities. Four of the eight participants implied that diversity training helped them to build professional relationships with colleagues. For example, Lisa noted that her organization diversity training focused on ways to build productive relationships internally and externally of the organization.

Professional relationships commonly provide inside knowledge not afforded to all employees from decision makers. The decision makers tend to have major influence and often information regarding career and promotion opportunities. This power and influence could very well be the difference in the success or failure of a career. With their

guidance and assistance employees can build professional relationships network. Mary, a human resource professional, stated:

Such training has not made any significant influence regarding my opportunities.

At the end of the day, it's a networking mechanism. If you know the right people such appointments and recommendations take place. Your strong professional foundations such as education and experience are minimal compared to your communication channels.

The first component of professional relationship was mentorship. Mentorship is an invaluable tool in the career progression of any employee. Through mentorship, an employee can learn how to maneuver within the culture of the organization. Some participants in the study had genuine concerns surrounding the lack of mentorship in their respective organizations. Pamela said that diversity training showed her the importance of "building allies throughout my career because when it comes time to make decisions, I want to be inside the real meetings." Pamela believed that there were private meetings held with only hand-selected individuals. Historically, these meeting have been referred to as the "good ole' boys' club," meetings. These clubs affords certain individuals more opportunities for progression within the company. Fortunately, Pamela expressed that her diversity training had afforded her an opportunity to meet the right people and build mentorship opportunities. She is hopeful and confident that these new relationships will pay dividends in her career progression.

Senior leaders should ensure that all African American women have viable mentors that enhance their development. This mentorship should be available at all aspects and levels of the organization. The outcomes can play a pivotal role in career

enhancement for disenfranchised African American women employees, as well as the ability to tap into unused talent, skills, ideas, and resources. Six of the eight participants acknowledged diversity training as being a vital impact on their career progression. Unfortunately, there has been limited research on the impact of diversity training on mentorship of African American women's career progression. Nevertheless, mentorship can provide direction and guidance to participant's career progression. Lisa concurred when she stated, "Mentoring is a good tool that can be used to foster better relationships from a diversity standpoint." These relationships can enhance opportunities for African American women to succeed. Through increased mentorship and effective leadership participants believe they could possibly obtain the necessary support needed for career progression challenges.

The second component of professional relationship was peer-to-peer relationships. The freedom to have open dialogue with colleagues allows employees to get know and understand one another, and facilitates employees to become more comfortable with discussing differences that exist between them. Diversity training provides a safe environment where employees can freely express their experiences, feelings, and opinions. Participants also can share autobiographical stories, resulting in employees learning, understanding more about colleagues, and learning more about themselves as people. Beverly explained that diversity training allowed her and her colleagues an opportunity to have conversations regarding social and diversity issues that they normally would not discuss. The training allowed her and others to learn more about the lives of their fellow workers through autobiographical storytelling. For example, White males shared stories of not having any interaction with a Black person until

working in the corporate world, and fellow African Americans disclosed their struggles of maneuvering throughout life as a Black person.

It is commonplace for management to direct employees not to discuss sensitive social issues in the workplace. Too often cultural, gender, race, and other so-called taboo social issues are considered off-limits for workplace discussion. However, Kelly disagreed and insinuated that the workplace was the perfect place to have conversations about sensitive social issues. She implied that the workplace would give employees a safe environment to have such discussions. She noted, “when employees leave work at 5:00pm, they still have to enter into a broader more diverse community to live in. And how are you going to live, behave, and walk among different people in society? I think that is [an] even bigger issue to tackle, not just what you do on your job from 8-5.” In her interview, Beverly acknowledged that diversity training broadened her horizon on her colleagues beliefs and feelings. She also noted, “Diversity training has made me aware that people have a lot of biases.” Overall, the majority of the participants acknowledged an improvement in their peer-to-peer relationships. Building professional relationships of employees should be one of the goals of any corporate diversity sponsored training program. The peer-to-peer relationship could dramatically improve teamwork, enhance communication, determine term sustainability of the company, and increase career progression of African American women.

Theme 3: Inclusiveness

The third theme to emerge from interviews responses was inclusiveness. This theme derived from the following questions posed to participants. (1) What would be your recommendations for diversity training program planners for enhancing the

effectiveness of African American women to progress into senior leadership? (2) In what ways have diversity training created a work environment conducive to your progression into senior leadership position? (3) What ways has diversity training hindered your progression? This theme had two components of effective leadership and the lack of representation. The first component of the theme was effective leadership. Effective leadership allows employees to become better workers and managers to become better leaders. Anytime an organization can receive a return on investment of employees it's a "win-win situation" for everyone. During the interviews, four of the eight participants revealed that corporate-sponsored diversity training had indeed enhanced their leadership skills. For instances, Lisa disclosed that diversity training enhanced her leadership skills, and that she believed effective leadership would only lead to more opportunities for higher leadership positions. In her interview, Ann recognized that diversity training caused her to challenge her current leadership style. She felt a need to re-evaluate her current style and possible use an alternative leadership styles for employees who are different. Hopefully, the enhancement of her leadership skills and ability would allow her to become a better leader for all her subordinates.

Often, leaders and managers adopt a one-size-fits-all leadership model. However, this leadership style may not be conducive when leading a diverse workforce when gender, race, ethnicity, and cultural differences are prevalent. For example, one participant stated, "Diversity training made us more cohesive leaders. Knowing that this person has gone through diversity training and you know they are aware of different aspects of diversity created cohesiveness and more understanding of each individual." Increasing the leadership skills of African American women through diversity can

prepare them for greater responsibility and develop relationships. The increase in knowledge helps participants feel part of the team and helps accomplish personal development. Increasing the participant's leadership skills through diversity training produced positive outcomes for some participants. Through effective leadership, African American women can obtain skills that propel them into senior leadership roles as vital member of the team.

The second component of the inclusiveness theme was lack of representation. Participants in the current study expressed real concerns with the lack of African American women's representation in the higher leadership positions. The higher African American women ascend the corporate ladder, the lower the numbers of representation become. This was evident during one interview, when Pamela stated:

We don't see a lot of Black females at the top, so there is some causation causing that. To bust that wall down, I think that is something they don't want to teach you. There is no training out there for that. We talk about that, we talk about how to navigate through that, but it still does not open doors for the African American leadership. You have some, but it is a very small amount and I don't think it happening by chance. I think it is happening and it is something that is being manipulated.

Another participant echoed Pamela when she stated that "diversity training highlighted the lack of representation of African American women." Most participants were aware of the miniscule number of African American women in senior leadership positions in their respective organizations, and felt that the lack of representation illustrated the lack of commitment of diversity and inclusion. However, the participants believed that diversity

training finally made the current leadership acknowledge the huge disparity of African American women not in senior leadership. Participants hoped that the heightened awareness would be considered when personnel decisions were being made to hire. For example, Ann stated:

You [need] to have senior management have African American women in their head when they are making hiring and promotion decisions. Making sure senior management is considering Black women in their decision-making process for senior positions not only ensures an equal opportunity, but expands the talent pool of qualified applicants for those positions.

The lack of African American women in senior leadership positions has historically been overlooked. The exclusion of African American women in senior leadership position has become the norm in the workplace. All the important positions of great authority continue to be held overwhelming by White men. This workplace norm continues to relegate African American women to menial positions with no real authority. However, Beverly suggested that resources groups could help combat the practice of exclusion and be a beneficial start:

The second thing is creating employee resources groups where Black women can come together to talk about what they need from the company and present it to the company. Sometimes the company thinks what they need is not what we need. Having a group where they can brainstorm and present ideas to leadership and leadership will listen, that is important. Focusing the diversity training away from you have to like me, you have to understand me, you have to love me, and focusing away from that and more on respect and behavior modification. As

oppose to you know, we got to hug and kisses up in the break room and got to come to my baby shower.

African American women councils were also suggested as a pivotal role in providing senior leadership with recommendations for the lack of representation of African American women progression. Those recommendations could include changes to policies, procedures, communications, and succession planning to name a few. The ultimate goal, according to participants, is to increase the representation of qualified African American women in all the upper echelons of the organization. The practice of near-exclusion of African American women from senior leadership opportunities has created racial and gender divisions. For example, Michelle recalled how the marketing department at her previous company had only one African American female out of 50 employees. This type of underrepresentation can send the wrong message, forces exceptional African American women employees to leave, and questions a company's true commitment to diversity. Therefore, the inclusion of African American women in the discussion about their career needs is paramount for their organizational success.

Summary

The purpose of this chapter was to provide a summary of the findings as a result of interview responses of the eight African American women participants. The responses generated from the interview questions in the study produced the three themes of: professional growth, professional relationships, and inclusiveness. The three themes were composed of nine components that the researcher used to answer the two research questions. In the next chapter, the researcher will provide an interpretation of the findings

relative to the research questions, and will situate them within the current literature. In the final chapter, the researcher will also put forth recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Companies and diversity practitioners have understood the need for diversity for over 25 years. In spite of this, African American women are still underrepresented in senior leadership, even though their representation in the workforce has increased. The purpose of this study was to explore the perceptions of African American women on how corporate-sponsored diversity training has impacted their upward mobility into senior leadership positions. This phenomenological research study explored the lived experiences of eight African American women. The data analysis from participants' responses revealed three themes: (a) professional growth, (b) professional relationship, and (c) inclusiveness. The goal of the study was to answer the following two research questions.

Research Question 1: What role does diversity training have in the advancement of African American women into senior leadership positions?

Research Question # 2: What are the Salient Outcomes of Diversity Training Programs?

In this chapter, the researcher will connect key findings from the study to existing relevant literature as it pertains to the two research questions.

Research Question 1: What role does diversity training have in the advancement of African American women into senior leadership positions?

The participants identified two roles: increased job opportunities and increased opportunities to learn how “difference” impacts workplace relationships and African American women career progression into senior leadership. Each is reflected in the themes of professional growth, professional relationship, and inclusiveness. Although the numbers of African American women in the workforce has steadily increased, only a tiny portion has been able to achieve the highest levels of corporate leadership (Henderson, 1994). As such, one role of diversity training should be to increase job opportunities for African American women into senior leadership positions. African American women are represented in most companies, but they are relegated to jobs that have no real decision power (Bell, 1990).

Research regarding the impact of diversity training on the career progression of African American women into senior leadership positions has been mixed. However, the general consensus is that diversity training has provided some opportunities for African American women, but still falls well short in advancing the careers of African American women. Kalev et al. (2006) examined several diversity programs and concluded none of the programs provided much evidence of effectiveness. This echoed Kulik and Roberson’s (2008b) research that found minimal data indicating that diversity training was beneficial or provided an advantage. Similarly, Giscombe and Mattis (2002) surveyed 1,735 women of color and discovered that 38% of African American women reported their opportunities for management as minimal and unchanging. Finally, Wilson (2012) revealed that diversity training has had limited impact on the career progression of African American women into senior leadership positions. The participants in this study also expressed mixed feelings regarding the role diversity training plays in increasing

opportunities for upward mobility of African American women. Five participants felt that diversity training contributed nothing to their success, while the remaining participants acknowledged receiving at least one opportunity. Two indicated that they received some type of career advancement as a result of the diversity training—i.e., a senior leadership position outside of the organization, a promotion within her current organization. The other participants attributed their success to their own self determination to succeed as opposed to the diversity training. These views were quite different from Catalyst (2004), who found that 24% of African American women believed their opportunities to obtain a senior leadership positions had decreased, regardless of their training and self-determination.

Another aspect of the role of diversity training focuses on who receives the greatest job opportunity; “Although the proportion of women in supervisory and management positions has been rising during the last two decades, the number of Black women who hold top executive positions is very small” (Mitra, 2003, p. 67). Previous researchers have indicated that White women, White men, and even Black men receive greater benefits than Black women (Bell & Nkomo, 2003). Dobbin, Kim, and Kalev (2011) noted that diversity programming adopted by companies tends to result in the promotion of White women. The authors concluded that White women managers are most likely to advocate for diversity programs because they benefit from strong diversity program implementation. Dobbin et al. (2011) found in a sample of firms spanning 1980-2002 that “White women, on average, hold 23 percent of management jobs, whereas African American men/women hold 4 percent” (p. 388). Consequently, African American women have not been recipients of increase promotion into senior leadership

positions through diversity initiatives. Findings from the U.S Department of Labor (2014) revealed one employer who hired participants in the Charlotte area had 104 African American women in executive senior level officials and managers positions; compared to White women who held 1,666 positions. Two other employers, who employed some of participants in study, had a total of two White women and zero African American women in their senior leadership position. Participants' responses were split down the middle regarding diversity training and who receives job opportunities. Half of participants believed that no additional job opportunities were provided, and the other half felt they have had additional job opportunities. Ann stated the diversity training helped her hone her leadership skills and this had helped her continue to advance.

Providing increased opportunities for participants to have serious dialogue and understand different perspectives is another way in which diversity training programs engage participants. Holien (2013) found that "exposure to diversity shapes the process of learning, particularly learning about views and experiences relevant to minority groups" (p. 10). The training sessions created a forum where all attendees could openly share relevant information that developed trust, enhanced teamwork, and helped them to examine their beliefs. Several participants indicated that they and their colleagues gained greater knowledge and understanding of themselves and each other. This included a heightened self-awareness of their biases and prejudices. Kalev et al. (2006) noted that personal narratives exposed participants directly to new and sometimes dissenting information. According to Dobbin et al. (2011), the narratives directly or indirectly provide education on the different views, experiences, and backgrounds of all diverse

groups who participate in diversity training. Overall, the responses of those who participated in this study were consistent with those research studies.

The role that diversity training plays in developing understanding and appreciation of differences is critical to the advancement of African American women into senior leadership. Self-awareness development enables African American women to engage in practices that reflect different beliefs, behaviors, and values (Kalev et al., 2006). However, the diversity among employees and the criteria needed for African American women make professional growth and career planning that more difficult (Kalev et al., 2006). Much like other racial/ethnic minority groups, African American women face challenges to advancement in the corporate world, as is demonstrated by their low representation in influential leadership roles (Catalyst, 2004). Bell and Nkomo (2003) found that African American women expressed different obstacles than their White male and female colleagues. For example, Catalyst (2004) found “whereas White women frequently reference the ‘glass ceiling’ as blocking their advancement up the career ladder, women of color often characterize the barriers they encounter as comprising a ‘concrete ceiling’ that is more dense and less easily shattered” (p. 3). Some research authors have concluded African American women face double negatives due to their race and gender (Mitra, 2003). A research survey of 963 African American women that Catalyst conducted found that African American women encountered barriers of stereotypes, credibility, double minority status, visibility, and scrutiny. The participants in the current study echoed the findings of previous research.

Pamela stated that there was something different about what impeded the advancement of African American women into senior leadership from her White female

colleagues. She alluded to the barriers created by the concrete ceiling such stereotypes and negative perceptions of African American women. Most of the participants in the study agreed that stereotypes are still present in their respective workplace in some shape, fashion, or form. Holien (2013) wrote, “Despite some mixed results, in general the studies show that exposure to diversity can ameliorate negative stereotypes and bias people may have about people from different backgrounds and perspectives” (p.12). On one hand, diversity training is effective in improving overall awareness of employee differences regarding cultures, languages, and values. Participants agreed that diversity training could curtail negative stereotypes. However, the training may not change or eliminate stereotypes of African American women and other minority groups (Kulik & Roberson, 2008a). As companies become more diverse, the possibility of social and racial issues becomes more prevalent. Therefore, the need for diversity training and diverse leadership becomes more relevant (Kulik & Robertson, 2008a). The majority of participants acknowledged encountering negative stereotypes during their career, but refused to allow the stereotypes to define them.

Research Question # 2: What are the Salient Outcomes of Diversity Training Programs?

Based on the analysis of participants’ interviews, the researcher identified certain outcomes as useful for the advancement of African American women into senior leadership. These include training accountability, mentoring, and diversity initiative policies as salient outcomes of an effective diversity training program.

Training Accountability

The first outcome deemed important for diversity training was accountability. The major goal of any training is transfer of learning. That is, employees will take the knowledge gained from training and apply it to current or future jobs. Hemphill and Haines (1997) found that government agencies and over half of all Fortune 500 companies provided some form of diversity training. Additionally it has been reported companies lose an estimated average of 88 cents on every dollar spent on training (Curry, Caplan, & Knuppel, 1994). Unfortunately, according to Curry et al. (1994), employees transfer only 10-13% of skills learned in trainings from the classroom to the workplace. Gregoire, Propp, and Poertner (1998) estimated that companies spend over 100 billion dollars yearly on training, and that employees transfer an average of only 12% of what they learned to the workplace. Previous researchers Hanover and Cellar (1998) found that organizational climate, supervisors, and colleagues play important roles in transfer of learning. For example, supervisors' support and willingness to allow trainees to use newly obtained skills in the workplace is crucial for further development. Given the high cost, transfer of training will always be a concern of human resources managers. The participants' responses echoed that this transfer is important.

As a whole, employees understand that creating an inclusive work environment requires open dialogue, knowledge, and increased awareness. Training accountability allows organizations to determine the impact of the diversity training. Merely implementing or conducting diversity training without any type of oversight and accountability could be more damaging than not having any diversity initiative. Jayne and Diboye (2004) posited that organizations should develop diversity training with goals

and training outcomes in mind. Powell and Graves (2003) wrote that instituting steps to implement diversity, but ignoring the need for accountability, may inhibit an organization's ability to fully evaluate its diversity training's impact on African American women. Too often, diversity training evaluations concentrate on immediate reactions to the training, as opposed to long range impacts (Powell & Graves, 2003). Participants recognized an immediate transfer of learning in terms of a broader sense of consciousness of people different than them, increased knowledge, self-awareness, inclusiveness, and new perspectives on instrumental leadership skills among the attendees. However, they could not provide specific examples of how that transfer of learning translates long term into the work environment.

Researchers seeking to evaluate the transfer of learning must therefore consider the long term impact of diversity training on the enhancement of consciousness, knowledge, self-awareness, and leadership skills to ensure sustained institutional change resulting in increased opportunities for people of diverse backgrounds. The lack of this form of accountability allows companies who have historically discriminated against African American women in hiring, development, and promotions to continue to do so (Kirchmeyer, 2002). For this reason, participants believed it was necessary for upper management to hold managers accountable for concepts, ideas, and knowledge obtained during diversity training to ensure the company's diversity initiatives are met. Kalev et al. (2006) wrote that "programs that establish clear leadership and responsibility for change have produced the greatest gains in diversity" (p. 280).

Dobbin and Kalev (2007) found that diversity programs that have accountability parameters increase representation of African American women in management.

However, the majority of African American women have not been recipients of increased promotion into senior leadership positions as a consequence of diversity initiatives. This is evident in the career progression of the African American women who participated in this study. Only two had received a promotion as a result of the diversity training. Some participants felt that White male senior leaders did not understand the needs of African American women and this presented a barrier to advancement. The participants believed the dissimilarities between White men and African American women created obstacles for their development as future senior leaders but diversity training did establish a foundation for building stronger relationships which in turn resulted in open communication and furthered understanding of how organizations perceive African Americans.

Consequently, some participants expressed that their respective organizations needed better tools to evaluate the transfer of learning from diversity training programs. Sinclair's (2000) research around diversity training found "evidence that 40% of US companies have some sort of diversity training and those trainings were beneficial in the reduction of stereotyping, fostering better relations and reducing workplace turnover." This research study, in conjunction with extant diversity training literature, affirmed the importance of training accountability for both short term benefits and their long-term effects of reducing stereotypes, increasing awareness and development, and improving the representation of African American women into senior leadership.

Mentoring

The second outcome deemed important for a corporate-sponsored diversity training program by participants was mentorship. Mentorship relationships allow a more

experienced employee to take an active role in a less experienced employee's career development. The relationship provides the less experienced employees with information that enhances their skills, awareness, and knowledge on their career development (Bhavnani, 1997). Furthermore, O'Neil and Blake-Beard (2002) noted that through mentorship, companies can provide career development, career progression, and exposure to visibly challenging assignments for all employees. Therefore, mentorship is essential for greater career success and career progression (O'Neil & Blake-Beard, 2002).

Over the last 20 years, the number of women in the workforce has reached all-time highs. This dramatic shift has made more and more organizations dedicate considerable resources to mentorship development through formal and informal mentor plans (Skipper & Bell, 2008). Unfortunately, a shortage of African American women in senior leadership positions has created a shortage of African American women female mentors (O'Neill & Blake-Beard, 2002; Ragins & Cotton, 1996). This shortage helps create artificial barriers that hamper African American women's success. Catalyst (2004) found that of 963 African American women surveyed, three quarters believed that having a mentor was vital to their career success. Accordingly, Hemphill and Haines (1997) noted that regardless of the program, mentoring and development networks are geared to and has afforded White men guidance, coaching, leadership development, and other forms of assistance more often than other groups. The responses from participants interviewed coincide with the studies in that only three participants reported receiving some form of mentorship. The remainder of participants had concerns regarding the lack of mentorship within their respective organizations.

Parker and Ogilvie (2005) posited that African American women are more likely to be excluded from the company's main networks. Feagan (2000) found that African American women are less likely to receive inclusion in informal social networks where a number of informal mentorship opportunities may originate. In fact, White men continue to have unfettered access to the formal and informal rules of development that leads to advancement and mentorship (Eagly & Chin, 2010), whereas African American women are not privileged to the luxury of unabated resources, mentorship opportunities, and support that some attribute to career success (Morrison & Von Gilnow, 1990). This was evident from Catalyst's (2004) research, which discovered that only 38% of 963 African American women surveyed confirmed having a mentor. In fact, Rutherford (1999) reported that women attributed the lack of career guidance and mentoring as a major barrier to their success. Therefore, participants of the study were convinced that corporate-sponsored diversity training should include mentorship outcomes component to be effective.

Policies

The final outcome that the participants deemed important for diversity training was policies. One important aspect of diversity programs and diversity initiatives that are successful is the foundation of objective policies. An organization's ability to implement concrete policies that create an environment conducive for the success of African American women and other employees is paramount. Woody (1992) noted that "public policy are the second greatest influences on work opportunity for Black women" (p. 3). Woody (1992) concluded that public policy implementation has been a key motivator in organizations increasing numbers of African American women in today's workforce

(Woody, 1992). Despite this, African American women continue to judge diversity policies as having limited benefits and are pessimistic about their opportunities to advance to senior management (Catalyst, 2004). In addition, Catalyst (2004) found that “fewer than 25% African American women believe that diversity policies in their companies focus on career development” (pg. 31) and did not feel the diversity policies created inclusiveness up and down corporate ladder. Overall, participants in this study appeared to agree with findings from existing literature that current diversity policies in their respective organizations focus more on regulatory compliance and less on opportunities into senior leadership positions resulting in minimal difference in their advancement. For instance, Dobbin et al. (2011) contended that regulatory requirements failed to bolster any additional adoption of diversity programs designed to promote equality and opportunity. Accordingly, participants felt that organizations need more emphasis on overall policies and career development aimed at African American women’s progression.

Catalyst’s (2004) research showed that 50% of participants believe that company policies can create barriers and impede diversity initiatives. For example, “Outdated organizational policies often do not accommodate the changes taking place in the diverse workplace” (Catalyst, 2004). Implementing policy that allows African American women access, but no career progression fails by most account. Hemphill and Haines (1997) suggested that senior-level leadership should implement and support policies that encourage fairness to combat the low numbers of African American women in leadership. Participants’ responses revealed that they felt strong diversity policies were

essential to a company's successful diversity training and salient outcomes to African Americans' success.

Recommendations for Future

The purpose of this study was to explore the perceptions of African American women and explore how diversity training impacted their upward mobility into senior leadership. The findings revealed a mixture of opinions among the eight participants. Future researchers should conduct studies to compare the perceptions of Hispanic American women, Asian American women, Native American women, and LGBT and transgender women to determine if diversity training has positively impacted their careers. Discovering what impact diversity training has on minority women's career progression could help companies determine the real benefits of diversity training. Future researchers should also determine if current diversity policies and practices are producing opportunities for all employees. Finally, future results should focus on the salient outcomes that the participants suggested. For example, will mentorship give African American women increased opportunities? Will training accountability improve African American women representation into senior leadership? The importance of discovering diversity training impact on diverse groups within the workforce will give valuable insight on diversity training effectiveness. Using Critical Race Theory, Symbolic Race Theory, and Black Feminist Theory could also help companies transform their diversity training into meaningful results. Each theory in its own unique way addresses social problems of inequality. Through transformation the theories attempt to change social structure and policies that allow certain groups power and others to be marginalized

(Carbado et al, 2013). Using these concepts as infrastructure could be vital in the design, development, and deliver of diversity training programs.

The findings of this study could possible serve as informative data for current companies. The data could also help companies re-examine development program towards African American women and other women. More importantly, current companies could examine how their diversity training programs affect professional growth, professional relationship and inclusiveness within their respective organizations. The data finding could also be a basis to review companies mentoring, career development, and promotion procedures. Through these programs companies advocate equality, but organizational chart rarely show comparable representation at senior leadership positions. A thorough assessment of current practice and policies could reassure employees the company is committed to diversity at every level of the organization. Therefore, using diversity training, initiatives, and policies to provide employees an equivalent opportunity for success.

Conclusion

The major emphasis placed on diversity training throughout the corporate and government sector has been well documented. The ultimate mission of diversity training is to create a workplace where all employees are respected, gain awareness and promote an inclusionary environment. In addition, diversity training should help develop, support, and promote employees. Unfortunately, all employees have not received those pre-determined benefits. Cox and Nkomo (1990) posited that African American women have comparable job experience and receive higher ratings than African American males, but

have received fewer opportunities for career progression. The few opportunities available to women have been typically been filled by White women.

The study captured the experience of African American women who had attended diversity training within the last 15 years. The results revealed the women's perceptions on the impact of diversity training and salient outcomes for having a successful diversity training program. The research revealed facts that could provide a foundation for future research outcomes of diversity training programs. As diversity practitioners continue to determine the impact of diversity training, they must realize that the results have not been equal. As a result, there should be more emphasizes placed on diversity training to gain a better understanding of the effects on all employees' upward mobility.

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APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

What are the perceptions of African American women on how corporate-sponsored training has impacted their upward mobility into senior leadership?

1. Tell me about your career progression into senior leadership.
2. Describe the corporate-sponsored diversity training that you have had over the past 15 years.
 - a. What was meaningful to you?
 - b. What seemed to impact those around you most?
 - c. What difference did the training make in the workplace environment?
 - i. Attitudes
 - ii. Relationships
 - iii. Knowledge
 - iv. Experiences
3. Tell me about the corporate-sponsored diversity training experience you found most beneficial? Least beneficial?
4. In what ways have corporate-sponsored diversity training better prepared you for leadership?
5. In what ways have corporate-sponsored diversity training created a work environment conducive to you progressing into a senior leadership position? In what ways has it hindered that progression?
6. How has corporate-sponsored diversity training influenced your opportunities to enter senior leadership positions?

7. What would be your recommendations for corporate-sponsored diversity training program planners for enhancing the effectiveness of such training for helping African American women to progress into senior leadership?
8. Basic demographic data will also be collected: Name, age, position, education history, email address.

APPENDIX B: CONSENT LETTER

Name of Proposed Study: “What are the perceptions of African American women on how corporate-sponsored training has impacted their upward mobility into senior leadership?”

Date:

Dear: Ma’am,

My name is William Crews and I am currently a doctoral student at University of North Carolina—Charlotte. I am conducting a research study on “What are the perceptions of African American women on how corporate-sponsored training has impacted their upward mobility into senior leadership.” I am requesting your assistance as a participant in my research and would greatly appreciate your support.

The purpose of this research study is to better understand vital information about corporate-sponsored diversity training and the impact it has on African American women.

You will be interviewed by William Crews and the interview will last between 60 – 90 minutes. You will be asked to give honest responses to 8 interview questions. If you are unavailable for an in-person interview, I will arrange to conduct a telephone interview with you. There is also the possibility of a follow-up interview. The purpose of the follow-up interview may be to clarify your responses. The follow-up interview will also be face-to-face or over the telephone and last anywhere between 5-30 minutes.

Each interview will be recorded upon your permission. However, you do have the option to opt out of the research if you do not want your interview recorded. If you elect to be recorded, you also have the option to stop the recording at any time during the interview.

The recording of the interviews will be transcribed and reviewed by you for accuracy. All digital recording will be kept in Mr. Crews’ home office under lock and key. The

information will be kept until the successful defense of the dissertation and destroyed thereafter. After your interview you will be thanked for your participation and provided a \$25.00 Target gift card.

Your participation in the study is strictly voluntarily. You have the option not to participate in the study and there is no risk to you. The information collected in the study will have no bearing on your employment and all identifiable information will be coded to protect your participation. There is no minimal psychological risk associated and no economic harm or risk to you. Protective measure such as, assigning you a pseudonym name, number, and securing all data collected will help ensure your confidentiality.

The result of the study may be used in presentations, journal publications or reports.

However, if you have any questions or concerns regarding this research please contact William Crews at (704) 526-9483, wcrews5@uncc.edu or Dr. Lisa Merriweather at (704) 687-8740, lmerriwe@uncc.edu. If you feel your rights as a participant have been jeopardized in this research you can contact the University of North Carolina — Charlotte IRB board and someone will help you.

Sincerely,

William Crews
wcrews5@uncc.edu

APPENDIX C: CONSENT FORM

I _____ consent to participate in the study described above; understand my participation is voluntary and can withdraw from the study at any time. (Each participant must sign a consent form before participating in the study. The sign form will be secured until the completion of the dissertation and destroyed after the successful defense of the study).

Participant Signature: _____ Date: _____

Researcher Signature: _____ Date: _____

APPENDIX D: EMAIL RECRUITMENT LETTER

Dear,

My name is William Crews and I am a student at the University of North Carolina — Charlotte pursuing a Doctorate of Education degree. I am conducting a research study titled “EXPLORING THE PERCEPTIONS OF AFRICAN AMERICAN WOMEN ON HOW CORPORATE-SPONSORED DIVERSITY TRAINING HAS IMPACTED THEIR UPWARD MOBILITY INTO SENIOR LEADERSHIP.” The goal of this study is to examine the lived experiences of African American women who strive to attain senior leadership positions in the workplace. The results of the study could uncover the advantage and disadvantages of corporate-sponsored diversity training on African American women career progression.

To participate you must be between the ages of 28-65, hold a managerial leadership position in the Charlotte, North Carolina area business community, oversee the work of other employees as part of your daily duties and have participated in corporate-sponsored training within the last 15 years. You will also need to sign a consent form agreeing to participate in the study. There are no foreseeable risks associated with this research and your identity will not be compromised. If you are interested in participating or if you have any question or concerns regarding the research, please contact me at 704-000-0000 or wcrews5@uncc.edu.