FROM THE CORPORATE OFFICE TO MINISTRY:
A CASE STUDY OF AFRICAN AMERICAN WOMEN WHO
LEAVE CORPORATE LEADERSHIP POSITIONS FOR SPIRITUAL PURSUITS

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ABSTRACT

Fonda M. Harris. FROM THE CORPORATE OFFICE TO MINISTRY: A CASE STUDY OF AFRICAN AMERICAN WOMEN WHO LEAVE CORPORATE LEADERSHIP FOR SPIRITUAL PURSUITS. (Under the direction of Dr. Andrew T. Alexson) College of Business and Leadership, DECEMBER 2012.

The purpose of this dissertation was to explore through phenomenological inquiry the experiences, perceptions, personal journeys, insights, and in-depth reflections of African American women who after experiencing leadership success in corporate America opt-out to pursue spiritual endeavors.

To develop a conceptual framework, a literature review was developed that examined the historical perspective of women in leadership. Further, it investigated the spiritual dynamics of change, particularly as it related to women; and it provided a review of critical life events and its influence on career choice. Additionally, the research study incorporated personal interviews and narratives of 3 African American women between the ages of 40 and 60 who resided in the Metropolitan Nashville, TN area who formerly held mid to top level positions and are now pastors, missionaries, or participate in other ministry vocations. These women were allowed to tell the unique stories of their career journey and the precipitating events that led to their career path change.

The researcher provided a 10 item questionnaire to each participant to obtain demographic information and answer general questions regarding their experience in leadership and ministry. To eliminate researcher bias, Underwood’s Daily Spiritual Experience Scale (2006) was administered, which was a 16 question validated instrument to measure participants’ religious well-being and existential well-being.
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Chapter 1: Introduction

Are women leader’s public and private lives intertwined? In order to maintain balance, do women compartmentalize their lives, their duties, or their identities? These are questions that Helgesen (1995) grappled with in The Female Advantage: Women’s Ways of Leadership. Written during an era when women were assuming positions of leadership in greater proportion. There was a shift in leadership thinking after the turbulent 1980s and the upheaval of several prominent business organizations. This upheaval prompted a new direction, new “styles of leadership, new structures, new ways of motivating people, and new ways of strengthening relationships of every kind” (Helgesen, 1995, xiii). Consequently, the upheaval meant a door opening for women to bring their brand of leading to the forefront.

Women have made considerable advances in organizational representation, particularly in management and higher level positions (Catalyst, 1999). These advances are validated in their movement in upper-level positions, in earning power, and increased presence in boardrooms (U.S. Department of Labor, 1999). Women have transitioned into positions that were once considered male-dominated. Furthermore, women outnumber men in higher education programs and obtaining advanced degrees (Boushey & O’Leary, 2010).

The presence of women leaders has been witnessed in government, industry, corporations, and organizations all across the globe, which has brought about many opportunities for women of all races; however, it has also brought its share of challenges, both explicit and subtle. This study examined the unique opportunities and challenges that women face as they aspire to reach their full potential. The study also considered the
Leaving Corporate America

perennial issues that have impacted women’s advancement into leadership generally, and more specifically for African American women, as they attempt to close the gender and racial gaps in organizations. Further, it discussed the phenomena “opting out” and factors that prompt women to leave corporate leadership positions to pursue non-traditional career options, namely spiritual or ministry pursuits.

Chapter 1 is a compilation of the following topics: (a) introduction, (b) background information, (c) statement of the problem, (d) purpose statement, (e) significance of the study, (f) nature of the study, (g) research questions, (h) conceptual framework, (i) definition of terms, (j) assumptions, (k) delimitations of the study, and (l) summary of the chapter. The chapter concludes with transition to a review of literature related to the topic of women in leadership within the workplace. As well, it includes a review of literature pertaining to spiritual aspects of leadership, and the relevance of critical life events to change.

The study examined the lived experiences of 3 African American women who reside in Nashville, Tennessee that transitioned from leadership positions, i.e. manager, supervisor, director, assistant vice president, president, vice president, or equivalent positions, for spiritual or ministerial pursuits. The personal accounts and narratives of women who have chosen their life work in ministry provide a perspective and understanding of their experiences, and capture in-depth reflections by participants regarding their experience of the identified phenomenon (Creswell, 2007). This research methodology focuses on the meaning that human beings make of their experiences (Schweitzer, 2002). The researcher acknowledges that the participants’ reality is not directly accessible to the researcher, and therefore, the researcher’s focus is on the
dialogue of the individuals with their contexts, the “dialectical organization of experiencing-behaving subject and physical social world, which essentially defines the phenomenon in question” (McConville, 1978, p. 103). The qualitative phenomenology case study approach explored the following phenomenon: the lived experiences of mid to upper level leaders who transition to spiritual pursuits. This approach to research can lead to new insights in the unique processes of leadership, spirituality, and critical life influences on life choices.

Background of the Problem

This study addressed how significant numbers of women are leaving corporate leadership positions despite the increased prevalence of women in these positions. Relevant to this is how women traditionally have been viewed in terms of their leadership capabilities, as well as, the importance of the spiritual dimension of self and the influence of spirituality in directing career path choices.

In the last three decades, women have joined the workforce at significant rates. In 2011, women made up 46.6% of the labor force. Further, women comprised 51.4% of all management, professional, and related positions. Despite the workplace advances women have made in corporate America, of all people employed in management, professional, and related positions, only 5.3% were occupied by African American women (Catalyst, 2012). Yet, in recent years significant numbers of women are leaving their positions of leadership due to workplace pressures, and life pressures as well.

The private sector group, Hidden Brain Drain Task Force, identified various factors they term “push and pull” factors that determine why women leave the workplace; and work-life challenges is prominent on the list (Ludden, 2010). As reported in Off-
ramps and On-ramps: Keeping Talented Women on the Road to Success, childcare challenges has pushed 45% of women surveyed out of the workplace, and another 24% accounted for elder care challenges. An additional primary factor that determines why women leave the workplace, which consequently stems directly from the workplace itself, is the lack of flexibility in the workplace (Hewlett, 2007).

Moreover, there is another group of women who are leaving the workplace; but it is not due to workplace pressures or life pressures within themselves. They are searching for meaningful life purpose.

Notwithstanding the workplace advances that women have made, there are those who seek a higher purpose in their lives and as well, in their work. Consequently, they may seek opportunities to align purpose and work for a more meaningful approach to life (Gordon, 2007). This alignment recognizes that a person’s purpose is far greater than they are; and they desire to make a greater contribution to others and the larger society (Milliman, Czaplewski, & Ferguson, 2003). For this reason there are those who choose to leave corporate America for other more meaningful pursuits.

The term “opting out” is the phrase that identifies those who leave corporate jobs in favor of other non-traditional career paths. Some are choosing non-profit or foundation work, while others pursue service related vocations without monetary compensation (Why Women are Leaving, n.d.). Contrastingly, the U.S. Census Bureau (2009) investigated the “opting-out” phenomena and determined that women are not necessarily opting out of traditional career paths for non-traditional career paths. It found many women who leave do so to have children, and “despite many media stories to the contrary, most working mothers return to the workforce within a year after having a child.
The researchers hypothesized that two groups of women may opt out: women whose earnings are so low they may not be able to afford child care and women whose family earnings allow them to forgo personal earnings. However, “women at the highest household income levels ($200,000) were only slightly more likely to stop working than women in the middle household income levels ($100,000-$199,999). Women with the lowest household income levels were most likely to opt out” (as cited in Catalyst, 2012).

Yet, there is another segment of the corporate world that literature has not captured in the opting-out conversation: African American women who, despite their leadership success in corporate America, choose to opt out for spiritual pursuits. The opt out literature primarily focuses on White, affluent women with white-collar positions, which is a limited demographic from which to draw conclusions about majority of women (Rose & Hartmann, 2004 as cited in Williams, Manvell, & Bornstein, 2006).

Problem Statement

The problem in the current study is the phenomenon of African American women in leadership positions, who after years of struggle to penetrate corporate America “opt-out” to pursue their life purpose. Many times this change is precipitated by critical life events that bring into question each career decision made to that point.

Purpose of the Study, Conceptual Framework, and Research Questions

The purpose of this dissertation is to explore through phenomenology inquiry the participant’s perceptions, experiences, personal journeys, insights and in-depth reflections of African American women who after experiencing leadership success in corporate America opt-out to pursue spiritual endeavors. The concomitant objective is to
identify any patterns or themes that emerge from the lived experiences through the narratives of these African American women.

The conceptual framework of this study is the challenge of balancing competing interest in the secular and spiritual world, which contributes to having to choose one career path over another.

Figure 1: How competing interest impact career decisions.

This is due to the fact that the spiritual aspects of life are often more compelling than any other facet in one’s life. Moreover, elements of our spirituality do not exist in isolation on a continuum. Conversely, it is a cyclical process whereby one element inevitably
influences the other. Moreover, maturing in one’s faith directly influence one’s desire to find purpose and meaning in life and in work.

Figure 2. How faith evolves in a continuous process.

Significance of the Study

Empirical research into the experience of African American women in the workplace is limited. Literature has primarily focused on leadership of the dominant organizational culture. Some literature exists on women in leadership; however, majority of the previous research has been quantitative in nature using surveys and questionnaires for data collection and analysis. Likewise, very little is written regarding the African American woman’s experience in organizations. Prior research has generated from a gender and race inclusivity perspective, which does not account for the unique experiences of a group who shares a dual minority status. Further, research suggested that the experiences of persons of differing racial groups are divergent from those experienced by majority men and women (Bell & Nkomo, 2001).
The significance revealed through lived experiences of women who were in leadership in former careers who have opted to leave these positions provides insights that perhaps other methodologies have not revealed. This research revealed the lived experiences of African American women in corporate America, and explored another dimension of the opting-out phenomena that has not been studied: pursuit of spiritual purpose and meaning. An analysis of the experiences and perceptions of these women provided themes, views, and constructs to create an original contribution to the field of leadership and gender studies. This research study gathered stories of life experiences of African American women that broaden the knowledge of leadership, spirituality, and life change (Creswell, 2007; DeLeo, 2008; Van Manen, 1990, 2002).

The qualitative approach utilized a phenomenological research model. This method explored spirituality as a factor for opting-out of traditional leadership roles for African American women.

This research methodology allows one to gain an accurate understanding of experiences of others, and capture in-depth reflections of identified phenomenon (Creswell, 2007). According to Creswell and Maxwell (1996) qualitative research is a systematic, subjective approach used to describe life experiences and give them meaning. Madsen (2010) purports understanding one’s personal journey provides for effective learning, growth, and development, which supports the use of qualitative methodology for this study. Additionally, Bleakley (2005) determined that the gathering of personal narratives encourages diversity, promotes new perspectives, and supports knowledge sharing.
The findings of this study could be used to inform organizations, leaders, and women who are transitioning from corporate leadership to ministry. Further, the findings could lead to enhancements in organizations and institutions relative to their structures and policies.

Research Questions

In order to address the research problem, the following three research questions will be investigated:

1. What are the perceived factors that contribute to African American women pursuing spiritual endeavors who have been successful in leadership in corporate America?

2. How does spirituality influence career path choices?

3. How do life events influence career path choices?

According to Creswell (2005), central research questions are the overarching question qualitative research seeks to explore. The central research questions provide participants an opportunity to describe personal perspectives without interference of the researcher’s perspective.

Theoretical Framework

This qualitative phenomenological research explored and captured the personal stories, experiences, personal journeys, insights and in-depth reflections of African American women who after experiencing leadership success in corporate America opt-out to pursue spiritual endeavors. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) explained that stories provide frameworks through the cultural context of the story. Moustakas (1994) postulates the phenomenological method involves returning to participants’ experience
and accessing all complete descriptions available. The researcher’s focus is to honor the life experiences of each participant while finding possible meaning and significance to their experiences.

Several literature perspectives framed the study: a) leadership, b) women and leadership, c) spirituality, d) spirituality in organizations, e) African American women and leadership, f) purpose and meaning in work, and g) life events and life choice. Collins’ (1991) Afrocentric Feminism Epistemology is the theoretical framework chosen for this study. It supports a belief that the way in which African American women know and understand themselves and the world around them should be examined through the lens of four criteria – concrete personal experiences, an emphasis on dialogue, an ethic of caring, and an ethic of personal accountability. It was developed out of Standpoint Theory epistemology (Harding, 1986; Hartsock, 1981, 1983a, 1983b; Smith, 1979 as cited in Richardson, 2009) and was used for this study because of its focus on the examination of African American women and its use in previous studies examining the spirituality of African American women.

The Standpoint Theory is central to Black Feminist Thought, and represents the shared experiences and ideas of Black women (Collins, 2002). Collins (2002) asserted, Black women’s standpoint can be understood within the context of several common threads, which link Black women together. One theme that is common among Black women is the struggle against racism, sexism and classism, which affects their independence and self-reliance. This is not to suggest that all Black women experience and respond to these oppressions in the same way, rather Black Feminist Thought asserts that these women are linked by the common strife of being denigrated in society. Standpoint acknowledges that the occupational and familial
experiences of Black women, as well as experiences grounded in Black culture, lead to a Black feminist *group consciousness* (as cited in Henry, 2010, p. 3).

Being African American and female exposes this group to common experiences. Thus, the Afrocentric Feminist approach encompasses the complex factors that shape the life and experience of African American women, and combines both the Afrocentric and feminist standpoints to their experiences. Figure 3 represented these factors as interconnected and demonstrated how these elements inform life and career choices.

![Figure 3. Theoretical framework using elements of Standpoint Theory.](image-url)
Definition of Terms

Afrocentric feminism epistemology is a way to interpret the African American woman’s reality by those who live it. It holds the belief that the way in which African American women know and understand themselves and the world around them should be examined through the lens of four criteria – concrete personal experiences, an emphasis on dialogue, an ethic of caring, and an ethic of personal accountability. It was developed out of standpoint theory epistemology (Collins, 1991; Harding, 1986; Hartsock, 1981; Smith, 1979).

Corporate America is an informal phrase describing the world of corporations and big business within the United States.

Critical life events are major events that shape people’s lives (Northouse, 2010, p. 220).

Leadership positions are positions of authority, which include managers, supervisors, directors, assistant vice presidents, presidents, vice presidents, or equivalent positions.

Opting-out is a term used to describe those who leave corporate jobs in favor of other non-traditional career paths.

Spirituality is essential human values from around the world and across time that teach us how humanity belongs within the greater scheme of circumstances and how we can make harmony with life and work (Heerman, 1995 as cited in Fairholm, 1977, p. 25).

Standpoint Theory is central to Black Feminist Thought, and represents the shared experiences and ideas of Black women (Collins, 2002).
Stressful life events are any set of circumstances, the advent of which requires or signals change in the basic life pattern of an individual (Holmes & Rahe, 1967).

Assumptions

An assumption in research is “a condition that is taken for granted, without which the research project would be pointless. In research assumptions are equivalent to axioms in geometry – self-evident truths that any reasonable person might accept” (Leedy & Ormrod, 2010, p. 5). Further, they assert, “assumptions are so basic that, without them the research problem itself could not exist” (p. 44).

For the purpose of this study, one assumption was that participants in the study were competent to participate in the study. A second assumption was that the participants were open and honest regarding meeting the criterion for participation in the study; and they were equally honest in responding to the interview questions. A third assumption was that the participants’ experiences and perspectives varied in profundity based on their experiences. A fourth assumption was “the phenomenon under investigation was somewhat lawful and predictable; it is not comprised of completely random events” (Leedy & Ormrod, 2010, p. 5). The final assumption was that experiences of one ethnic or racial group with specified demographics might differ from other ethnic groups.

Delimitations and Limitations of the Study

This study focused on 3 African American women who were formerly in leadership in Corporate America and are now pursuing spiritual endeavors. The case study is limited in its results, due to time availability of the research participants, time allotted to conduct the interviews, and financial constraints that influenced the time...
allotted to complete the study. Because of the small sample size, the results may not be applicable to all African American women who experience this phenomenon. The involvement of several participants in a study can create a complex means for deciphering information in order to make a concrete finding. However, the results may inform other studies of women with the similar demographics as the women in this study. Additionally, this study focused on African American women from a specific region of the country, which does not take into consideration the experience of other cultures, ethnicities, or regions that have experienced the same phenomenon. The views of these women may not be representative of views of other women in other geographical areas. This could diminish the richness of the data and results.

Furthermore, this researcher came to the study with a set of assumptions and potentially biased experiences regarding why women leave corporate positions to pursue spiritual endeavors, the primary being that women are opting out of the corporate world due to their inability to balance competing interest. As well, this researcher has her own beliefs about the influence of spirituality.

Additionally, this researcher has leadership experience in both the corporate and spiritual arenas as an African American woman minister and a corporate leader, and understands the complexity of balancing these competing interests.

Moreover, this researcher grew up in a charismatic African American Baptist church and participated in all the rituals that are a part of an organized religion, including, worship, praying, Bible study, communion, and openly praising God. This body of believers acknowledged the church or the Ecclesia as defined as:
A company of regenerate persons, immersed on profession of faith in Christ; united in covenant for worship, instruction, the observance of Christian ordinances, and for such services as the Gospel requires; recognizing and accepting Christ as their supreme Lord and Lawgiver, and taking His Word as their only and sufficient role of faith and practice in all matters of conscience and religion (Jordan, 2001, p. 26).

This African American Baptist church united in fellowship with the purpose of bringing others to the saving knowledge of Jesus Christ, which comes through teaching, understanding, and acceptance of who we are in Christ, and acknowledging Scripture as the final authority on contemporary and future issues. For most believers, the church is where an understanding of God is revealed through the reinforcement of Bible reading, prayer, worship, and fellowship with other believers.

This researcher embraces spirituality and sees her life and all life relative to God the Creator. To that end the researcher conceptualizes spirituality as an awareness of and reliance upon God who connects us to life and others. It is a revelation that all are divine expressions of God; and thus, possess the divine nature of God. Moreover, spirituality recognizes that through a personal relationship with God a perpetual source of love and power is deposited to all that embrace the Spirit within them.

The researcher was cognizant that her personal beliefs, leadership history, the demographic of the study participants, sample size, and the methodology used to conduct the study lend itself to inherent bias. However, this researcher has taken measures to ensure the objectivity of the research and to circumvent research bias.
This researcher was aware of the fact that bias can occur from the researcher’s selective observations, selective hearing, or allowing personal attitudes, preferences, and feelings to affect interpretations of the data (Ary, Jacobs & Sorensen, 2010). Therefore, the researcher used reflexivity or self-reflection to recognize her own biases and to actively acknowledge and disclose them. Additionally, this researcher used specific approaches to enhance research credibility, reliability, validity, and quality assurance through Van Manen’s (1990) phenomenological data analysis, which involves questioning, reflecting and interpreting data in a line-by-line approach to find thematic analysis of the transcripts through examining every single sentence or sentence cluster to uncover the experience being described by participants. Additionally, the researcher employed member checks, peer review, and researcher memos to ensure trustworthiness and accuracy.

The purpose of the member check interview was to aid in clarifying miscommunications in the interview, therefore ensuring that the themes accurately represent the experiences of the participants as last semester interns transitioning to professional counselors (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). For this research study, the member check confirmed that the themes identified by the researcher accurately described participants experiences of the phenomena in question. The second method was peer review. The peer reviewer ensured through an external check of the research that the researcher is being rigorous in the data analysis (Creswell, 2007). Finally, researcher memos enabled the researcher to clarify any bias that may exist that would inhibit the research process. These strategies would qualify as rigor in qualitative research (Ary, et al., 2010).
Summary of the Chapter

In chapter 1 this researcher briefly discussed the advances that women have made in the corporate world. The term “opting out” is introduced as a phrase that is being used to identify those who leave corporate jobs in favor of other non-traditional career paths. As well, the chapter presents the term “push pull” factors, which are internal and external dynamics that can cause a strained response to perceived work-life conflicts. Additional, it introduced the importance of lived experiences and how personal accounts and narratives can provide a perspective and understanding of experiences, and capture in-depth reflections regarding the meaning human beings attach to experiences, as well as enlightens the identified phenomenon (Creswell, 2007; Schweitzer, 2002).

Chapter 1 discussed the perspectives that framed the study and briefly discussed the theoretical framework of the study: Afrocentric feminism epistemology (Collins, 1990). This epistemology “encompasses theoretical interpretations of Black women’s reality by those who live it” (Collins, 1991, p. 22). It provides a guide for research that is conducted by women and about women.

Chapter 1 included the focus of the study, significance of the study, research questions, nature of the study, and the conceptual framework. The chapter incorporated definitions of key terms. Chapter 1 also included assumptions, scope, limitations, and delimitations of the study.
Chapter 2

Literature Review

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenology case study was to examine the phenomena of the number of African American women who in mid to upper level leadership positions in their careers leave these positions to pursue spiritual endeavors. To establish a conceptual framework, a literature review was developed that provided an overview of leadership, and examined the historical perspective of women in leadership in the workplace. It also explored the standpoint theory and Afrocentric feminism as an appropriate theoretical framework for this study. Further, it investigated the spiritual dynamics of change, particularly as it relates to women; and provided an in-depth review of critical life events and their influence. This chapter presented results from searches of related literature pertaining to areas that contribute to the understanding of the phenomena.

Overview of Leadership

Leadership research spans several decades, which has led to a capacious body of knowledge and several paradigms on the subject. Moreover, leadership effectiveness and organizational success have been widely studied throughout history. Consequently, “more has been written and less is known about leadership than about any other topic in the behavioral sciences” (Bennis, 1959, p. 259).

Most would agree that effective and well-trained leaders are vital to the overall success of any organization and are the most essential factor in developing the culture of the organization. Leaders are necessary to foster guidance, relay information, and keep teams informed, motivated and focused on goals and outcomes. According to Maxwell
“leadership ability is the lid that determines a person’s level of effectiveness. The lower an individual’s ability to lead, the lower the lid on his potential. The higher the individual’s ability to lead, the higher the lid on his potential” (p. 1).

Leadership is a complex and multifaceted phenomena, and carries with it multiple definitions and perspectives. Burns (1978) conjectured, “leadership is one of the most observed and least understood phenomena on earth” (p. 2). Stogdill (1974) contends, “There are almost as many definitions of leadership as those who have attempted to define the concept” (p. 259). Yet, many would agree that an important ingredient to effective leadership involves “the ability to inspire and influence the thinking, attitudes, and behavior of people” (Adler, 1997, p. 154). Robbins (1994) asserted, “Leadership is the ability to influence a group toward the achievement of goals” (p. 12). Northouse (2010) adds to this definition that “a) leadership is a process; b) leadership involves influence, c) leadership occurs in groups, and d) leadership involves common goals” (p. 3). Based on these elements, Northouse defined leadership as “a process whereby an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal” (p. 3). Leadership is intended to bring diverse people whose skills, training and personalities are intricately woven to produce or meet the vision of the organization.

In the literature, leading and managing are often used interchangeably; however, not all leaders manage, and not all managers lead. Managers are usually formally appointed to their positions, yet, this does not mean they have the ability to lead. Traditionally, our culture has characterized management by its use of control and ability to get others to perform tasks in an ascribed way. Leaders, on the other hand, seem to
focus on getting others to follow them. Kouzes and Posner (1987) expressed the difference between managers and leaders as:

The difference between night and day. The former honor stability, control through systems and procedures, and see passion and involvement, as words not fit to pass through adult lips. Leaders thrive on change; exercise “control” by means of a worthy and inspiring vision of what might be, arrived at jointly with their people; and understand that empowering people by expanding their authority rather than standardizing them by shrinking their authority is the only course to sustained relevance and vitality (p. 87).

This was revealed through the context of five exemplary leader practices: challenge the process, inspire a shared vision, enable others to act, model the way, and encouraged the heart (Kouzes & Posner, 1987).

Kotter (1998) concluded an effective and efficient organization must include both managers and leaders. He summarized this point by stating:

Leadership is different from management but not for the reason most people think. Leadership isn’t mystical or mysterious. It has nothing to do with charisma or other exotic personality traits. It is not the province of a chosen few. Nor is leadership necessarily better than management or a replacement for it. Rather, leadership and management are two distinctive and complementary activities. Both are necessary for success in an increasingly complex and volatile business environment (p.73).

Management develops the capacity to achieve its plan by organizing and staffing. They create organizational structure and set jobs for accomplishing plan requirements, staffing
the jobs with qualified individuals, communicating the plan to those people, delegating responsibility for carrying out their plan, and devising systems to monitor implementation. On the other hand, leadership activities center on aligning people together by communicating direction to those who can create coalitions around a vision and are committed to its achievement. Leadership focuses on motivating and inspiring while managers focus on goal accomplishment through controlling and problem solving (Harvard Review, 1990). The manager’s job is defined by the various roles identified with the manager’s position. Figure 4 represents a description of the manager’s role:

**Figure 4. The Manager’s Role**

This form of management depicts the traditional view of management by use of authority and control.

Leading encompasses the ability to integrate and coordinate the functions of various groups, as well as energizing others to perform the best job possible. Success in meeting this objective is contingent on the leader’s ability to secure the commitment and cooperation of everyone involved (Manske, 1987). Figure 5 illustrates the leader’s role in working with various constituencies to get the job done:
Managing is about coping with complexities and leading is about influence and coping with change. These different functions shape the characteristic activities of management and leadership. Each has to decide what needs to be accomplished; creating networks of people that can accomplish an agenda, and ensuring that people are competent to meet job responsibilities; however, each accomplishes these tasks in different ways.

Although leadership is a term full of ambiguity and many interpretations, many find themselves struggling to answer, “What makes an effective leader?” (Setters & Field, n.d.). Irrefutably, leaders are necessary if organizations are to have full participation and input of its workforce. Effective leaders will guide others in performing to their fullest capacities with complete confidence in their abilities.

Leaders are expected to provide information, accessibility, resources, trust, and follow-through. Kanter (1999) suggest there are classic skills for leaders: “The most
important skills are . . . passion, conviction, and confidence in others” (para. 11). It is important to recognize that no organization operates without a leader, although methods of leadership over the years have been counterproductive. Wheatley (1997) conveyed:

. . . [O]ver the years, leaders have consistently chosen control rather than productivity. Rather than rethinking our fundamental assumptions of our organizational effectiveness, we have stayed preoccupied with charts and plans and designs. We have hoped they would yield the results we needed, but when they have failed consistently, we still haven’t stopped to question whether such charts and plans are the real route to productive work (para. 5).

Researchers at the Center for Creative Leadership have studied the relationship between leadership and organizational effectiveness since the 1970’s. They have identified three basic attributes of leadership that are linked to overall organizational effectiveness: (1) certain innate skills, (2) the ability to lead others, and (3) good communication skills (Moxley, 1998). The innate skills of leadership include resourcefulness, decisiveness, and determination. A person who possesses these skills is adaptable to change, can take action in response to change, and learns how to make good decisions from these experiences. Further, the communication skills of leaders include the ability to be straightforward but flexible, to build and mend relationships with followers, to maintain a balance between one’s work and personal lives, to possess self-awareness, and to express compassion and sensitivity in order to make others feel comfortable in their relationship with the leader (Moxley, 1998).

Leadership is also about coping with change. The landscape for most companies is one marked by competition, both domestically and internationally, technological
change and change in the makeup of the workforce. In an ever-changing environment good leadership is necessary for organizational survival. Coping with organizational complexities and change, shape the characteristic activities of leadership (Kotter, 1996). Leaders decide what needs to be accomplished; creating networks of people that can accomplish the agenda, and ensuring that those people actually complete the job task (Bossidy & Charan, 2002).

In contemporary organizations, effective leadership is a more significant tool in realizing organizational goals than the use of any management technique. Effective leaders are the link between employees and the organizational structure and ultimately the consumer or customers served. Chris de Neuville (1988) wrote,

Leadership thus implies something more than a mere supervisory responsibility or formal authority. It consists of influence that accompanies legitimacy as a supervisor. Therefore, it can be said that leadership is the incremental influence that a person has beyond his or her formal authority. Incremental influence can exist to varying degrees in every member of a work group (p. 6).

There are many who would say becoming an effective leader is a process that evolves over time. Yet, there are others who would argue that leadership qualities are innate; and therefore leaders possess certain characteristics that set them above and apart from non-leaders. Nevertheless, the various leadership approaches collectively create a pool of leadership behaviors to draw from to create a framework for those who desire to lead well.

There are many books, articles, and print material which outline the history of leadership theory and development (Bolden et al., 2003; Northouse, 2007; Bass, 2008).
The theoretical foundations which give leadership its platform reflect a gradual evolution from an authoritarian leadership style, which views people merely as instruments to reach a desired goal; to a democratic orientation that seeks to motivate the people to feel they are vital contributors to the group or organization. Literature notes a shift in the leadership paradigm focusing on the leader’s ability to actualize potential in others rather than on the traits of the leader. From this, perspectives such as transformational leadership develop where individualism, self-initiative and autonomy are encouraged. Table 1 provides a list of known leadership theories that demonstrate shifts in leadership thinking.
Great Man | The original leadership approach of leaders being born not made. Those certain individuals have exceptional qualities and are destined to lead. The situation brings out the leader.
---|---
Trait | People have certain natural traits which are more suited to leadership. Leadership traits can be listed. It is the combination of the right traits which makes a leader.
Behavioural | Leaders are made and not born. Leadership can be defined into certain behaviors which can be learned and developed.
Situational/Contingency | Situational theory sees leaders adapting their styles to the context and development level of their followers. Contingency theory proposes that it is situational factors together with the leader’s style which determine the success of a leader.
Path-Goal Theory | The successful leaders create structural paths which help followers attain their work goals.
Charismatic | The personal charisma of an individual creates an intense emotional attachment for their followers.
Transactional | Emphasis is placed on the leader-follower relation. It is the transactions (reward, punishment) which are the best way for leaders to motivate the performance of their followers.
Transformational | Leadership is based on the sharing of a vision which motivates and directs the followers.
Cognitive | Leaders who by word or personal example influence the behavior, thoughts or feelings of their followers.
Servant | The leadership role is most successful if they serve those they lead.
Authentic | That the root of any leadership theory is the need for a leader to be authentic, to be self-aware.

Table 1. Chronological depiction of leadership theory adapted from May, 2010.

Each of these theories of leadership has significantly informed the practice of leadership over time.
Perceptions of Women in Leadership

Northouse (2010) provided a succinct depiction of popular thought on the interest of women in leadership and the barriers they face.

Writers in the popular press have shown an enduring interest in the topic of gender and leadership reporting stark and meaningful differences between women and men (Book, 2000; Bowman, Worthy, & Greyser, 1965). These differences turned from a view of women as inferior to men (e.g., some posited that women lacked skills and traits necessary for managerial success; Hennig & Jardin, 1977) to the more modern popular view that extols the superiority of women in leadership positions (Book, 2000; Helgesen, 1990). However, for a variety of reasons, including methodological hindrances, a predominance of male researchers largely uninterested in the topic, and an academic assumption of gender equality in leadership, academic researchers ignored issues related to gender and leadership until the 1970s (Chemers, 1997). The increasing numbers of women in leadership positions and women in academia, brought about by dramatic changes in American society, have fueled the scholarly interesting the study of female leaders (p. 301).

Northouse revealed the complexity of scholarly thinking regarding women in leadership. Much of the ideas related to women in leadership prospectively derive from how we are socialized or acculturated in our society to think of women as the weaker sex. Further, the ability to implement practices for the advancement of women in organizations is embedded in complex social schema. Among the chief of these
indoctrinated social factors are gender stereotypes and social identity (Kottke & Agars, 2005).

The stereotype of women being the “weaker vessel” has existed in the accounts of our history for generations (Eisenstein, 2004, as cited in Scales, 2010) and has affected every aspect of life for women. The inclination of women being the weaker gender is not only a physical manifestation, but intellectual, moral, and emotional as well. In the 18th century, scientists considered the woman’s brain capacity as too small to hold a brain powerful enough to lead organizations (Eisenstein, 2004; Harding & Norberg, 2005, as cited in Scales, 2010). Consequently, no matter how intellectually superior a woman might be, “she cannot favorably compete with men” (Ahmed, 2011, para. 1).

Historically, leadership has been misconstrued as a masculine activity, and many theories of leadership have accordingly focused on stereotypically masculine qualities in leaders (Miner, 1993). However, many situational theorists would argue that the effectiveness of leadership behavior depends on contextual variables, such as the nature of the task and the characteristics of the followers (Chemers, 1997). Both schools of thought have led to multiple studies to test their veracity.

Literature suggests that women and men lead differently (Helgesen, 1995), which leads to an under-representation or leadership gap in the more elite positions in the workplace (Northouse, 2010). A meta-analysis of more than 160 studies of gender differences found that women use a more participative or democratic style and a less autocratic or directive style than men do, although this propensity diminishes in highly male-dominated environments (Eagly & Johnson, 1990; Deaux & Kite, 1993).
Similarly, research on performance, leadership, and influence in teams has correspondingly shown that men display a more self-assertive and dominant style and less deference and warmth with team members than do women (Carli & Eagly, 1999). They are also more independent, rational, and decisive (Deaux & Kite, 1993; Heilman, 2001). Female managers more than male managers tend to adopt a transformational leadership style, especially in mentoring followers and attending to them as individuals (Eagly, Johannesen-Schmidt, & van Engen, 2003). Women leaders are considered more communal, sensitive, warm, helpful, and nurturing (Deaux & Kite, 1993; Heilman, 2001). The more agentic qualities that are more associative with men, such as assertiveness, are perceived to be needed in high status occupations (Cejka & Eagly, 1999). However, effective leadership is marked by an androgynous mixture of traits including intelligence, social skills, initiative, and the ability to persuade (Eagly & Carli, 2007, as cited in Northouse, 2010, p. 310).

Secondly, research supports there are stark differences in women and men in behavioral displays of leadership. There are vast amounts of literature that suggest that women leaders surpass their male counterparts at nurturing competencies, such as, developing others and building relationships, and many might put exhibiting integrity and engaging in self-development in that category as well. In all four cases data concurred — women did score higher than men. Moreover, a study using 360 degree feedback processes show that women managers and executives consistently score higher on behavioral competencies such as teamwork, empowerment, sharing information, displaying high integrity and honesty, and drives for results (Zenger & Folkman, 2012) (Table 2).
Other leadership studies show women to be more emotionally aware, which in turn creates more empathetic responses towards others, and more interpersonal exchanges; whereas men are more confident, optimistic, adaptable, and better able to manage stress (Goleman, Boyatzis, and McKee, 2002).

Thirdly, marked differences materialize in the evaluation of leadership based on gender. Although a meta-analysis of 82 studies measuring leadership effectiveness (Eagly, Karau, & Makhijani, 1995) found that male and female leaders do not differ overall in effectiveness, comparisons of leader effectiveness favor men when the work
environment is predominately male, including subordinates; or when the leadership role is seen as more affable to men (in terms of self-assessed competence, interest, and low requirements for cooperation or high requirements for control). Contrastingly, women are favored when the aforementioned conditions are reversed (Eagly et al., 1995). The argument that attempts to explain the inequity in leadership opportunities for women based on gender, traits, or substantial differences in leadership style should not disadvantage women and could offer them a female advantage (Eagly & Carli, 2003, as cited in Northouse, 2010, p. 309). However, this notion has continued to be a barrier for women.

Another argument that attempts to explain the leadership gap is a stereotypical argument that suggests that women take care and men take charge (Hoyt & Chemers, 2008, as cited in Northouse, 2010, p. 310). According to Dodge, Gilroy, and Fenzel, 1995 and Heilman, 2001, this stereotypical thinking is pervasive, well documented, and highly resistant to change (as cited in Northouse, 2010, p. 311). In a survey of female executives from Fortune 1000 companies, 33% of the participants indicated stereotyping and preoccupations with women’s roles and abilities as a major contributor to the leadership gap (Catalyst, 2003, as cited in Northouse, 2010, p. 311).

In addition to gender-based stereotypes, African American women face a two-edged sword: racial and ethnic prejudice (Bell & Nkomo, 2001). Leadership advancement opportunities within the organization are not as accessible to African American women as with their White counterparts (Bell & Nkomo, 2001; Catalyst, 1999). In a comprehensive study on women of color in organizations, Catalyst (1999) found that study participants reported less access to mentors and sponsors, and those
women who intended to leave their organizations said that ineffective organizational diversity initiatives had failed to address subtle gender and racial biases. Bell (1990) found that African American women live “bicultural life experiences,” resulting in increased stress and pressure that occur from having to navigate two worlds: a predominantly White professional work world and a predominantly African American community world (as cited in Hopkins, O’Neil, Passarelli, & Bilimoria, 2008). Although the pervasiveness of gender, racial, and ethnic inequities in the workplace is perceptible, “developing a more androgynous conception of leadership will enhance leadership effectiveness” (Northouse, 2010, p. 316).

Women as Leaders in the Workplace

In the early 1950s only about one in three women participated in the labor force, which was about thirty-three percent of the labor force (Lanier, 2004). In 1964, about 19 million of the nation's non-farm employees were women; the three industries that employed the most women, manufacturing; trade, transportation, and utilities; and local government, accounted for 54 percent of these women (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2011). By 1998, about three out of five women of working age participated in the workforce. By 2003, close to sixty percent of all women ages sixteen and older were in the labor force (Lanier, 2004). By 2010, nearly 65 million women had jobs, and 53 percent of these women worked in the three industries that employed the most women: education and health services; trade, transportation, and utilities; and local government. During this period, the growth of the education and health industry, and the number of women employed in it, has been notable (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2011). The U.S.
Department of Labor predicts this number will steadily increase to about sixty-three percent by 2015 (Lanier, 2004).

According to a 2009 Bureau of Labor Statistics report, women are on the verge of outnumbering men in the workforce for the first time. This is partly due to changes in women’s roles and job losses experienced during the most recent recession (Dantzler, 2010). Women held 49.83 percent of the nation’s 132 million jobs in June, and are gaining the vast majority of jobs in the few sectors of the economy that are growing (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2009).

Despite the documented progress of women in the workplace, there remains a disparity in the number of women who hold executive positions. Women’s presence in top leadership positions first gained attention in 1977 when the nonprofit organization Catalyst, instituting a corporate board service to help introduce professional and business women to corporations, reported that there were only 147 women directors represented on the 1,300 largest U.S. public companies boards of directors (Schwartz 1980; Wolfman 2007). Although there still remain formidable barriers for women’s progression in leadership, there seems to be slight upward movement for women holding the more elite positions within organizations. This was evidenced by 14.4 percent of Executive Officer positions at Fortune 500 companies and 7.6 percent of top earner positions being held by women in 2010. In both 2009 and 2010, more than two-thirds of companies had at least one woman Executive Officer (Catalyst, 2010). Notwithstanding the presence of women in leadership has improved, they continue to encounter an invisible barrier that prevents them from equitably rising to top leadership positions because of perceived stereotypes based on gender.
The invisible barrier or the “glass ceiling” is a concept used to describe the dynamics which keep women from achieving leadership power and success equal to that of men (Eisner & Harvey, 2009). Morrison et al. (1987) postulated the term “applies to women as a group who are kept from advancing higher because they are women” (p.13). Metaphorically, the “glass ceiling” implies that one can clearly see those who have risen to success; yet instead of being able to realize the same success invisible barriers impede her from further achievement. The Federal Glass Ceiling Commission (1995) referred to this “glass ceiling” as the “artificial barriers to the advancement of women and minorities”. Bryant (1984) contended,

Throughout the corporate world—faster in some industries, slower in others—the door to real power for women has opened. But it is just ajar. Women may already be in middle management, but the steps from there up to the senior hierarchy are likely to be slow and painstakingly small. Partly because corporations are structured as pyramids, with many middle managers trying to move up into the few available spots, and partly because of continuing, though more subtle, discrimination, a lot of women are hitting a “glass ceiling” and finding they can rise no further (p. 19).

Others have extended the “glass ceiling” to another dimension noting, this invisible barrier preventing women for ascending into elite leadership positions was initially dubbed the glass ceiling…Even in female-dominated occupations; women face the glass ceiling, whereas White men appear to ride a “glass escalator” to the top leadership positions (Maume, 1999; Williams, 1992, 1995). Interestingly, the proverbial glass ceiling that hinders women from progressing professionally has also been dubbed
the “concrete ceiling” because it is an impermeable barrier women have not been able to break through, but only chip away at its surface (Bonawitz & Andel, 2009) due to the solid nature of the ceiling.

Without question, the “glass ceiling” encompasses multiple barriers. Accordingly, Kochanowski (2010) in *Women in Leadership: Persistent Problems or Progress*, presented several research studies and identified a complexity of barriers that constitute the “glass ceiling”. The following barriers were listed with associated researchers:

Oakley (2000) lists the glass ceiling barriers as including: lack of line management experience; inadequate career opportunities; gender differences in socialization and linguistic styles; gender-based stereotypes; the old boy network persisting at the top of organizations; and tokenism.

According to MacRae (2005), these barriers include: the common perception that men are leaders while women are supportive followers; lack of strong female role models; the existence of the “good ole boy” network; the issue of family responsibility; and the need for women to develop a professional style with which male counterparts would be comfortable.

Similarly, Kilian, Hukai, and McCarty’s (2005) list includes: lack of mentors and role models; exclusion from informal networks of communication; stereotyping and preconception of roles and abilities; lack of significant line experience; and commitment to personal and family responsibilities (p. 3).

Others suggest that the metaphor “glass ceiling” has become one of the barriers for women who try to attain leadership positions. One limitation of the glass ceiling is
that “it implies that everyone has equal access to lower positions until all women hit this single, invisible, and impassable barrier” (Northouse, 2010, p. 305). However, the glass ceiling encompasses multiple barriers or obstacles. Kochanowski (2010) suggested, “the glass ceiling metaphor misdiagnosis the problem thereby leading to ineffective remedies” (p. 7). A more inclusive approach is the image of a leadership labyrinth that indicates challenges for women at every level of an organization (Eagly & Carli, 2007). It also addresses the fallacy that women and men have equal entry access within organizations. Figure 5 depicts the leadership gap for women who have out produced their counterparts educationally. Eagly and Carli (2007) convey an image of a leadership labyrinth for women where their journey is “riddled with challenges all along the way, not just near the top” (Northouse, 2010, p. 305).

The Leadership Gap of Women

*Invisible barrier preventing women from ascending into elite leadership-positions commonly called the glass ceiling

Congress 16.8%
Board Seats in Fortune 500 Companies 15.2%
Women CEOs 3%

GLASS CEILING
Managerial & Professional Positions 50.8%
U.S. Labor Force 46.7%
Bachelor’s Degrees 57.5%

Figure 6. The Leadership Gap adapted from Northouse, 2010, p. 305.
Northouse (2010) speculates the underrepresentation of women in high-level leadership positions generally revolve around three types of explanations: differences in women’s and men’s investments in human capital, gender differences, and discrimination against female leaders.

It is argued that women have less human capital investment in education, training, and work experience than men (Eagly & Carli, 2004, 2007, as cited in Northouse, 2010, p. 306). This has been termed a “pipeline problem” where women are in the pipeline, but there is an apparent leak in the pipeline. Women obtain undergraduate degrees at higher rates than men, earning 57.5% of the bachelor’s degrees in the United States, and women are graduating at a rate greater of nearly equal to that of men in most professional schools (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2008, as cited in Northouse, 2010, p. 306).

It is true that women have less work experience and more career interruptions than men; however, this is due largely to the disproportionate child rearing responsibilities and domestic duties that women assume (Bowles & McGinn, 2005; Eagly & Carli, 2007, as cited in Northouse 2010, p. 307), which often causes them to opt-out for non-traditional and/or non-linear career paths. Yet, these barriers present enormous burdens for women who desire to move to higher levels of leadership.

The second explanation for underrepresentation of women in leadership is gender difference. The perceptions about gender differences perpetuate the notion that women’s leadership style renders them ineffective in elite leadership positions; and women are not as committed to employment and are less motivated to lead (Northouse, 2010). This has been found to be a fallacy. According to research, women show the same level of identification with and commitment to paid employment roles as men do; however,
women do not self-promote and negotiate for leadership positions (Bowles & McGinn, 2005, as cited in Northouse, 2010, p. 309). Studies supporting that women and men do engage in different leadership styles and have different leadership characteristics have not produced conclusive results (Bartol & Martin, 1986; Bass, 1981, 1990; Bennis & Goldsmith, 1997; Kouzes & Posner, 2003; Sonnenberg, 1994).

Another argument is the apparent prejudices that are generated by stereotyped expectations of women. Gender stereotypes prescribe certain attributes and behaviors to women and men; and behaviors to the contrary are to be avoided (Burgess & Borgids, 1999; Click & Fiske, 1999; and Heilman, 2001, as cited in Northouse, 2010, p. 311). When people hold stereotypes about certain groups of people, they expect the members of the group to possess certain characteristics and exhibit certain behaviors consistent with those stereotypic expectations; and perceivers tacitly assimilate information to their gender-stereotypic expectations (von Hippel, Sekaquaptewa & Vargas, 1995) and instinctively fill in indefinite particulars of others’ behavior to conform to those expectations (Dunning & Sherman, 1997).

The incongruent expectations about women’s gender role and expectations about leadership roles, which consequently have a predominately masculine orientation, underlie prejudice responses against women leaders (Eagly & Karau, 2002); and these gender stereotypes are easily and automatically activated, and often lead to biased judgments (Fiske, Bersoff, Borgida, Deaux, & Heilman, 1991 as cited in Northouse, 2010, p. 312).

Not surprisingly, in leadership roles gender stereotypes are particularly damaging for women because agentic, as opposed to communal tendencies often are indispensable
(Chemers & Murphy, 1995). This can be detrimental to women because agentic qualities are primarily associated with men and are those that organizations seek out in selecting elite leaders (Powell & Graves, 2003 as cited in Northouse, 2010. p. 313).

Workplace disadvantage of women comparative to men has been well established and documented. However, research that specifically focuses on the African American woman’s experience in the workplace is limited and relatively recent (Bell & Nkomo, 2001), and there seems to be a double standard when it comes to gender and race in the workplace.

African American Women in Leadership

African Americans indicate they believe different organizational standards exist for them than for their White counterparts (Parker, 2005). This perennial issue grows out of the belief that those of color must perform better and work harder in order to receive equal pay, recognition, and the promotional opportunities of their White counterparts. Consequently, African American women have yet a greater standard of performance imposed because of not only race but gender. This dual minority status often results in workplace inequities and biases associated with being an African American woman in today’s society. Chima (1999) indicated that workplace environments are different for African Americans than for others. Further, African Americans are more likely to be discriminated against in terms of promotional opportunities, training and development, and are perceived to be targets of discrimination at work (John J. Heldrich, 2002).

As well, in senior level positions, a disparity exists for African American women (Combs, 2003). African American women represented 5.3% of all people employed in management, professional and related occupations in 2009 and 5.2% in 2007 (Catalyst,
Cross (2000) asserted, 

Most of the people leading America’s major institutions have grown up in segregated communities with segregated schools. They have had limited opportunities to interact with people from different cultures—people whose first language may not be English, or whose skin color is not the same as their own. Many of these leaders have internalized all the stereotypes about race, gender, sexual orientation and ethnicity that are built into the structures of our society and our organizations. They are ill prepared for the heterogeneity which exists in most organizations today and will surely exist in all organizations tomorrow. The dramatic changes that are upon us are creating an imperative to consider real integration of all workers—not as a matter of social justice or civil rights, but as a necessity for survival (p. 2).

It is the lack of amalgamation of gender and race within organizations that limit African American women from making full contribution to workplace environments, and produce inequitable experiences for them (Northouse, 2010).

The organizational experience of African American women in the workplace is quite different than that of other women (Blake, 1999; McCollum, 1998) due to the duality of gender and race and the negative impact that each variable presents (Bell & Nkomo, 2001; Collins, 2004; Gregory, 2001; Simien, 2006). Although there is limited research on this experience, African American women contend that being Black and female has a negative impact on their ability to advance in their careers (Bell & Nkomo,
The intersection of race and gender often results in workplace inequities that stem from racial and gender biases that infiltrate the everyday experiences of African American women as they perform and seek career advancement in organizations (Bell & Nkomo, 2001; Golden, 2002 as cited in Combs, 2003).

The intersection of race, ethnicity, and gender has been referred to as “double jeopardy” as it presents a double dose of discrimination to African American women based on gender and ethnicity (Beale, 1970; Bond & Perry, 1970; Epstein, 1973). This “double jeopardy” status accrues with each subordinate-group identity (Davis, 1981). The more devalued identities a person may have, the more cumulative discrimination he or she faces (Almquist, 1975; Epstein, 1973 as cited in Purdue-Vaughn & Eibach, 2008). This is seen in the disadvantages African American women experience across all spectrums of the workplace. Although, without question, women as a whole experience many workplace inequities, African American women face additional disparate encounters.

Older Women’s League (2012) reported, “Minority women represent less than 2% of the positions on corporate boards of Fortune Global 500 companies even though minority women make up 974,000 (18.3%) of the 5.3 million women who are managers (p. 18). Although the workplace is now more diverse than ever, many African American women continue to be excluded from the better jobs and organizations.

Following the election of President Obama in 2008, a poll was commissioned by The Executive Leadership Council to gauge how the first African American President will impact opportunities for minorities seeking to move into executive positions in leadership. This poll of 150 executives revealed:
75 percent of the executives believe that having minorities in senior executive positions is particularly important to providing new ideas and to better reflect the diversity of customers. The bad news is that the findings also demonstrate that African-American women face serious challenges in their climb up the corporate ladder. Thirty-one percent of the surveyed executives attribute those challenges to weaker or less strategic networks available to African-American women.

Inaccurate perceptions of African-American women’s capabilities (24 percent) and work/life balance demands (23 percent) round out the top three issues cited as preventing or slowing down their rise (as cited in Collins, 2009).

There are other issues that African American women face in the workplace that further impede their advancement, which includes employment biases, lack of access to network and mentors, promotion and advancement difficulties, and emotional and psychological maltreatment (Queralt, 1996). There is often the “buddy” or “good old boy” network that African American women are excluded from. This exclusion limits their ability to build relationships or access information that might be critical to their profession, which places African American women at a great disadvantage since networks provide tactical assistance, informal feedback on performance, and emotional support (Collins, Kamya & Tourse, 1997). This continues to perpetuate the cycle of exclusion from circles of influence that keep African American women from receiving full benefit of their respective workplaces.

Although there is much literature that sheds light on the racial disparity that exists for women in the workplace, there is little literature on work experience, perceived job qualities, or factors that influence it for African American women. Much of the literature
focuses on job characteristics among all women, which provided generalities about women in the workplace; however, the amalgamation of gender-race is known to be a workplace stereotype that hinders African American women from advancement. Yet, research has failed to delve into the complexities of the influence of race and gender on the experiential experience of African American women (Combs, 2003).

Catalyst has presented rigorous data over the years that have shed light on the work experiences of African American women. Catalyst (2004) presented results of a mixed-method study that investigated barriers facing African-American women in business. The quantitative findings resulted from survey reports of 963 African American women in Fortune 1000 companies. The qualitative results derive from 23 focus groups with entry to mid level African American women. Additionally, in 2001, 369 of the original survey respondents participated in a subsequent survey resulting in additional quantitative data yielding the following results:

Barriers facing African-American women in business include negative, race-based stereotypes; more frequent questioning of their credibility and authority; and a lack of institutional support. Experiencing a “double outsider” status—unlike white women or African-American men, who share gender or race in common with most colleagues or managers—African-American women report exclusion from informal networks, and conflicted relationships with white women, among the challenges they face. The historical legacy of slavery, legally enforced racial segregation, and discrimination based on skin color make race a particularly difficult topic for discussion in the workplace (Catalyst, 2004).
To further the inequities in the workplace, women’s wage earnings are also significantly less than that of men. U. S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2011) indicate that although African American wage differential is much less than their Caucasian counterparts, African American women earn only 91% of African American men’s median weekly earnings, despite the larger representation of women in higher positions in the workplace.

African American women continue to represent the highest rate of employment of African Americans with 53.8% of the labor force occupied by African American women; yet, they continue to represent the smallest gains with regard to higher status positions (U.S. Department of Labor, 2011). Bell and Nkomo (2001) would suggest this is due to divergent experiences of African American women in the corporate arena comparative to Whites, while Nash (2011) argued it is due to their inability to gain equity in pay, power, and positions due to race and gender convergence.

Work inequities are prominent catalyst for women deciding to leave the workplace; and they add to the push and pull factors women encounter daily, which include limited career opportunities because of the glass ceiling, minimal mentoring support, lack of acknowledgement for work, stressful workplaces, inflexibility in the workplace, attending to family demands, increased independence and opportunities, and the disproportionate share of domestic responsibilities they carry (Ntumba & McCain, n.d, Buttner & Moore, 1997; and Cornelius & Skinner, 2005), all of which can lead to job dissatisfaction and lack of job commitment. As a result, while women are entering the workforce at similar rates as men, two-thirds of highly qualified women either leave the
workforce for good, or reject corporate careers in favor of less traditional career paths (Hewitt, 2007).

Women’s Exodus from the Workplace

The term “opting out” is the phrase used to identify those who voluntarily leave corporate jobs in favor of other non-traditional career paths. Belkin (2003) is credited with first using the phrase “opt out revolution” (Williams, Manvell, & Bornstein, 2006) describing how women choose to leave the corporate world for fulltime childrearing. The impassioned article sparked a wealth of public comment and print news stories in popular press from 1983 to 2006 (Story, 2005; Wallis, 2004; Williams et al., 2006) after Belkin (2003) claimed that it is not just that the workplace has failed women, but it is also that women are rejecting the workplace (para. 17).

A study of women opting-out showed that nearly 4 in 10 highly qualified women (37%) dropped out as opposed to 24% for men (Hewlett & Buck Luce, 2005 as cited in Kim, 2007). However, there are those who disagree with this term because it implies “choice” which is often an illusion for those who leave the workplace (Stone, 2007). The study *Opting Out or Denying Discrimination: How the Framework of Free Choice in American Society Influences Perceptions of Gender Inequality* suggested the assumption that women opt out of the workforce, or have the choice between career and family, promotes the belief that the individuals are in control of their fates and are unconstrained by the environment (Stephens & Levine, 2011). Williams (2008) concurred indicating women are “often pushed out because of all or nothing workplaces” (as cited in Anderson, 2011).
Mainiero and Sullivan (2006) suggested the reasons why women leave the workplace are complex; and women, as well as men, feel trapped by both societal and corporate structures and are therefore forced to make impracticable choices between work and family. These choices may lead to negative consequences in health and family situations (Allen, Herst, Bruck, & Sutton, 2000).

Mainiero and Sullivan (2006) affirmed that the complexity of work-life dynamics for women often push their careers in a non-linear path; and women tend to focus on authenticity, balance, or challenge, which alternate in importance at different stages in their careers, to find the best fit for their varied interest and create careers on their own terms. Additionally, Hall (1976) asserted, the extreme demands of the workplace today leave women looking for alternatives, such as reshaping their career in relation to their life changes and personal needs.

Furthermore, Schwartz (1989) asserted “the rate of turnover in management positions is 2 1/2 times higher among top-performing women than it is among men” (p. 65). Such corporate migration may arise from women’s greater discomfort in environments dominated by men (Riordan, Schaffer, & Stewart, 2005; Tsui & Gutek, 1999). Mallon and Cohen (2001) concluded that managerial and professional women’s migration from career to self-employment was due to disillusionment and dissatisfaction with their current organization. Bilimoria and Piderit (2007) asserted that women are not necessarily leaving the workforce, but they are leaving corporate America and starting their own businesses.

Miller and Wheeler (1992) surmised that age, promotional opportunities, and meaningful work were significant predictors for women in their intentions to leave their
organizations. In a study of 615 managers from Fortune 500 organizations, female intentions to leave the organization was based on perceived lack of career opportunities within their organizations (Stroh et al, 2002 as cited in Bilimoria & Piderit, 2007).

Various studies and publications support that women are leaving the workforce, but not solely to balance work and family. Moreover, there is another dimension of opting-out that is not seen in the literature, which is the influence of spirituality in the “opting-out” dialogue.

The Influence of the Spirit on Work

According to Heerman (1995), “we can define spirituality as essential human values from around the world and across time that teach us how humanity belongs within the greater scheme of circumstances and how we can make harmony in life and work (as cited in Fairholm, 1997, p. 25). A similar explanation infers “spirituality is a source guide for personal values and meaning-making, a way of understanding the world, an inner awareness. It is a means of integration of the self and of the world (Jacobson, 1995, as cited in Fairholm, 1997, p. 25). Similarly, Vaill (1989) stated spirituality is “a state of intimate relationship with the inner self of higher values and mortality. It is recognition of the truth of the inner nature of people (as cited in Fairholm, 1997, p. 29). These definitions encapsulate an awareness of self and universal, shared values that accompany a person in every arena of their lives, even in the workplace.

Undisputedly, “people are spending more of their time working” than being involved in any other activity in their lives (Mirvis, 1997). Yet, few organizations have created cultures, which allow employees to cultivate their spiritual lives in the workplace. There are those who would argue that the two, workplace practices and spirituality cannot
amalgamate in the workplace, but can breed divergence and contention because of its similarity to religion (Neck & Milliman, 1994). Nonetheless, there is evidence that workplace spirituality can enhance creativity, moral sensitivity, honesty and ethical behaviors, and increase overall personal job fulfillment (Krishnakumar & Neck, 2002); and it adds opportunity for one “to realize their full potential as a person” (Mitroff & Denton, 1999).

Spirituality is fundamental to an individual feeling fully integrated. “It is not a thing apart from our daily lives, but rather the fundamental energy source that fuels all our emotions, relationships, work, and everything else we consider meaningful” (Crumley, Dietrich, Kline, & May, 2004, para. 5). “It permeates everything that one does, whether at home, in social life, or at work” (Doohan, 2007 as cited in Marina, 2012, para. 16). Thus, not experiencing and expressing one’s spirituality compartmentalizes one’s identity and forces them to present one identity while at work, while maintaining another identity in other environments.

In the past twenty years there has been growing interest in the spiritual dimensions of work. For this reason, there is a considerable body of literature that has emerged on the issue of spirituality and organizations and has found its way into academic literature and organizational discussion. Yet, the concept of spirituality seems to baffle us as evidenced by the myriad of definitions of the concept. Just like the word leadership has multiple definitions and interpretations, similarly the term spirituality, specific to the workplace, is met with much ambiguity, rendering a plethora of definitions and interpretations. Many have suggested that the only point of unity in the literature on spirituality is its conceptual ambiguity (Strack & Fottlerk, 2000). However, regardless of
which concept of spirituality is espoused, there seems to be consensus that spirituality encompasses beliefs, values, and practices, that must be lived out by an individual with consistency to be considered spiritual (Gibbons, 1999). In Fairholm (1997), 30 respondents were surveyed to identify characteristics of spirituality. The following table represents their responses:

Most Frequently Defined Characteristics of Spirituality

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of Responses</th>
<th>Definitional Characteristics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>An inner conviction of a higher, more intelligent force</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The essence of self that separates humans from other creatures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>The basis of human comfort, strength, happiness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>The source of personal meaning, values, life purposes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>A personal belief system</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>An emotional level; feeling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>The experience of the transcendent in life</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3: Summary of seven aspects of spirituality (Fairholm, 1997, p. 29).

Each definition captures a relationship with the self and the Transcendent and values meaning and purpose in life.

Workplace spiritually is the “recognition that employees have an inner life which nourishes and is nourished by meaningful work taking place in the context of a community” (Rego & Pina e Cunha, 2008, p. 55). “Spirituality in the workplace is about individuals and organizations seeing work as a spiritual path, as an opportunity to contribute to society in a meaningful way” (Smith & Rayment, 2007 as cited in Brooke and Parker, 2009, p. 3); human’s search for meaning (Vaill, 2000); and it includes “a framework of organizational values evidenced in the culture that promotes employees’
experience of transcendence through the work process facilitating their sense of being connected to others in a way that provides feelings of completeness and joy” (Giacalone & Jurkiewicz, 2003 as cited in Kanesan, Alzaidiyyeen, & Aldarabah, 2009, p. 39). Laabs (1995) contends that people find deeper meaning and rewards in the workplace when spirituality is a part of the environment (as cited in Kanesan, Alzaidiyyeen, & Aldarabah, 2009). Freshman (1999) made several suppositions about spirituality in the workplace:

1. Not any one, two or even three things can be said about spirituality in the workplace that would include the universe of explanations.

2. There is no one answer to the question, “What is spirituality in the workplace?”

3. Definitions and applications of spirituality in the workplace are unique to individuals. Therefore when planning any group or organizational intervention around the topic, again the suggestion is made to derive definitions and goals from the participants themselves.

4. There are many possible ways to understand such a complex and diverse area as spirituality in the workplace. (as cited in Marschke, Preziosi, & Harrington, 2009).

While a growing number of people are looking to find a place for spirituality in the workplace, the organization itself seeks to find positive work outcomes through integration of spirituality in the workplace. Milliman, Czaplewski, and Ferguson (2003) found that workplace spirituality influences organizational commitment, intentions to leave, intrinsic work satisfaction, job involvement, and organizational-based self-esteem (as cited in Indartono, Naﬁuddin, Sakti, & Praja, 20012). Researchers connect job satisfaction and organizational commitment to spirituality in the workplace.
Leaving Corporate America

(Krishnakumar & Neck, 2002). Dent, Higgins, and Wharf (2005) suggests workplace spirituality can be correlated with individual development, and that spirituality comprises a tangible added value at the organizational level (as cited in Middlebrooks & Noghiu, 2010, p. 69); along with an enhanced sense of personal fulfillment of employees (Kinjerski & Skrypnek, 2004). The term “spirituality has gained greater currency in organization and management development circles” (Howard, 2002, p. 230).

Garcia-Zamor (2003) conjectured that spiritually, which is normally not experienced in workplace settings, has risen as a result of employees search for more meaning at work (as cited in Ritter-Seltzer, 2009). At points on the career continuum, many begin to ask themselves what impact they have had on the world in and through their various vocations. Majority of one’s waking hours is spent at work; therefore, finding meaning in work is a natural consequence. Frankl conveys, “man’s search for meaning is the primary motivation in his life and not a secondary rationalization of instinctual drives (1984, p. 101).

Finding meaning in work is a subjective concept; however, there seems to be some archetypes of what is meant by finding meaning in work. Morin and Aranha (2009) indicate “much of the literature coalesce around three broad approaches to the meaning of work question” (as cited in Overell, 2009, p. 5). The first two approaches are concerned with interpretation of the term meaning. The first approach looks to the Latin root of the word meaning, which is sensus. This term refers to sense-making, or the faculty of judging or knowing. In this approach, the meaning of work is translated as the values that are placed on work by the one who is actually performing the work (Morin & Aranha
as cited in Overell, 2009, p. 5). In other words, meaning is related to the question: what does work mean to you?

The second approach to finding meaning at work derives from the Greek root of the meaning, sumo, which is translated as direction, purpose, and significance. This word is related to whether work has substance, significance, purposefulness and importance, which in essence brings fulfillment (Morin & Aranha as cited in Overell, 2009, p. 5).

The final approach to finding meaning, according to Marin and Aranha (2009) is concerned with how individual values and expectations affect their actions. It looks at the “fit” between a person and their work, which inevitably affects the energy, flexibility, and productivity they are willing to give to work (Morin & Aranha as cited in Overell, 2009, p. 5). Each of these archetypes attempts to identify intrinsic value in work.

According to a study conducted by The Work Foundation (2006), 51% of the participants found their work to be a ‘means-to-an-end’. The same survey found 69% who identified their work as a source of personal fulfillment (as cited in Overell, 2009, p. 7).

Kinjerski and Skrypnek (2008) proposed spirituality at work “involves profound feelings of well-being, a belief that one’s work makes a contribution, a sense of connection to others and common purpose, an awareness of a connection to something larger than self, and a sense of perfection and transcendence” (p. 319). Further, these researchers posit spirituality at work has been conceptualized as characteristic of the organization, the individual, or both. They found there were four dimensions to spirit at work: engaging work, spiritual connection, sense of community, and mystical experience (Kinjerski & Skrypnek, 2008). Further they proposed,
Spirit at work is a distinct state that is characterized by cognitive, interpersonal, spiritual and mystical dimensions. Spirit at work involves: engaging work characterized by a profound feeling of well-being, a belief that one is engaged in meaningful work that has a higher purpose, an awareness of alignment between one’s values and beliefs and one’s work, and a sense of being authentic; a spiritual connection characterized by a sense of connection to something larger than self; a sense of community characterized by a feeling of connectedness to others and common purpose; and a mystical or unitive experience characterized by a positive state of energy or vitality, a sense of perfection, transcendence, and experiences of joy and bliss (Kinjerski & Skrypnek, 2006, pp. 16-17).

There are others that affirm that people seek meaning from their professional life. Bassuk and Goldsmith (2009) contend, “meaning in the workplace is derived from both primary and secondary factors. Primary factors represent the work itself and secondary factors involve other work factors that are highly valued, such as, philanthropy and community service, healthy culture, ethical alignment, mentoring, creativity, big future vision, multiple perspectives, exposure to others, and public engagement” (p. 8).

Through work many find social purpose, moral correctness, achievement-related pleasure, autonomy, recognition, and positive relationships (Morin, 2004) through shared values and a sense of community. However, there are many who struggle to find meaning in their workplaces because they “were expected to complete their allotted tasks without involving their essential self” (Akers & Preston, 1997, p. 678); therefore, they look for meaningful work alternatives.
Spirituality in Leadership

As noted, spirituality is difficult to define and conceptualize in organizations. Moreover, it is as difficult to explain in the context of leadership. However, it is asserted by some leadership scholars that leadership and spirituality are interrelated (Bolman & Deal, 1995; Fairholm, 1998; and, there is a growing body of literature that is now taking into account the spiritual aspects of leading. This was first seen in writings regarding servant leadership and now in more recent writings of steward leadership.

The Bible introduces the concept of steward and stewardship. The Scriptures denote, “As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace” (I Peter 4:10). “Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men” (Colossians 3:23). “Commit your work to the Lord, and your plans will be established” (Proverbs 16:3). These verses encapsulate where steward and stewardship emanate. Only in recent years has this concept found its way in the language of organizations outside the religious arena; and offers potential for a focused and practical approach for leadership. The aforementioned Scriptures point to God as being the foundation on which stewardship emanates and rests.

In The Steward Leader: Transforming People, Organizations and Communities (Rodin, 2010), the author noted steward characteristics and how to strive to be steward leaders in relationship to God, oneself, others, and God’s creation. The author postulated, “true Christian leadership is an ongoing, disciplined practice of becoming a person of no reputation and, thus, becoming more like Christ” (Rodin, 2010 p.13). Borek, Lovett, & Towns (2005) exclaim, “while much of the world is searching for better tools and
machines - while many in the church are searching for better methods - God is searching for better people” (p.3).

The idea of servant leadership and stewardship has existed since the beginning of time, particularly for Christians. Scripturally, the first steward was Adam who was given dominion over the Garden of Eden and was told to tend and to keep the garden.

Stewardship is, "the conducting, supervising, or managing of something: especially the careful and responsible management of something entrusted to one's care" (Merriam-Webster, 1999).

From a historical context, stewardship is an essential concept when talking about accounting and finance, and a steward’s responsibility and relationship with the focus of financial accountability and reporting. Its primary meaning focuses on those having a role of one who manages the resources of another. However, stewardship in organizations was articulated in The Making of a Leader (Clinton, 1989). The author postulated a mark of a steward leader is “a person who readily applies scriptures to his or her life in response to word checks, obedience checks, and integrity checks” (p. 207). A successful integrity check, “results in a stronger leader able to serve God in a wider sphere of influence” (p. 34). He asserted that this type of leadership exists primarily among Christian nonprofit leaders.

Cunningham (1979) viewed stewardship as a model for complete living that helps amalgamate different aspects of an individual’s life and ministry. He looked at the relationship between God, the Creator and owner, humankind as the steward or manager, and the redeemed world in relation to natural and spiritual resources.
A succinct definition of servant leadership comes from the notable author Greenleaf (1970) who contended, “the servant-leader is servant first” and ensures people’s highest priority needs are being served” (p.7). His idea of servant-leader stemmed from a novel entitled *The Journey to the East* (Hess, 1956) in which he provides a story of a group of travelers who were on a mythical journey. The group was accompanied by a servant who performed menial chores for the traveler’s, as well as provided his spirits and song. His presence provided comfort to the travelers. However, the servant becomes lost from the group. The travelers fall into disarray and discontinue their journey. Without the aid of the servant they could not continue on. In essence, it was the servant who was leading the group. He emerged as the leader by serving the group of travelers (Northouse, 2010).

As a servant leader the leader’s focus is “on the needs of followers and helps them to become more knowledgeable, more free, more autonomous, and more like servants themselves. They enrich others by their presence” (Northouse, 2010, p. 385). It is “the care taken by the servant-first to make sure that other people’s highest priority needs are being served” that makes him a leader (Rodin, 2010, p. 75).

The concept of servant leadership has continued to spark the interest of others (Farling, Stone, & Winston 1999; Russell & Stone, 2002; Sendjaya & Sarros, 2002). It has been closely associated with the principles of ethic of caring established by Gilligan (1982). According to Rodin (2010), servant leadership provides a “view of leadership that comes as close to the values of the kingdom of God as any other in recent history” (p. 81). It is Rodin’s premise that effective leaders are “servants first and leaders second” (Rodin, 2010, p. 81).
The servant leader serves through his ability to listen, understand, accept, empathize, and apply foresight, persuasion, awareness and conceptualization. In turn the followers of the servant leader become healthier and wiser and are likely to also become servants themselves. The servant leader can increase leadership effectiveness and inspire higher individual and organizational performance since it increases mutual appreciation, affection and trust among members of the organization (Yukl, 2010). These qualities underscore the top 16 competencies top leaders exemplify most, such as developing others, inspiring and motivating others, building relationships, and collaboration and teamwork (Zenger & Folkman, 2012).

Rinehart (1998) stated “the nature and character of spiritual leadership reflects the humble stewardship of those Christ has called as members of His body, the people of God” (p. 98). She deduced the primary role of spiritual leaders is to release others to service so they can be leaders through the execution of the spiritual gifts God has given them for the purposes of serving others.

Sanders (2007) asserted, “Spiritual maturity is indispensable to good leadership” (p. 44). Consequently, Nouwen (2006) affirmed spirituality cannot be formed without discipline, practice and accountability; and discipline, practice, and accountability require standards and values that inform and direct leader behavior. Scripture provides a description of spiritual maturity. The Scripture indicates, “[The Lord] has shown you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God?” (Micah 6:8). Homer Hailey suggested that, the 'good' that [God] requires is the doing of His will. To accomplish that lofty (yet necessary) goal man must act toward God and man according to the divine
standard of righteousness revealed in God’s will; he must show every man a compassionate warm-heartedness; and walk humbly in recognition of the absolute holiness and righteousness of God by submitting to God through obedience to His desire and will (1972, p. 214).

It starts and ends with obedience to the will of God.

In *Lead like Jesus*, the authors wrote, “effective leadership starts on the inside; it is a heart issue” (Blanchard & Hodges, 2005, p.39). They emphasize relationship to others is a direct reflection of the relationship we share with God through Jesus Christ. Rodin (2010) also expresses the significance of a steward’s relationship to God and to those they serve. He asserts, “…leaders lift those around them by their direct leadership and management, but also most importantly by their example” (p.106).

Thus, spirituality in leadership is not a new phenomenon; however, it carries with it various suppositions. In the workplace the concept of spirituality translates to “the inner values of the leader and the followers-the mature principles, qualities, and influences that we implicitly exhibit in our behavior and interactions with other people” (Fairholm, 1997, p. 25). The ability to integrate the spiritual self and the dynamics of work provides a holistic approach to leading. This paradigm takes into account the complexity of human nature as well as the complex nature of leadership. It takes consideration of the spirit, intellect, and physical skills (Fairholm, 1997). It recognizes that the totality of one’s life cannot be compartmentalized or isolated; but they coexist in an integrated way. Moreover, leaders who profess to have a spiritual life will also “assure that the value system of the organization is integrated and holistic in nature so they do not have to sacrifice values” (Cound, 1987, as cited in Fairholm, 1997, p. 31).
There are numerous studies that emphasize the importance of spirituality in leadership, and work. Yet, spirituality in leadership is often overlooked (Thompson, 2004). There are multiple leadership development programs that are geared towards improving the competencies of leaders within organizations, but often the core curriculum fails to consider the real world situations that require compassion, empathy, and other attributes that are not ascertained through traditional leadership developmental courses. This leaves ambiguity in how to employ one’s spiritual essence into work context. Therefore, an intersection of spirituality and work can bring about profound organizational transformations when addressing employees from an all-inclusive approach, which embraces their physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual needs. Consequently, spirituality can also bring about profound individual transformation when one faces stressful or critical life events.

Life Change and Spirituality

Change is ubiquitous. As long as human relationships exist there will always be opportunities for change to occur. Daily there are political, social, technological and economic changes both domestically and internationally that threaten the framework and foundation that was once regarded as solid, permanent and unshakeable. “The magnitude of change today can prompt a doom-and-gloom vision, or it can be seen as an opportunity for a fundamental shift in how we humans define ourselves, where we are going, and how we will accomplish a goal” (Connor, 2006, p. 5). Former ways of approaching changing situations may no longer be viable for the veracity of change that occurs far more rapidly than ever before.
In many instances people regard change as something that is happening to them. It is the result of something that occurs outside of them that cannot be controlled or altered; and they are merely a means to an uncertain end. Conversely, Conner (2006) saw change as predictable and recognizable and “a phenomenon that has a distinct shape and character” (p. 6). Moreover, the element that distinguishes how one successfully transitions through change lies in their ability to demonstrate resilience in the face of change.

Resilience is “the capacity to absorb high levels of change while displaying minimal dysfunctional behavior” (Conner, 2006, p. 6). This internal characteristic allows people to demonstrate strength, fortitude and flexibility during intensive change occurrences, while others resist and are fearful of the uncertainties of change. The fear of the unknown becomes paralyzing; and varying levels of dysfunctional behavior emerge such as fatigue, emotional burnout, inefficiency, sickness and drug abuse, which impede productivity. This dysfunctional behavior occurs when a person’s ability to assimilate or absorb change is disproportionate to their “speed of change” (Conner, 2006, p. 12).

It is intuitively obvious that too much change will put a strain on people and organizations. The futurologist Toffler (1970) made a detailed study of the acceleration of change and its psychological effects. He suggested that increased levels of change will lead to a set of severe physical and mental disturbances, which he called the "future shock" syndrome. Similar to people who are witnesses to war or disaster may develop a “shell-shock” response, people experiencing rapid changes in life may develop a state of helplessness and inadequacy based upon perceived stressful life events.
Stressful life events have been defined as any set of circumstances, the advent of which requires or signals change in the basic life pattern of an individual (Holmes & Rahe, 1967), which can be the precursor to physiological and psychological distress. Stressful life events have also been referred to as critical life events. Critical life events are “major events that shape people’s lives. They can be positive events like receiving an unexpected promotion, having a child, or reading an important book; or they can be negative events like being diagnosed with cancer, getting a negative year-end evaluation, or having a loved one to die” (Northouse, 2010). Nonetheless, whichever end of the continuum the event falls, the critical life event “acts as a catalyst for change” (Northouse, 2010).

Researchers have indeed found a positive correlation between stress, change, and physical illness. The "Life Change Scale" is a psychological tool which measures the amount of change experienced by a person over a given time interval (Holmes & Rahe, 1967). The "Life Change" questionnaire asks people to mark on a list which important changes they recently underwent: move to a new home, a new job, marriage, divorce, birth of a child, death of a family member, travel, promotion, etc. The total score for a person is calculated as the sum of all changes that the person experienced, multiplied by their relative weights. Using this scale, it was shown that individuals with high life change scores are significantly more likely to become ill. More surprisingly, it turned out that illness correlates with all changes, positive (such as marriage or promotion) as well as negative (such as divorce or job loss).

Social stressors or personal life changes can cause a significant change in a person’s life. Whether change is perceived as positive or negative, the change event can
be stressful because it requires one to adjust and adapt to changing situations. However, how a person interprets a stress encounter affects the level and intensity of the stress on one’s physical and emotional well-being (Ballesteros & Whitlock, n.d.). Detrimental events, such as death of a family member or job loss are more likely to be associated with impaired functioning than are desired events such as job promotion or marriage (Mueller, Edwards, & Yarvis 1977; Sarason, Johnson, & Siegel, 1978; Vinokur & Seizer, 1975). Nevertheless, individuals vary in their assessment of and response to life events (Redfield & Stone, 1979). Many possess internal coping responses that allow them to handle stressful life events better than others. Yet, others find it necessary to utilize social resources to manage stress reactions and take action to moderate the impact of the perceived problematic aspects of their environment (Lazarus, 1966, 1980).

Two methods of coping that are used to mitigate stressful situations are problem-focused and emotion-focused coping (Lazarus, 1980). Problem-focused coping uses efforts to attempt to eliminate or modify the source of the stress through behavior. Whereas, emotion-focused coping concentrates its efforts on managing emotional consequences of stress and maintaining emotional equilibrium through mitigating the impact of the stressful situation. Women are more likely to use emotion-focused coping methods and less likely to use problem-focused strategies (Lazarus, 1980). For the African American woman, spirituality and the church are sources of social support that are often used to mitigate the impact of stress and change; and provide individuals with opportunities for feedback about themselves and for validation of their expectations of others (Caplan, 1974, p. 4).
The church has played a central role in how stress and change impacts the African American community. Religion and the church are important aspects of life (Lincoln & Mimiya, 1990), and church is central to African American culture. During slavery, Reconstruction, Jim Crow, the Civil Rights Movement, and up to the present time, the African American church has been held in high esteem and has served as the centerpiece for not only providing spiritual guidance and a place to worship, but providing for the human needs of the community as well. Traditionally the African American church has served as a hub for social welfare services for the poor; providing educational services, food, clothing and shelter for those in need (Cnaan, Sinha, & McGrew, 2004). During the Civil Rights era, the church became the source of political leadership for the African American community (Schiele, 2000). Weems (2005) proposed religion and the church has been a most needed “shelter in the time of storm” for the African American community. She suggested the African American church is a “dominant presence and stabilizing force in the African-American community” (p. 122).

Although change is ever-present, for the African American woman faith and spirituality are the stabilizing forces that seem to remain constant. If a survey was conducted within the congregations of most African American churches, regardless of denomination, results would show that most African American churches are comprised predominately of women (Hamilton, 2009). Given the significance of faith and spirituality for the African American woman, it is not surprising that she often relies on her spirituality for consolation and support when facing life’s challenges. Lowen (n.d) contended, “Black women have long been regarded as the backbone of the Black church”
Consequently, spirituality provides a safety net for the African American woman when she faces challenges in her life, even in the workplace.

The Kaiser Foundation and the Washington Post (2011) found 74% of Black women revealed that living a religious life was “very important,” compared to 57% of White women. The study further suggested African American women adhere to a higher power to “escape the everyday madness, or to bring comfort and understanding to a daunting situation” (as cited in Hughes, 2012, para. 2). Religious practices, beliefs and perceptions about God are “important in Black women’s efforts to cope with difficult life events” (Mattis, 2000, p. 3).

Banerjee, Mahasweta, and Canda (2009) examined the role played by spirituality in the lives of women participating in a Micro-Entrepreneurial Training Program. The results revealed,

Spirituality is their major source of strength when dealing with everyday issues ranging from problems at work to problems in the home, with their families and with poverty. Including and beyond the issues of poverty, participants stated that spirituality helped them address various life challenges such as helping them cope with basic needs after losing employment. Spirituality helped them persevere while seeking food, clothing, shelter, and re-employment (as cited in Hendricks, Bore, & Waller, 2012).

Not surprisingly, Billingsley (1978) and Hill (1972) suggested Christian spirituality is an important cultural strength for African American women who look to their spirituality for refuge, comfort, and solace when facing challenge; and spirituality provides a framework for making sense of the world and coping with the complexities of life. Spirituality and
church have been demonstrated to be of great importance in the lives of African American women in every aspect of their lives.

Summary

The review of literature included several relevant studies focusing on women in leadership. Further the literature section discussed challenges and barriers African American women in leadership face. It also contained exploration of women’s exodus from the workplace, spirituality and leadership, and life change and spirituality, which revealed complex factors that influence and impact women, particularly African American women, within the context of the workplace, as well as, factors that impact their decisions to leave the workplace.

Chapter 3 includes the research methodology and design used for this research. The chapter includes explanation of the qualitative methodology and phenomenological design as a rationale for the study.
Chapter 3: Methodology and Design

This chapter provides detailed methods used in developing this research. Included in this data are the methods used for gathering data, and the means for determining the validity, uniqueness, limitations and summary of the data.

The Approach

The qualitative research method selected for this study was chosen based on the fact that the findings are not produced based on quantitative data, but from real world experiences where the “phenomenon of interest unfold naturally” (Patton, 2001, p. 39). “Quality refers to the what, how, when, and where of a thing – its essence and ambience. Qualitative research thus refers to the meanings, concepts, definitions, characteristics, metaphors, symbols, and descriptions of things” (Berg, 201, p. 3); and seeks “illumination, understanding, and extrapolation to similar situations” (Hoepfl, 1997 as cited in Golafshani, 2003). It is a subjective approach to research that is used to describe personal experiences and provide meaning to those experiences through a set of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible. It is most useful when the research context or the nature of the phenomenon of study is poorly understood. It emphasizes the importance of looking at variables in their natural settings and using participant observation to describe the context or variables under consideration. The most common qualitative research designs are phenomenology, grounded theory, and ethnography.

For this study, phenomenology design was selected because of its approach to exploring real life experiences, and to explore the transition of African American women from leadership roles in the workplace to spiritual or ministry pursuits. A
phenomenological case study methodology was used to gain an accurate understanding of another’s experience, to capture in-depth reflections by participants regarding their experience of the identified phenomenon (Creswell, 2007). Pure phenomenological research seeks essentially to describe rather than explain, and to start from a perspective free from hypotheses or preconceptions (Husserl, 1970). More recent humanist and feminist researchers refuted the possibility of starting without preconceptions or bias, and emphasized the importance of making clear how interpretations and meanings have been placed on findings, as well as making the researcher visible in the ‘frame’ of the research as an interested and subjective actor rather than a detached and impartial observer (Plummer, 1983, Stanley & Wise 1993; Hammersley, 2000).

The phenomenological research methodology was used to appropriately address the meaning of lived experiences through the standpoint of those who have actually experienced a certain phenomena. Patton (1990) described a phenomenological study as one that focuses on descriptions of what people experience and how it is that they experience what they experience; and researchers look for invariant structure or the essence or central underlying meaning shared within the experiences presented by others (Creswell, 1998) through dialogue and reflection of the quintessential experience (Holstein & Gubrium, 1994). The researcher is charged with maintaining an open mind, “seeking what meaning and structures emerge” (Rossman & Raliis, 1998, p. 22). Moustakas (1994) described the process of seeking meaning and structure or analyzing the experiences of others in the following way:

1. Immersion: the researcher is involved in the world of the experience
2. Incubation: a space for awareness, intuitive or tacit insights, and understanding
3. Illumination: active knowing process to expand the understanding of the experience

4. Explication: reflective actions

5. Creative synthesis: bring together to show the patterns and relationships.

This process allows the researcher to recognize personal bias and subjectivity, while objectively allowing those under study to define the phenomenon through their lived experiences.

Giorgi (1985) contended that the operational word in phenomenological research is the word “describe” since the primary aim is to describe as accurately as possible the phenomenon, refraining from any preconceived framework, but remaining authentic to facts presented. Phenomenologists are concerned with “understanding social and psychological phenomena from, the perspectives of people involved” (Welman & Kruger, 1999, p. 189). This methodology has the following qualities:

1. It recognizes the value of qualitative designs and methodologies. Studies of human experiences are not approachable through quantitative approaches.

2. It focuses on the wholeness of experience rather than solely on its objects or parts

3. It searches for meanings and essences of experience rather than measurements and explanations

4. It obtains descriptions of experience through first-person accounts in informal conversations and formal interviews

5. It regards the data of experience as imperative in understanding human behavior and as evidence for scientific investigations
6. It formulates questions and problems that reflect interest, involvement, and personal commitment of the researcher (Moustakas, 1994, p. 21).

The aim is to determine what the experience means to the persons directly involved in the experience, as well as the perspective of the researcher who has interest in the phenomenon being studied.

Case studies are used in varied investigations, particularly in sociological studies. They are designed to bring out details from the viewpoint of the participants in their environment by using multiple sources of data. According to Bromley (1990), the case study method is “a systematic inquiry into an event or a set of related events which aims to describe and explain the phenomenon of interest” (p. 302). Case study is an ideal methodology when a holistic, in-depth investigation is needed (Feagin, Orum, & Sjoberg, 1991, p. 28). It is more than sampling research; however, selecting cases must be done to maximize what can be learned in the period of time available for the study. In the case study method, the researcher considers not just the voice and perspective of the participants, but also the relevant group of participants and the interaction between them. Yin (1984) defined the case study research method as “an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident; and in which multiple sources of evidence are used” (p.23). Yin presented at least four applications for a case study model:

1. To explain complex causal links in real-life interventions
2. To describe the real-life in which the intervention has occurred
3. To describe the intervention itself
4. To explore those situations in which the intervention being evaluated has no clear set of outcomes (p. 34). 

Case study research excels at bringing us to an understanding of a complex issue of object and can extend experience or add strength to what is already known through previous research.

Case study research has been used interchangeably with qualitative research, however they are not synonymous. Case study research evolved as a distinctive approach to scientific inquiry, partly as a reaction to perceived limitations of quantitative research (Gall, Borg, and Gall, 1996, p. 66). It is one of several approaches to qualitative research, and probably the most frequently used. Many qualitative researchers use the case study method as a guide to their investigations to examine real life situations and provide a basis for the application of ideas and extension of methods.

*From Corporate Leadership to Ministry*

This case study approach incorporated personal interviews and narratives of 3 African American women who have held leadership positions in the corporate arena and have left these positions for spiritual/ministry pursuits. Each participant resided in the Metropolitan Nashville, TN; these women were allowed to tell the unique stories of their life and ministry journey. To support the case study, a questionnaire was provided to each participant to obtain demographic information and answer general questions regarding their experience in leadership and ministry. To eliminate researcher bias, Underwood’s Daily Spiritual Experience Scale (2006) was used as a validated instrument to measure one’s religious well-being and existential well-being (see Appendix G). This data provided quantifiable information pertaining to the “awareness of “how beliefs and
understandings are part of moment-to-moment features of life from a spiritual or religious perspective” (Underwood & Teresi, 2002, para. 1).

The Daily Spiritual Experience Scale is a sixteen-item written self-report measure designed to measure ordinary or “mundane” spiritual experiences, not the more dramatic mystical experiences such as near death experiences or hearing voices or seeing visions (Appendix). It measures experiences of relationship with and awareness of the divine or transcendent. It measures how beliefs and understandings are part of moment-to-moment features of life from a spiritual or religious perspective (Underwood & Teresi, 2002).

Population

A population is all members of any well-defined class of people, events, or objects (Ary et al., 2010). It is virtually impossible to study an entire population; and therefore, uses a subset or a sample of the given population to make generalizations about the entire population (Leedy & Ormrod, 2010). There are multiple approaches to identifying the sample population, however, the sample selected must depend on the research questions and who would presumably represent the population and best answer the research questions.

The current study involved conducting in-depth, semi-structured interviews with 3 African American women ages 40 to 65 who have left leadership positions (manager, supervisor, and director) in corporate America for spiritual pursuits. The participants were identified by an intermediary who is an affiliate of a 60-member ministers’ fellowship organization in Nashville, Tennessee.

The ministers’ fellowship organization has for more than 50 years addressed the needs of persons impacted negatively by established systems; an interdenominational
direct action group designed to fight social injustices and champion many issues impacting the poor and disenfranchised. This is accomplished by providing an interdenominational bridge, which brings about a unified cooperative Christian leadership cadre to address social progress and social change.

The intermediary with the ministers’ fellowship organization contacted the President of the Nashville chapter of a national group of African American ministers, which comprises 140- members among 39 national affiliates, as an additional avenue to identify participants. An email was sent out through this organization to invite women to participate in the study. From these 2 groups 3 women who met the participation criteria were identified to participate in the study.

Sampling Frame

The study used purposive sampling to identify study participants. This sampling design is a form of nonprobability sampling, which limits the researcher’s ability of predicting or guaranteeing that the participants will represent each element of the population being studied (Leedy & Ormrod, 2010). However, the intermediary assisted in selecting those who might present diverse perspectives on the phenomenon.

The study did not include all African American women who have transitioned from corporate leadership to spiritual pursuits; nor did it attempt to represent the entire range of experiences among all African American women leaders. Rather, this study sought to provide an in-depth study of patterns and themes experienced by a sample of African American women who represent the aforementioned criterion.

The parameters of age criterion of the purposive sample group were determined because the age range of 40 to 65 represents ages of stabilization and often transition; and
it was believed participants in this age range would offer experience that would add a substantial amount of breadth to the study. Patton (1990) asserted “in qualitative research, determining sample size is entirely a matter of judgment; there are no set rules” (p. 236). He further contended that a greater wealth of experiences of the participants from a smaller sample population may yield more valuable information because the experiences may be more information rich (Patton, 1990). Therefore, the current study identified 3 African American women, through purposive sampling technique, who met the race, gender, and age criteria who have transitioned from corporate leadership to pursue spiritual or ministry endeavors.

Informed Consent

Researchers should obtain consent from intended study participants. Participants should fully understand the nature of a study and that they have the right to choose to participate or exclude themselves from participating in any research study (Ary et al., 2010; Leedy & Ormrod, 2010). Further, they should be informed “they have a right to withdraw from the study at any time” (Leedy & Ormrod, 2010, p. 105). This maintains ethical credibility in research that uses human beings to ascertain data. Ethical issues within research fall into 4 primary categories:

1. Protection from harm
2. Voluntary and informed participation
3. Right to privacy
4. Honesty with professional colleagues (Leedy & Ormrod, 2010).

Most experts would agree that it is wise to ascertain consent, particularly if the results are to be published or used in other context. Commonly, researchers will utilize a consent
form that describes the research and the nature and parameters of the participant’s involvement. According to Leedy and Ormrod (2010), the consent form will generally contain the following information:

- A brief description of the nature and goal(s) of the study, written in language that readers can readily understand
- A description of what participation will involve, in terms of activities and duration
- A statement indicating that participation is voluntary and can be terminated at any time without penalty
- A description of any potential risk and/or discomfort that participants may encounter
- A description of potential benefits of the study, including those for participants, science, and/or human society as a whole
- The guarantee that all responses will remain confidential and anonymous
- The researcher’s name, plus information about how the researcher can be contacted
- The individual or office that participants can contact if they have questions or concerns about the study
- An offer to provide detailed information about the study (e.g., a summary of findings upon its completion)
- A place for the participant to sign and date the letter, indicating agreement to participate (when children are asked to participate, their parents must read and sign the letter) (Leedy & Ormrod, 2010).
These elements helped to maintain the integrity of the study.

The study participants received informed consent and privacy guidelines in the form of a letter (see Appendix E). They were also required to sign a confirmation letter indicating receipt of a copy of the informed consent (see Appendix F).

Confidentiality

Each respondent received an emailed letter regarding their participation in the study (see Appendix D). The letter informed the participants of the anonymous and confidential nature of the study. It further informed the participant of their opportunity to decline to participate without penalty or terminate at any time. The participants signed the consent to participate on the date of the interviews, November 12, 2012.

During the interview process the participants’ names were never mentioned during the audio recording. As well, each participant was assigned a unique code to obscure their identity in all written documentation.

Geographic Location

Only participants who were contacted through a local ministers’ fellowship organization and were located in Nashville, Tennessee, Davidson County were invited to participate in the study. Access to the study participants involved contacting the President Elect of the ministers’ fellowship organization through electronic letter, and providing her with the participant parameters. The electronic email provided specific information about the study, including the title of the study, purpose of the study, criterion of participants, and researcher contact information.
Data Collection

Interview data was collected on November 12, 2012 at the National Sorority of Phi Delta Kappa using a semi-structured interview process due to the exploratory nature of the study. It incorporated 21 questions adapted from Dr. Clark's wonderful and insightful dissertation Why Some Women Leave Corporate Leadership Positions and Why Other Women Remain: A Phenomenological Study (2005) (see Appendix I). The interview questions were presented in a group setting to 3 African American female participants. The purpose of the interview questions was to explore and capture the experiences, personal journeys, insights and in-depth reflections of African American women who after experiencing leadership success in corporate America opt-out to pursue spiritual endeavors.

The interview took place on November, 12, 2012 at 5:30 pm and lasted approximate 90 minutes. The interview was audio recorded and transcribed to facilitate and determine common emerging themes. In addition to the semi-structured interview questions, the participants were emailed a 10 question questionnaire on November 5, 2012 to obtain demographic information, and a 16 question Daily Spiritual Experience Scale as a validated instrument to measure religious well-being and existential well-being. Each participant presented the completed documents prior to the interview phase of the data collection.

Data Collection Appropriateness

Qualitative research has several methods for collecting data. However, the most prominent data gathering tool in qualitative research are interviews. “Interviews are used to gather data from people about opinions, beliefs, and feelings about situations in their
own words. They are used to help understand the experiences people have and the meaning they make of them” (Ary et al., 2010, p. 438). It is a means of guided, thoughtful, intentional probing into the thoughts and conscious of others to make sense of other’s realities. It provides “insight on participant’s perspectives, the meaning of events of the people involved, information about the site, and perhaps information on unanticipated issues” (Ary et al., 2010, p. 439).

As well, the phenomenological design is an appropriate approach to this study because it allows the researcher to “look a multiple perspectives on the same situation” thus allowing the researcher to make “generalizations of what something is like form an insider perspective (Leedy & Ormrod, 2010, p. 145). The following table provides details as to why this research design was chosen over other possible designs used in qualitative research.
Characteristics of Phenomenological Research

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phenomenology Research Questions</th>
<th>“What is the meaning, structure, and essence of the lived experience of this phenomenon for this person or group of people?” (Patton 2002).</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Representation of findings</td>
<td>In-depth reflective description of the (experience) ... (Morse &amp; Richards, 2002).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data generation</td>
<td>In-depth, unstructured lengthy interviews which are more similar to a conversation rather than a typical interview talking the interviewee and listening the researcher (Leedy &amp; Ormrod, 2005). The interviewee and the researcher often work together during the interview &quot;arrive at the heart of the matter&quot; (Tesch, 1990).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data Analysis</td>
<td>Search for &quot;meaning of units&quot; that reflect various aspects of the experience; integration of the meaning units into a typical experience (Leedy &amp; Ormrod, 2005).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literature review</td>
<td>Review of professional and research literature to prepare for the study. The focus is thereby prior relevant studies; distinguishes their design, methodologies, and findings (Moustakas, 1994).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Background of the researcher</td>
<td>The researcher can have personal experience in the phenomenon of investigation, while broadening his own understanding by the experience of others the researcher can than generalize from a insider perspective 'what something is like' (Leedy &amp; Ormrod, 2005).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4: Adapted from Reiter, Stewart, & Bruce, (2011) Deciding Between Grounded Theory and Phenomenology.

This design allowed the researcher the ability to acquire richer, more in-depth personal accounts of the participant’s experience. Further, it allowed for the researcher to have personal experience in the phenomenon of study.
Phenomenological research almost exclusively utilizes interviews as a means to collect data from participants. The interview process in qualitative research use the following interview formats:

In this study the interview questions are semi-structured in nature to ascertain in-depth responses from the participants, which correlates with Tesch’s (1994) assertion that “the phenomenological interview is often a very unstructured one in which the researcher and participant work together to “arrive at the heart of the matter” (as cited in Leedy & Ormrod, 2010, p. 145). The semi-structured interview questions are such that “the area of interest is chosen and questions are formulated, but the interviewer may modify the format or questions during the interview process” (Ary et al., 2010, p. 438). Hannabuss (1996) suggested that semi-structured interviews are preferable when complex, personal or sensitive issues are being probed. Each interview question is open-ended to reveal what is important to understand about the phenomenon being studied (Ary et al., 2010).
In the interview the researcher facilitates a discussion and the participants provide the breath of the information through what resembles an informal conversation. The researcher’s task is to listen well to determine the flow and direction of the conversation. Seidman (2006) described three levels of listening that the researcher must engage in: 1) listening to what the researcher is saying; 2) listening to the “inner voice,” the unguarded response that is not targeted to an external audience; and 3) listening while remaining aware of process and nonverbal cues (as cited in Ary et al., 2010, p. 439). The interview is recorded to minimize distractions and keep the flow of conversation between the researcher and the participants.

The interview was conducted in a group format to yield a more in-depth information gathering process with participants interacting together, building on and replying to the comments of others, and having their experiences and interpretations of events and actions questioned; thereby, pushing them to greater clarity and thoroughness. The view is that “individual attitudes, beliefs, and choices of action do not form in a vacuum. Listening to others helps people form their own opinions” (Ary et al., 2010, p. 439), thus making for a more insightful and thoughtful interaction. With phenomenological interviewing, the researcher attempts to assess the lived experience of the participants of the phenomenon by focusing on the past, present, and connecting the two frames to understand the experience (Ary et al., 2010).

Validity and Reliability

Research calls for objectivity, accuracy, and rigor for efficacy; and there are various standards by which researchers evaluate the validity and reliability of qualitative research. Qualitative researchers use words such as credibility, trustworthiness,
confirmability, and validation rather than validity (Leedy & Ormrod, 2010) when evaluating research. Guba and Lincoln (1985) replaced validity and reliability with trustworthiness, which carries with it four standards of rigor: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. There are various approaches used to support the validity of findings including, spending extensive time in the field, negative case analysis or identifying contradicting studies, thick descriptions, feedback from others, and respondent validation (Leedy & Ormrod, 2010). Further, Guba and Lincoln (1985) opined that the character of the investigator is significant in the attainment of rigor in qualitative research. The researcher should be responsive and adaptable to changing situations, sensitive, and be able to provide clarification and summarization.

To address the trustworthiness of this study of African American women opt out of corporate leadership for spiritual pursuits, the researcher used various checks and balances to safeguard the validity of the findings. The researcher employed member checks, peer review, and researcher memos to ensure trustworthiness and accuracy. Member checks aided in determining that themes identified from the interview narratives were reflective of the participant’s experiences of the phenomenon of study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Peer review involved and external review of the data analysis by an independent analysis to determine that the researcher used rigor in the data analysis (Creswell, 2007). The researcher also recorded written reflective notes in the form of research memos about what was learned from the data and relationships between categories or themes to facilitate analytic insight. This process aided in unifying the data and facilitated analytic comparison (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), and provided ideas to be revisited (Goulding, 2001, p. 24).
Data Analysis

This phenomenological research, data collection and analysis inform each other in a process that includes questioning, reflecting, and interpreting. Creswell (1994) suggested the researcher immerse in the interview transcripts to become totally familiar with its content. Therefore, this was the initial approach in analyzing the data. Van Manen’s (1990) approach to phenomenological data analysis was utilized as an approach to identify emerging themes through analysis of the interview transcripts. This process required line by line review and identification of sentence clusters to search for “meaning of units” that reflect the various aspects of the experience described by the participants (Leedy & Ormond, 2010).

Following the completion of the group interview process, the researcher transcribed the digital voice recordings. This process enabled the researcher to engage in the data to capture the essence of what the interviewees were saying, as well as how they presented their experiences. The transcript was read multiple times to immerse in the experience from the participants perspectives. Further, the narratives were peer reviewed by an independent analyst to identify common themes. The researcher and second reader then determined the final divergent and convergent themes.

Summary

The researcher examined the experiences of 3 African American women who opted out of corporate leadership for spiritual pursuits using a qualitative research design that incorporated surveys and a group interview process. The qualitative research methodology was explained in detail providing a description of the survey instruments that were used. The population and sample frame were described detailing how the study
participants were selected and the criterion for their participation. The method used to obtain the data and the rigor of the data, and the data analysis methods were explained in detail. The results of the data are presented in the following chapter.
Chapter 4

Results

The purpose of this study was to explore the influence of spirituality on career path choices, and why women opt out of corporate leadership for spiritual pursuits. The phenomenological case study method was used in this research. The data used was gathered from a semi-structured interview process interviewing 3 African American women who transitioned from corporate leadership to spiritual pursuits and offer differing perspectives and experiences regarding their experiences. The responses were evaluated through the lens of Collins’ Afrocentric feminist approach. This chapter provides analysis of the data obtained.

Data Analysis

Interview questions and narrative responses generate a wealth of data that has to be organized in manageable units for analyzing. The process included organizing the data and identifying patterns within the data. The central point in data analysis is to identify common themes in descriptions of experiences by identifying statements that relate to the topic, grouping statements into “meaningful units”, seeking divergent perspectives, and constructing a composite (Leedy & Ormrod, 2010) with the purpose of presenting the experience through the perspective of those who experienced the phenomenon. This is done through objective survey data and semi-structured interviews with a series of open-ended questions.

The analysis included extracting perspectives, attitudes, and personal reflections from narrative data of African American women regarding the corporate experience and the influence of spirituality on their career choices. To interpret the narrative data the
researcher applied the content analysis process, which categorizes verbal or behavioral data, for the purpose of classification, summarization and tabulation (Hancock, 1998). Ary et al. (2010) indicated this method is used “for the purpose of identifying specified characteristics of the material” (p. 457). The content can be analyzed on two levels. The basic level of analysis is a descriptive account of the data: this is what was actually said with nothing read into it and nothing assumed about it. Some texts refer to this as the manifest level or type of analysis. The higher level of analysis is interpretative: it is concerned with what was meant by the response, what was inferred or implied. It is sometimes called the latent level of analysis (Hancock, 1998). The basic idea is to identify from transcripts the data that are informative in some way and to identify important or relevant messages hidden in the mass of each interview. The transcribed interview document was reviewed by not only the researcher of the study, but by an independent analyst for analysis. The researcher and independent analyst discussed and compared narrative interpretations and arrived at consensus where there were differences in interpretations.

Each participant was provided with a questionnaire to gather demographic information. As well, the questionnaire allowed the participants to reflect on their corporate leadership experience, their transition out of the corporate arena, and their daily spiritual experiences. Appendix G provided the questionnaire that was used in obtaining this information. Following are the pre-interview questions and a summary of the responses.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>P1</th>
<th>P2</th>
<th>P3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Age</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>55-59</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60-65</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Gender</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Educational Level</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some College</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduate Degree</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post Graduate Degree</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>How long Saved Believer?</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&gt;20 years</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>How long in Ministry?</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10-15 years</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15-20 years</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&gt;20 years</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Do you hold a Senior Pastor Position?</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>How long in Senior Pastor Position?</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N/A</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0-3 years</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&gt;10</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Leadership Position prior to Ministry</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The data indicate each two respondents were between the ages of 55 to 59, and one was between the ages of 60 to 65. Each respondent had achieved varying levels of education with one attaining a four year college degree, one attaining a graduate degree, and one attaining post graduate degree. Each participant held a leadership position prior to transitioning to ministry, which was a primary criterion for participating in the study. Each was at different stages in their ministry; and the length of years may correlate to their ages or when they accepted the call to ministry. Of the 3 participants interviewed two were pastors, one has been pastoring 0-3 years and one for more than 10 years. Each reported being a saved believer, or one who professes Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, for more than 20 years.
Each participant was also provided with a Daily Spiritual Experiences Scale (DSES) to ascertain her religious and existential well-being. The data was analyzed using the Likert scale method of summated ratings. This scale assessed attitudes toward a topic by presenting a set of statements about the topic and asking respondents to indicate for each whether they strongly agree, agrees, is undecided, disagree, or strongly disagree. The various agree-disagree responses are assigned a numeric value, and the total scale score is found by summing the numeric responses given to each item. This total score assessed the individual’s attitude toward the topic (Ary et al., 2010). In this measure the higher the score the stronger the connection of daily experiences to spirituality (Table 6).
Table 6: Daily Spiritual Experience Scale*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>P1</th>
<th>P2</th>
<th>P3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Q1. I feel God’s presence</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q2. I feel a connection to all of life.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q3. During worship, or at other times when connecting with God, I feel joy which lifts me out of my daily concerns.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q4. I find strength in my religion or spirituality.</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q5. I find comfort in my religion or spirituality.</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q6. I feel deep inner peace or harmony.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q7. I ask for God’s help in the midst of daily activities.</td>
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<td>4</td>
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<tr>
<td>Q8. I feel guided by God in the midst of daily activities.</td>
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<td>Q9. I feel God’s love for me directly.</td>
<td>6</td>
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<td>Q10. I feel God’s love for me through others.</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
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<tr>
<td>Q11. I am spiritually touched by the beauty of creation.</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
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<td>Q12. I feel thankful for my blessings.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Q13. I feel a selfless caring for others.</td>
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<td>6</td>
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<td>Q14. I accept others even when they do things I think are wrong.</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
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<td>Q15. I desire to be closer to God or in union with the divine.</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Q16. In general, how close do you feel to God?</strong></td>
<td>5</td>
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<td>6</td>
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Average: 5.25, 4.50, 5.81

*Scale Values: 1=Never or almost never; 2=Once in a While; 3=Some days; 4=Most days; 5=Every day; 6=Many times a day

**Question 16 had only 4 responses, and therefore only 4 scale values: 1=Not at all; 2.66=Somewhat close; 4.32=Very close; 5.98=As close as possible.

The mean scores were 5.25, 4.50, and 5.81. The overall mean score for the group was 5.19. Collectively the group seemed to have a high level of awareness of “how beliefs and understandings are part of moment-to-moment features of life from a spiritual or religious perspective” (Underwood & Teresi, 2002). This validated instrument provided measure of the spiritual and existential well being of the respondents and provided a basis to engage in an inquiry process regarding the experiences of African American women in corporate leadership and their decision to leave to pursue spiritual pursuits.
Interview Narratives

The semi-structured interview process correlated with the theoretical framework selected for this study: Collins’ (1991) Afrocentric Feminism Epistemology. Collins believed that African American women, because of their dual minority status and the prevalence of oppression that comes with this status, have unique experiences and perspectives which connect them together to common, distinctive experiences, such as racism, sexism, and classism, which lead to a group consciousness and knowledge that is obtained through lived experiences. Collins (2002) proposed that African American women’s experiences be examined through four contours: concrete personal experiences, an emphasis on dialogue, an ethic of caring, and an ethic of personal accountability.

Collins (2002) referred to the daily life experiences of the African American woman as concrete experiences. She asserted that African American women value wisdom ascertained through experiences. The current study validated the concrete experiences of African American women in corporate leadership who transitioned to spiritual pursuits through the second contour of emphasis on dialogue. The interview process allowed the participants to dialogue openly within a “safe space” (Collins, 2000) about their personal experiences, from which emerged core themes or patterns in their collective experiences. The researcher intended to place value on the accounts of their experiences to demonstrate respect for their insightful and astuteness to the phenomenon of study.

The third contour, ethic of caring, exists on the premise that emotions and thought coexist, and presence of emotion corroborates the assertion that “a speaker believes in the validity of an argument” (Collins, 2000, p. 263). The researcher of this current study
suggested this contour is relevant to this current study due to emotional responses that spirituality, race, and gender elicit.

The final contour, ethic of personal accountability, was the most significant of the four contours because it considers the credibility of the person’s ethic and character who shares the account of their experiences with others. If a person has questionable character, the other contours become negligible or inconsequential, and thus invalidate their knowledge claims (Collins, 2000). In this current study, the ability of the participants to connect their personal experiences through dialogue and an ethic of caring confirmed or refuted personal responsibility of knowledge claims.

Afrocentric feminism emphasizes the significance of open dialogue with an individual to gain knowledge about them and their experiences. This supposition supported both the model, qualitative phenomenology, and framework - Afrocentric feminism chosen for this study, which allowed the researcher to gain an accurate understanding of the experience of each participant and to capture in-depth reflections regarding their experience of the identified phenomenon (Creswell, 2007). This study revealed the lived experiences of African American women who leave corporate leadership positions for spiritual pursuits. Data collection and analysis provided the foundation for answering the following research questions:

1. What are the perceived factors that contribute to African American women pursuing spiritual endeavors who have been successful in leadership in corporate America?

2. How does spirituality influence career path choices?

3. How do life events influence career path choices?
Age and Context

Initial review of the data did not reveal significance regarding participants’ age and the perceptions of life experiences. However, after several readings the narrative data revealed the significance of age and the context in which individual life experiences occurred. There was no direct mention of age associated with each lived experience by the participants; however, age was implied in the context of their explanations, which could imply that their response or the significance of the life experience was affected by their age. The following quotes provide examples of this pattern.

P1: I had to raise a family, and my first job out of high school was with the Social Security Administration.

P2: When I was growing up, you’d either want to be a nurse or you could be a school teacher.

P2: In Nashville, at the time that I went to nursing school there were only a few nursing programs.

P3: Growing up, I knew one thing I did not want to be and that was a domestic. So I knew I had to have some type of career. Even though during our era it would be teaching or nursing…

P3: At the time that I was in the leadership position in our section of the department, the three top leaders were female.

Age can be a significant factor in how one processes experiences, particularly when the experience is considered stressful.
Construction of Realities from Emphasis on Dialogue

The interview process allowed the participants to dialogue openly within a “safe space” (Collins, 2000) about their personal experiences, from which emerged reflections of mutual effects and influence of the experiences, as well as more exhaustive, reflective responses from participants after hearing the responses of their co-participants.

P2: My experience was different than P3’s in terms of promotions and getting a leadership position, but what I see now in the corporate world I still see those barriers that Black women continue to face today.

P3: I agree. In the position that I was in, though, it was different. At the time that I was in the leadership position in our section of the department, the three top leaders were female. And that was a complete turnaround of what it was years ago, because these positions were filled by men.

P2: I guess mine is a little different, in that my career was predominantly women in nursing. But there came a time when more men were entering into the field; and that’s when I said it was hard for the men to take supervision from a woman.

P1: I certainly agree. And that quality is not something that I came to overnight, because raising a family pretty much alone, I had to be the one in control, and that was valuable to me. So the ability to be flexible and to support persons that I didn’t always agree with became valuable to me—to know how to do that and to see the big picture, support the vision that helped a great deal.

P3: I agree. And also you have to be willing to listen [P1 response - That is important]. Because I had to learn that every criticism may not have been bad
once I learned to truly listen and process what the other person was saying. Then you have to get to the next level if you are willing to listen as well as to hear.

Collins (2002) suggested dialogue between African American women fosters credible and validated knowledge claims.

_Construct of an Ethic of Caring_

Personal expression of emotion is important in validating knowledge claims; and it aids in convincing others of the genuineness of one’s ability to show empathy and care for others (Collins, 2002). The extent to which the participants of the study demonstrated care for others is seen in the following quotes.

P1: I think it really is important that you have a genuine care for people and that people know that and can feel that. In any setting, people don’t care how much you know until they know how much you care.

P2: I think that’s good to have that genuine care, but not to the point where people will take advantage of you. Being in the South, Southern woman who are loving, caring, good natured, and a nurturer, are often taken advantage of.

P3: I was very surprised to come against department heads that stereotyped their employees. I was challenged greatly to get a person out of that company because they were not polished enough; and they were not articulate enough. They were there (at work) everyday on time or before time. They worked hard. The lady worked hard, but she lived in subsidized housing, and she was a single parent. She didn’t have a car, but she beat everybody else to work. But she didn’t have the “college” polish that they wanted, and the image that the department-head wanted to create. This young lady didn’t have the money to dress a certain way to
fit the image. So I was really pressured one time to try to let this person go—to talk to her first about her dress and that type of thing. But I was saying (to the department-head), “She’s on the phone. Customers can’t see her or how she’s dressed. She’s on the phone most of the day.”

These quotes demonstrate that each participant had care and empathy for others. Further, the ability of the participants to connect their personal experiences through dialogue and an ethic of caring confirm an ethic of personal accountability or responsibility of knowledge claims (Collins, 2002).

The Influence of Spirituality

According to Dantley (2003), “spirituality is the nexus of inspiration, motivation, and meaning-making in the lives of Black Americans” (as cited in McClellan, 2006, p. 95). Further, spirituality is demonstrated in African Americans’ practice of human freedom and the acknowledgement of one's spiritual self has served as the very bedrock of African American life (Dantley, 2003). Spirituality is the precursor to life purpose and meaning. As demonstrated in this study, although each of the participants in this study has unique experiences, spirituality served as a force that unifies them in a common life experience.

The interview protocol contained 5 questions that discussed the impact of spirituality on the lived experiences of the study participants.

- Q8- What reasons influenced your decision to leave the corporate world to solely pursue spiritual/ministry endeavors?
Q9- Describe your attitudes about your work, comparing and contrasting the time you were in the corporate world with your current situation in spiritual/ministry work.

Q15- As an African American woman, what influence did spirituality have on your decision to leave the corporate arena?

Q16- Can you recall when and if balancing a career and spirituality/ministry became challenging? Describe the situation.

Q20- How would your life be different if you had not left the corporate arena to pursue spiritual pursuits?

These questions unified the distinctive experiences of the participants, which are seen in the following responses.

P1: I started class at American Baptist College first, which was maybe a few months after I discussed my call with my pastor. [I left the corporate field entirely] about two years later.

P2: When I answered my call to ministry, immediately I answered a call to academic preparation to pursue a full-time seminary masters of divinity degree, so I needed to be able to leave the corporate field in order to be obedient to the call I had discerned from God.

P3: In the corporate world, it was a job. In this, it’s a love.

P1: This is a gift to me. Spiritual counseling is my gift.

P2: My decision to leave the corporate world was out of love for and obedience to God
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P1: Spirituality had a great influence. I am committed—sold out to do what God tells me to do. I am committed to that, and nothing has fulfilled me as much.

P2: Yeah, I say I was obedient, but I had a period there where I was operating with partial obedience. I was trying to fulfill both the career and the call. And God let me do it for about a semester, and it almost killed me. That’s when the Lord said, “I didn’t call you for both, I called you to do this one thing.”

P3: I feel the same. I can just see God all in it. Even the time that I chose to leave the corporate world and the Lord said no. So I can just see it, and just letting God orchestrate what to do, when to do it, how to do it. I have learned, even now, that timing is everything.

Convergent and Divergent Themes

Analysis of the narrative data revealed major themes and sub-themes which contributed to why African American women leave corporate leadership for spiritual pursuits. The five major themes mentioned by the participants were,

1. Dual bias of race and gender
2. Different expectations for women
3. Lack of mentoring in corporate arena
4. Obedience to the call
5. Experience of stressful/critical life events

The four sub-themes that emerged were institutional racism, attitude about corporate job, mentor in ministry, and balancing career and spirituality. A discussion of each major theme follows.
Theme 1: Dual bias of race and gender. The participants’ gender and race were challenges in their respective work environments. This theme emerged as participants revealed their personal experiences faced in leadership in the corporate arena. Each participant referred to gender and race as a barrier in the workplace. African Americans indicate they believe different organizational standards exist for them than for their White counterparts (Parker, 2005). This perennial issue grows out of the belief that those of color must perform better and work harder in order to receive equal pay, recognition, and the promotional opportunities of their White counterparts. These quotes illustrated their experiences:

P1: At times men have an unspoken network that women don’t have.

P2: When they do promote an African American female, they get two for one. They get an African American and they get a woman, so they fill two quotas…Even though she is promoted in the leadership role, it’s still not easy for her to fulfill that role. Her gender is a barrier. A man not wanting to be under the leadership of women is a huge issue…And there are stereotypes about Black women. When [Black women] assert themselves as a woman in leadership, she is demonized as being and angry Black woman. You have to overcome a lot of stereotypes.

P3: As [African American women] you were allowed to assume the [leadership] position, but they expected you to fail…The supervisor that hired me basically just gave me the [performance manual] and said “here you go.” No supervision. Not anything. In other words, if you make it fine, and if you don’t you’re gone.
**Sub-theme 1: Institutional racism.** A sub-theme of institutional racism emerged from the major theme dual bias of gender and race in responses from 2 of the 3 participants.

P2: In Nashville, at the time that I went to nursing school, there were only a few nursing programs. There was, not necessarily a rivalry, but there was a stereotype among the different schools. I graduated from Tennessee State School of Nursing. And then there was Vanderbilt, and there was Belmont. But anyway, between Vanderbilt and TSU, TSU nursing students were deemed “less than,” “less capable”, “less qualified”, “not as smart”. It would take longer to get acclimated from the academic setting to the clinical setting. So there were a lot of stereotypes. So then to be a leader who had graduated from that institution, you had to overcome more.

P3: I agree. I had the same issue from Tennessee State because the supervisor that was hired before me previously had graduated from Belmont and took great pleasure in telling me that she had graduated from Belmont. I told her one day that it wasn’t the school, it was the teachers or students, and as long as you learned what you were capable and supposed to learn, it didn’t matter what school you went to.

**Theme 2: Different expectations for women.** The second theme emphasized the role of different role expectations experienced by the participants. The responses referenced terms or phrases such as, overqualified, sharpest, and the best.

P1: Part of the barrier that you had to overcome was feeling like you had to be the sharpest, the brightest, the best, because you were challenged on everything.
Leaving Corporate America

P2: I think for any leader, but particularly for women, is to make sure that they meet the educational criteria component. Whatever field they are in, they must make sure they are on their A game. Because again, you are a woman, you will be challenged by both sexes, period. I think about Condoleezza Rice, who had a top position in the nation and was still questioned by those who sweep the floor if she’s really qualified for the position. So most women prepare themselves for leadership positions by making sure that they are over-qualified.

P3: I agree.

**Sub-theme 2: Attitude about work.** The in-depth interview responses revealed divergent perception about corporate work comparatively to spiritual pursuit from the experiences of each participant.

P2: In nursing, for me that was a call. To be able to be in people’s lives at different points along their journey was always precious, and I was always ministering. I was at St. Thomas hospital, which in itself saw itself as a ministry. So even when I answered my call to ministry, they didn’t give me a buy-out, they gave me a buy-in. They sent me to school for my masters in divinity and kept me on salary the entire time. So, it was just a transition. It wasn’t like I stopped one thing and started another. All of my experience that I had even in the corporate, how to treat people, how to talk to people, how to lead people, all of that transitioned right into the church. I thought that I was actually going to be going back to the hospital to work as a chaplain. It was the Lord that said, “No, your ministry is going to be in the church,” and it was the hospital that said, “We’re going to support your ministry in the church.” Then, I was a cardiac nurse and
pastoring people on a physical heart level. And now, I pastor people on a spiritual heart level. But I’m still entering people’s journey at different points and places along their path. So over here in corporate, I’m preaching and teaching. Here in the church, I’m still ministering to people’s health needs.

P3: In the corporate world, it was a job. In this, it’s a love. It is a totally different area (spiritual pursuit). This is a joy. This is a love. This is something that I have always loved to do, and when I worked in corporate, similar to P1, at the time I was a single parent. It was a job that I did to support myself as well as my children, and it was a vocation that I could really work in and still do my pastoral duties.

**Theme 3: Lack of mentoring in corporate arena.** This theme emerged as participants revealed their experiences with mentorship in the corporate arena.

P1: In the corporate world, I don’t remember having a mentor, per se… But I think the people I admired in the corporate world were colleagues around me.

P2: I didn’t have a mentor, but I had many mentors who didn’t even know they were my mentors. A lot of things they were mentoring me in was when I became a nurse, I’ll do it this way and not that way. I like how she does this. I don’t like how she does that. So I did not have a mentor per se. But there were those I admired or respected from a distance.

P3: I did not have a mentor in the corporate world; however I did have an aunt who had gone to school and who had achieved a great deal and had several degrees. I think I always looked up to her and wanted to pursue my education to succeed like she did. I would always say that if she had been a male, she would
have been the CEO or a leader in a corporation, but because she was a female she couldn’t.

**Sub-theme 3: Mentor in ministry.** A sub-theme that emerged from the responses was establishment of mentoring relationships in ministry. This was reflected in the experiences of 2 out of 3 of the respondents. However, in the absence of identified formal mentoring relationships, the third participant identified women in the ministry that she respected and admired.

P2: In ministry, I did not have a mentor when I first got into ministry, but I have one now.

(Interviewer: Is it a male or female?) P2: Female.

P3: I now have a mentor in the ministry; but, because I received my calling early at the age of 8, there were not too many females that were in the ministry to mentor you. In our community, there was one lady that I later found out was licensed and was an evangelist. She was not active during the time that I was growing up, so I had no one to turn to there. (Interviewer: In your ministry, is your current mentor male or female?) P3: I now have both male and female mentors in the ministry. I have a gracious father in the ministry that I still respect to this day.

P1: In the ministry growing up, I didn’t see women in the pulpit at Baptist churches. That’s why this whole thing was foreign to me, for me to have received a calling. I didn’t know if God was playing a joke. The people that I look up to—and they may not know it yet—are several women, two of whom are at this
table, that I have watched and admired for a long time… and I also have women that I can call if I need to; and that means a whole lot.

**Theme 4: Obedience to the call.** This theme emerged as participants expressed how their life would be diametrically different had they had not left the corporate arena for spiritual pursuits.

P1: I know I would not be at peace, and that’s primary in my life. There would be no peace. There would be upheaval. I would be jumping through hoops to please people. I just won’t do that.

P2: I believe that God honors life, whether I had still been in nursing or if I had been in ministry that God would honor that. But I probably would not have that sense of completeness. I would probably always be feeling like something was missing.

P3: I think I would be miserable. I would not be happy. I’ve had nightmares about the corporate world, and like I said I was recently asked to come back. I believe the Lord was even telling me then, “Don’t even think about it.”

**Sub-theme 4: Inability to balance career and spiritual pursuit.** A sub-theme that emerged from the responses was the inability to balance career and spiritual pursuits simultaneously. This was reflected in the experiences of 2 out of 3 of the respondents. However, the third participant remained bi-vocational for a number of years before going into full-time pastoring.

P1: Yes. Financially, it became challenging, especially with my illness. When I returned to work I could not physically keep up with the pace that I had
Leaving Corporate America

previously. The Lord just set it up in such a way that over time, He gave me peace about it, saying, “It’s OK, I got you.”

P2: Yeah, I say I was obedient, but I had a period there where I was operating with partial obedience. I was trying to fulfill both the career and the call. And God let me do it for about a semester, and it almost killed me. That’s when the Lord said, “I didn’t call you for both, I called you to do this one thing.”

P3: I’ve always done both. God opened the door for me in ministry at age 18, so I had been doing it even when I wasn’t doing it. I didn’t actually announce my calling until ’89, but the first time I was in a pulpit was at age 18… I tried to [make the decision to only pursue my calling] after 30 years with the state. That was in 2003, and I was thinking, “God, this is getting hard. I’m pastoring. I’m doing this, and I’m just not interested in that anymore…. I think the Lord knew that, and I think that’s the reason the Lord gave me peace about it, and when the time came, everything was in place and that’s when I made the decision.

Theme 5: Stressful/critical life events. This theme emerged as participants expressed how their life was impacted by events that changed their basic life patterns or career choice.

P1: The death of my mother was a life event. I was counseling at that time at a women’s prison, and I just shut down. That was a life event that just turned everything around for me. Before that, when I came here initially for college, my husband was sent to prison; and that was definitely a life event because I had to go back and in three days bring two children here. I also had a period of personal illness that left me bedridden.
P2: While working in corporate, I was newlywed and had two children, which was a life event changer. I received two degrees during that time. My husband and I have been married 38 years, and he likes to say I’ve been in school our whole married life. So there were several [life changing events]. Each time, especially with each promotion or educational achievement, it meant more financial security and ability to have a different lifestyle.

P3: I was divorced and remarried, and deaths of a brother were life events while I was working at my corporate job.

Summary

The qualitative, phenomenological study used semi-structured, open-ended interview questions to investigate perceived factors that contribute to African American women pursuing spiritual endeavors who have been successful in leadership in the corporate arena. The lived experiences of 3 African American women provided detailed accounts of their challenges in leadership due to their dual minority status, and the challenges of transitioning out of the corporate world to spiritual pursuits.

Data analysis revealed the validation of participants’ knowledge claims of the phenomenon through Collins’ (2002) four contours of evaluating the experiences of the African American woman’s experience: concrete personal experiences, an emphasis on dialogue, an ethic of caring, and an ethic of personal accountability. Data also revealed 5 major themes and 4 sub-themes, with each of the 3 participants experiencing the 4 major themes. The five themes identified that contribute to why African American women leave corporate leadership for spiritual pursuits were dual bias of race and gender, different expectations for women, lack of mentoring in corporate arena, obedience to the
call, and stressful/critical life events. The four sub-themes that emerged were institutional racism, attitude about corporate job, mentor in ministry, and balancing career and spirituality.

Responses to the interview questions depict in-depth reflections of the participants’ lived experiences and formed the basis for decisive analysis of the phenomenon, discussion, conclusions, and implications and significance of the findings to further research. In the following chapter, the researcher provided a discussion of the findings and made recommendations for additional research.
Chapter 5
Discussion, Recommendations, and Conclusions

The problem that guided this study was the phenomenon of women in leadership positions, who after years of struggle to penetrate and galvanize corporate America “opt-out” to pursue other non-traditional career paths. The purpose of this qualitative phenomenology case study was to examine the phenomenon as it relates to African American women who after experiencing leadership success in corporate America opt-out to pursue spiritual endeavors. The study explored the participants’ perceptions, experiences, personal journeys, insights, and in-depth reflections through a group interview process which generated extensive narrative data. The concomitant objective was to identify any patterns or themes that emerge from the narrative depictions of these women’s experiences.

In interpreting data, it is important “not to make snap judgments about the data we have collected. It is all too easy to draw hasty and unwarranted conclusions” (Leedy & Ormrod, 2010). The data should be interpreted using these parameters:

1. Relating the findings to the original problem and to the specific research questions and hypothesis.
2. Relating the finding to pre-existing literature, concepts, theories, and research studies.
3. Determining whether the findings have practical significance as well as statistical significance, and
4. Identifying limitations of the study (Leedy & Ormrod, 2010).

The research questions that guided this research were,
1. What are the perceived factors that contribute to African American women pursuing spiritual endeavors who have been successful in leadership in corporate America?

2. How does spirituality influence career path choices?

3. How do life events influence career path choices?

There are four sections that were developed in this final chapter 5: a) introduction, b) discussion and conclusions, c) recommendations, and d) research summary. The introduction to chapter 5 reviewed the following areas: a) research methods, b) limitations of the study, and significance of the study.

Introduction

Detailed in chapter 4, this study represented a qualitative phenomenological case study research design. This research methodology allowed one to gain an accurate understanding of another’s experience, and to capture in-depth reflections of participants regarding their experience of an identified phenomenon (Creswell, 2007). Further, the research method allowed participants to illuminate and described the phenomenon based on lived experience without the influence of the researcher’s experience (Moustaka, 1994).

Using purposive sampling strategies, 3 participants were identified for the study through an organization called the Interdenominational Ministers’ Fellowship, which was geographically located in Nashville, Davidson County, Tennessee. This sampling design was a form of nonprobability sampling, which limits the researcher’s ability of predicting or guaranteeing that the participants will represent each element of the population being studied (Leedy & Ormrod, 2010).
The data used was gathered from a semi-structured group interview process interviewing 3 African American women who transitioned from corporate leadership to spiritual pursuits and offered differing perspectives and understanding of their experiences to emerge (Leedy & Ormrod, 2010). The responses were evaluated through the lens of Collins’ (2002) Afrocentric feminist approach. The goal of the study was to determine underlying meaning of African American women’s experience through application of self-inquiry and dialogue.

Limitations

The primary limitations of this study, introduced in chapter 1, are time, sample size, focus on one race, culture, or ethnicity, focus on one geographical region, and influence of researcher assumptions and experiences.

Time. This research study and report was constrained by the amount of time available. Qualitative research not only requires extensive time in collecting data, but it requires a significant amount of time to analyze, interpret and compile and present the data in a logical format.

The primary issues related to time limitation was the availability of the participants and their ability to adjust their schedules to participant in a group interview format. The interviews were rescheduled due to a change in schedule of two of the participants. Initially there were 4 participants identified for the study; however, 1 participant could not participate due to family illness. If more time had been available it may have facilitated opportunity for other participants to participate. Additionally, more time would have allowed participants to share additional information to explain their experience with the phenomenon,
Sample size. There were only 3 participants in this study to generate perceptions about the phenomenon. If a sample size is too small it may be difficult to find significant relationships from the data and to be considered representative of the group that the study results will be transferred or generalized (Ary et al., 2010). If more participants were available it may have produced more in-depth insight of the experience.

Focus on one race, culture, or ethnicity. The study focused on African American women and their experiences. The experience of African American women may not necessarily be applicable to other groups.

Focus on one geographical region. The geographic region of the study may not make the conclusions of the study applicable to other geographic regions. The study could be generalized only to African American women who live in the South.

Influence of researcher assumptions and experiences. This researcher came to the study with potential biases and assumptions about the phenomenon of study. The researcher has leadership experience in both the corporate and spiritual arenas as an African American woman minister and a corporate leader, and understood the complexity of balancing these competing interests. Objectivity was challenged by personal context, experiences, and the cultural histories that shape our judgment of events.

To limit influence of researcher bias, the researcher used reflexivity and self-reflection to recognize and disclose her biases. Additionally, this researcher used specific approaches to enhance research credibility, reliability, validity, and quality assurance through Van Manen’s (1990) phenomenological data analysis, which involved questioning, reflecting and interpreting data in a line-by-line approach to find thematic analysis of the transcripts through examining every single sentence or sentence cluster to
uncover the experience being described by participants. Additionally, the researcher employed member checks, peer review, and researcher memos to ensure trustworthiness and accuracy of the data.

**Significance of the study.** Empirical research into the experience of African American women in the workplace was limited. Prior research has generated from a gender and race inclusivity perspective, which does not account for the unique experiences of a group who shared a dual minority status. Further, research suggested that the experiences of persons of differing racial groups were divergent from those experienced by majority men and women (Bell & Nkomo, 2001). Therefore, the findings of this study could be used to inform organizations, leaders, and women who are transitioning from corporate leadership to ministry. Further, the findings could lead to enhancements in organizations and institutions relative to their structures and policies.

**Discussion**

The results of this study reflected the lived experiences of 3 African American women who opt-out of corporate leadership and transition to spiritual pursuits. Chapter 4 constituted demographic analysis, exploration of the African American woman’s experience through a Black feminist perspective, and identification of emergent themes in relations to perceived factors contributing to African American women opting-out of leadership positions in the corporate arena to pursue spiritual endeavors. The identification of themes was obtained based on Van Manen’s (1990) phenomenological data analysis, through a line-by-line approach to find thematic analysis of the transcripts. The discussion and conclusion sections in this chapter included patterns and themes growing out of the participants responses to the interview questions. Also, within the
chapter were interpretations of the results, recommendations, and suggestions for further research. The four major emergent themes provided the organization for this section.

**Theme 1: Dual bias of race and gender.** Women in leadership face barriers that men do not. Study findings supported the conjecture that the organizational experience of African American women in the workplace was quite different than that of other women (Blake, 1999; McCollum, 1998) due to the duality of gender and race and the negative impact that each variable presents (Bell & Nkomo, 2001; Collins, 2004; Gregory, 2001; Simien, 2006). This divergent experience was different for those experienced by men and other women (Bell & Nkomo, 2001). A recent study indicated that workplace environments are different for African Americans than for others (John J. Heldrich, 2002).

The results of the research indicated commonality in workplace bias, barriers, and obstacles based on gender and race, which emerged from the narrative data of the participants in this study. Consistent with the literature, all 3 participants identified gender and race as significant barriers for African American women in corporate leadership. Several constructs of gender and racial bias were seen through the dialogue of the participants. A construct is a “mechanism by which advantaged and disadvantaged group members perceive and interpret interactions that appear to be based on their category membership rather than on their individual characteristics” (Taylor & Moghaddam, 1994, p. 159). These constructs lead to disadvantages for one group and advantages for others. The constructs that emerged were stereotyping, discrimination based on race, quotas, institutional racism, exclusion from formal networks, and lack of
promotional or advancement opportunities. Excerpts from the narratives provide descriptive accounts that these constructs exists in their experiences.

P3: “In my particular position I strongly feel that it was race.”

P3: “I felt that I was qualified…”

P2: “…when they do promote an African American female, they get two for one: they get an African American and they get a woman, so they fill both quotas.”

P1: “Men have an unspoken network that women don’t have.”

P2: “When she (African American woman) is assertive, they are accused of being aggressive…”

P2: “But anyway, between Vanderbilt and TSU, TSU nursing students were deemed “less than,” “less capable,” “less qualified,” “not as smart.”

P2: “To be a leader who graduated from that institution, you had to overcome more.”

P3: “I told her that it wasn’t the school, it was the teachers and students; and as long as you learned what you were capable and supposed to learn, it didn’t matter what school you went to.”

Inequities continue to exist that lead to dissimilar outcomes for different groups of people; and racial and gender disparities are ingrained in our systems and institutions.

There was also something very striking that appeared in this study. There was one participant who was a leader in a predominately female workplace environment; however, she experienced gender bias from both male and female staff who did not want to work under the leadership of a woman. The participant stated, “A man not wanting to be under the leadership of women is a huge issue; and then you have women who stereotype and don’t want to be under the leadership of a woman” (Participant 1). Varied
reasons have been reported as to why women prefer to work for men; including men are
less threatened and are less emotional (Forbes, 2012)

**Theme 2: Different expectations for women**

African Americans indicate they believe different organizational standards exist for them than for their White counterparts (Parker, 2005). As articulated by Bell (2002), African American women feel “the need to be twice as good … to get half as far” (p. 198). This perennial issue grows out of the belief that those of color must perform better and work harder in order to receive equal pay, recognition, and the promotional opportunities of their White counterparts. Consequently, African American women have yet a greater standard of performance imposed because of not only race but gender. This dual minority status often results in workplace inequities and biases associated with being an African American woman in today’s society. Excerpts from the narratives provide descriptive accounts different expectations for African American women in the workplace.

P3: “They basically allow you to assume the position, but they expect you to fail.”

P2: “Most women prepare themselves for leadership positions by making sure that they are over-qualified.”

P2: “Part of the barrier that you had to be able to overcome was feeling like you had to be the sharpest, the brightest, the best, because you were challenged on everything.”

**Theme 3: Lack of mentoring in the corporate arena**

Literature indicate “women are less likely to receive encouragement, be included in key networks, and receive formal job training than their male counterparts (Knoke & Ishio, 1998; Morrison & Von Glinow, 1990 as cited in Northouse, 2010, 0. 308). As a
result, they are less likely to engage in mentoring relationship on the job, which hamper their development and career success (Ensher & Murphy, 2005; Dreher & Cox, 1996). Women have reported difficulties in obtaining mentors, restricted access to potential mentors, unwillingness of mentors to enter into mentoring relationships with them, and concerns that others will misinterpret the mentoring relationship (Ragins & Cotton, 1991).

Mentoring serves career development functions by a) providing sponsorship, b) exposure, c) coaching, d) protections, and e) challenging assignments (Chao & Walz, 1992). Mentoring was associated with enhanced income, promotional possibilities, attracting and retention of women and minority professionals, reduces turnover, helps in dealing with organizational issues, helps with cultural assimilation, and provides consistent support for mentees (Crowe & Montgomery, n.d.).

Although mentoring relationships in the workplace has increased in the last few years, women and less skilled workers, among others, lacked mentoring opportunities (Broadbridge, 1999). The lack of mentors for women caused them to lag behind in connecting with decision makers that could potentially assist them in advancements in the workplace. The 3 participants revealed through their in-depth, personal interviews a lack of mentoring relationships in the workplace.

P2: “…I didn’t have a mentor, but I had many mentors who didn’t even know they were my mentors.”

P3: “I did not have one (mentor) in the corporate world…”

P1: “In the corporate world, I don’t remember having a mentor, per se.”
It is important to note that while each participant admittedly did not have formal mentoring relationship in the corporate world, 2 of the 3 participants discovered and engaged in informal mentoring through role modeling and emulating the behaviors of others.

**Theme 4: Obedience to the call**

Spirituality was very complex, ambiguous, has multiple definitions, and means different things to different people. However, regardless of which concept of spirituality was espoused, there seemed to be consensus that spirituality encompasses beliefs, values, and practices, that must be lived out by an individual with consistency to be considered spiritual (Gibbons, 1999). It is a means of integration of the self and of the world (Jacobson, 1995, as cited in Fairholm, 1997, p. 25); and Christian spirituality is an important cultural strength for African American women (Billingsley 1998; Hill, 1972); and they rely on it when they face challenges in their lives, even in the workplace.

The most important thing that gives people meaning and purpose in their work is “the ability to realize [their] full potential as a person” (Mitroff & Denton, 1999, p. 85). Moreover, people not only engage in work to realize their full potential, but they see work as a means to attain social value, (Pfeffer, 2005) and meaning and purpose.

Data collected during the interview process highlighted the significance of “obedience to the call” as a primary reason for leaving corporate leadership for spiritual pursuits. Although each participant had unique experiences on her journey to ministry, each indirectly cited or implied “obedience to the call” as important to her transition to ministry. Each participant cited different ages when her ministry journey began;
however, each spoke of the life-changing influence that obedience to the call had on her life.

Each participant spoke passionately about her call to the ministry and how her life would have been very different if she had not been obedient to “the call” of God. Each was candid in her expression of God as being the directing force in her life and that God called her to follow Him exclusively. Further, they decisively indicated they would not return to their previous vocations in corporate American with any enticements, including monetary. Excerpts from the narratives provided descriptive accounts that the influence of spirituality and obedience to “the call” had on their decision to leave corporate leadership for ministry.

P2: “My decision to leave [the corporate world] was out of love for and obedience to God.”

P1: “Spirituality had a great influence. I am committed—sold out to do what God tells me to do.”

P3: “I feel the same. I can just see God all in it. Even the time that I chose to leave the corporate world and the Lord said no. So I can just see it, and just letting God orchestrate what to do, when to do it, how to do it.”

Although each participant followed the call of God and transitioned from the corporate arena to ministry, something unique surfaced from the study. The participant who worked in the nursing field felt that her calling to ministry was a continuation of her ministry in nursing. The perceived continuity in her progression allowed her to view her job differently. She saw both careers as blended, but carried out through two distinct paths. This could be based on the level of spiritual engagement that was allowed within
her vocation. The participant stated, “In nursing, for me that was a call. To be able to be in people’s lives at different points along their journey was always precious, and I was always ministering. I was at St. Thomas hospital, which in itself saw itself as a ministry… So, it was just a transition. It wasn’t like I stopped one thing and started another. All of my experience that I had even in the corporate—how to treat people, how to talk to people, how to lead people—all of that transitioned right into the church… Then, I was a cardiac nurse and pastoring people on a physical heart level. And now, I pastor people on a spiritual heart level.”

**Theme 5: Experience of stressful/critical life events**

Stress to some was regarded as an external, environmental factor or a precipitating factor that brings about a response or reaction; and to others stress is an internal state that can manifest in a physical or psychological way (Brown & Harris, 1989). Selye (1956) regards the external approach to stress as “arbitrary” and that “the stressor effects depends not so much upon what we do or what happens to us, but on the way we take it” (as cited in Brown & Harris, 1989). However, life events can have a great impact on the lives of people.

Stressful life events have been defined as any set of circumstances, the advent of which requires or signals change in the basic life pattern of an individual (Holmes & Rahe, 1967), which can be the precursor to physiological and psychological distress. Stressful life events have also been referred to as critical life events. Critical life events were defined as

Major events that shape people’s lives. They can be positive events like receiving an unexpected promotion, having a child, or reading an important book; or they
can be negative events like being diagnosed with cancer, getting a negative year-end evaluation, or having a loved one to die (Northouse, 2010, p. 266).

Nonetheless, whichever end of the continuum the event falls, the life event “acts as a catalyst for change” (Northouse, 2010, p. 266).

The ability to successfully cope or having resiliency during stressful situations seems to avert prolonged negative effects of life changing events. Some people employ coping mechanism or they “possess a unique ability to maintain or regain high levels of well-being in the face of the most aversive life changes as, for example, the onset of cancer or the sudden death of a child” (Bulman & Wortman, 1977, p. 213). However, stress symptomology can persist in others for longer periods of time (Wirtz & Harrell, 1987). Nevertheless, individuals vary in their assessment of and response to life events (Redfield & Stone, 1979); and life events can be catalyst to long-term life changes.

Data collected during the interview process indicated the significance of stressful life events and critical life events on the lives of the participants. Two respondents experienced critical life events through a death of a mother, imprisonment of a spouse, death of a brother, and divorce. One respondent experienced stressful life events through job promotions, marriage, and birth of children. Following are excerpts from the narrative regarding experience of life events.

P1: “The death of my mother was a life event…my husband was sent to prison; and that was definitely a life event because I had to go back and in three days bring two children here.”

P3: “I was divorced, remarried and the death of a brother was all life events while I was working at my corporate job.”
Leaving Corporate America

P2: “While working in corporate, I was newlywed and had two children, which was a life event changer.”

Although each participant had unique life events to touch their lives, none resulted in transition from their jobs to other vocations. There was mention by one respondent of a “shut down” and being “bedridden” (Participant 1), but there was no mention of the influence of the life event on career choice. It was only when “obedience to the call” occurred that job transition actually took place.

Implications

Based on the study findings, there were several implications that pertain to African American women who opt out of corporate leadership for spiritual pursuits. First, the findings suggested an intersection of race and gender bias that undermine and devalue the contribution of African American women in the workplace despite educational attainment or position. Stereotyping and other prejudicial behaviors served to minimize the African American woman’s role in the workplace and hinder her opportunities for advancement. In today’s workplace environments gender bias is more subtle and less overt; however, “they are implicit preconceptions and discrimination, making them particularly potent and pernicious” (Northouse, 2010, p. 317). Therefore, overcoming these prejudicial behaviors can be achieved when there is an acknowledged existence of these often concealed behaviors. Second, mentoring relationships in the workplace were vital to career development; therefore African American women should have access to mentors for support and development. Third, there was the perception by African American women that they are held to a higher standard of expectation than their counterparts based on their dual minority status; therefore, the work culture should be
such that it promotes fairness and equity among staff regardless of gender or race.

Fourth, the influence of spirituality was significant in directing life-path and career choice; therefore, the merger of work practices and spirituality in organizations could render benefits for not only employees, but for the organization as well. Fifth, stressful life or critical life events may signal significant change in individual life patterns, but it does not necessarily necessitate change in vocation or career path. This was due in large part to the ability of individuals to employ coping strategies that allowed them to successfully manage change. Therefore, while workplace environments should be sensitive to the impact of life change on individuals in the workplace, this research does not suggest life events influence career path choices.

Recommendations for Further Studies

The results of this study provided a rich description of the experiences of African American women who opt out of corporate leadership for spiritual pursuits. Questions for further study were recommended:

1. Examine the phenomenon with African American women who are influenced by spirituality but choose to stay in corporate leadership.
2. Expand the research to include the experiences of African American women in other geographical regions of the United States.
3. Expand the research parameters to include other races and ethnicities.
4. Expand the research to examine the experience of African American men.
5. Examine organizations that have integrated spirituality in their work culture.
Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to examine the lived experiences of African American women who opt out of corporate leadership for spiritual pursuits. The 3 participants in this study offered unique and persuasive accounts of the perceptions of their experiences in corporate America as African American women. The study confirmed many of the findings presented in the literature review regarding African American women’s experience in corporate leadership. Collectively, the respondents presented a surfeit of insight related to the complexity of the duality of gender and race on the workplace experience. Each participant discussed racial and gender discrimination and stereotyping in the workplace, which was demonstrated through exclusion, diminished promotional opportunities, and systemic racism.

Although workplace disillusionment and dissatisfaction (Mallon & Cohen, 2001), “push-pull” factors (Ludden, 2010), and balancing competing interest played a role in many women opting-out of corporate America, these influences were not seen as causes for the 3 women in this study to opt-out. The research found that the influence of spirituality and obedience to the call were the most significant factors in determining why the respondents transitioned out of the corporate leadership to spiritual endeavors, expressly when viewed through Black feminist standpoint.

From the respondents’ standpoint, obedience to the call prodigiously determined their career shift. While there were stressors that occurred within and outside the workplace environment, nothing impacted the respondents’ career journey in the same fashion as did obedience to the call of God on their lives, which supports the assertion that Christian spirituality was of great importance in the lives of African American
women (Billingsley, 1978; Hill, 1972). Moreover, each respondent offered that they would not return to corporate America under any circumstance. Therefore, the influence of spirituality and obedience to the call of God is significant in directing life-path and career choice. Consequently, based on data ascertained from this study, there is merit in convergence of work related practices and spirituality in organizations for employee retention and employee self-actualization.
References


Leaving Corporate America


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Retrieved on November 12, 2012 from www.ejbrm.com


APPENDIX A

LETTER TO INTERDENOMINATIONAL MINISTERS’ FELLOWSHIP REQUESTING PARTICIPANTS

Good Morning (Name Omitted),

I received your email address from Melva Black on this morning.

I am a student at Tennessee Temple University completing my Doctor of Philosophy in Leadership. I am conducting a research study entitled “From the Corporate Office to Ministry: A Phenomenological Case Study of African American Women who Leave Corporate Leadership for Spiritual Pursuits.” The purpose of this study is to explore and capture the experiences, personal journeys, insights and in-depth reflections of African American women who after experiencing success in corporate America opt-out to pursue spiritual endeavors. As part of the study, I will examine the concept of critical life events and its impact on life change decisions.

I am seeking your assistance in identifying six African American women who meet the aforementioned criteria and are between the ages of 40 to 64 to participate in this research study. Any guidance you can provide to direct me to the best way to obtain the study participants is appreciated. I believe this study will further contribute to the wealth of studies on gender and leadership. My contact information is below. Thanks in advance for your support.

Sincerely,

Fonda M. Upshaw Harris
Doctoral Candidate
Tennessee Temple University
Good afternoon (Name Omitted),

I hope you enjoyed a fruitful weekend. This is a follow-up to my email on Friday. As mentioned, I received your name through Dr. Judy Cummings as an avenue to identify participants for a research study.

I am a student at Tennessee Temple University completing my Doctor of Philosophy in Leadership. I am conducting a research study entitled “From the Corporate Office to Ministry: A Phenomenological Case Study of African American Women who Leave Corporate Leadership for Spiritual Pursuits.” The purpose of this study is to explore and capture the experiences, personal journeys, insights and in-depth reflections of African American women who after experiencing success in corporate America opt-out to pursue spiritual endeavors. As part of the study, I will examine the concept of critical life events and its impact on life change decisions.

I am seeking to identify six African American women who meet the aforementioned criteria and are between the ages of 40 to 65 to participate in this research study. If you meet these criteria and are willing to participate, or know of others who do, I would appreciate your assistance in identifying and securing their commitment to this research.

The interview process will be conducted in a focus group format. I have two tentative dates for the interview: October 13, 2012 at 11:00 and October 20, 2012 at 11:00. Location to be determined. Lunch will be provided.

I am on a very stringent timeline to complete my dissertation. Any assistance you can provide is greatly appreciated. Below is my contact information. Thank you in advance for your support and I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Fonda M. Upshaw Harris
Doctoral Candidate
Tennessee Temple University
APPENDIX C

LETTER REQUESTING USE OF DAILY SPIRITUAL EXPERIENCE SCALE

Daily Spiritual Experience Scale
© Lynn Underwood
Registration Form

Name: Fonda M. Harris

In affixing your name to this form you agree to include:

And you agree to keep Lynn Underwood informed of results from your work and publications and presentations that come from your work using the scale. lynnunderwood@researchintegration.org

Your email address: fonda.harris@nashville.gov

Title and Address: PhD Candidate – (address removed)

College/University/Other Organization: Tennessee Temple University, Chattanooga, TN

Date: 10/31/2011

Reason for use of the scale and/or study description: Dissertation for PhD

Work supported by a Research Grant or other support? Y/N - No

Is your work for profit? Y/N - No

How did you find the scale and my contact information? Internet search

Which language version of the scale are you using? English

How many individuals do you expect to administer the scale to? 5

Why have you picked this particular scale?

The DSES is an brief survey that will support my research study and eliminate researcher bias; and it is a validated instrument to measure one’s religious well-being.
APPENDIX D

LETTER TO PARTICIPANTS

Tennessee Temple University
1815 Union Avenue
Chattanooga, TN 37404

November 5, 2012

Dear Participant:

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study. As you know I am conducting a research study as partial fulfillment of the requirements for completion of a Doctorate of Philosophy Degree in Leadership at Tennessee Temple University. The study is entitled “From the Corporate Office to Ministry: A Phenomenological Case Study of African American Women who Leave Corporate Leadership for Spiritual Pursuits.” The purpose of this study is to explore and capture the experiences, personal journeys, insights and in-depth reflections of African American women who after experiencing success in the corporate arena opt-out to pursue spiritual/ministry endeavors. As part of the study, I will examine the concept of critical life events and its impact on life change decisions.

While I know this is a busy time of the year, I would appreciate your taking a few moments to complete the enclosed 10-item questionnaire and spiritual experience assessment. The questionnaire will provide demographic information for the research and
the spiritual assessment will help answer important questions about your spiritual experiences and relationship with and awareness of the Divine or transcendent. The questionnaires will take approximately 15 to 30 minutes to answer collectively.

Participation in this research is anonymous and voluntary. You may decline to participate without penalty or terminate at any time. Your responses will be used for research purposes only and are strictly confidential.

If you have any questions regarding this research or the questionnaires, please feel free to contact me at (615) XXX-XXXX or (615) XXX-XXXX. Thank you so much for your participation.

Sincerely,

Fonda M. Harris,
Doctorate of Philosophy Candidate
November 12, 2012

Re: Informed Consent

Dear Research Participant,

My name is Fonda M. Harris and I am a student at Tennessee Temple University completing a Doctor of Philosophy in Leadership degree. I am conducting a research study entitled — From the Corporate Office to Ministry: A Phenomenological Case Study of African American Women who Leave Corporate Leadership Positions for Spiritual Pursuits. The purpose of the research is to explore the lived experiences, personal journeys, insights and in-depth reflections of African American women who after experiencing leadership success in corporate America opt-out to pursue spiritual endeavors. The study could provide insight on perceived factors that contribute to African American women solely pursing ministry as their vocation after experiencing leadership success in the corporate world.

Your participation will involve a voluntary audio-recorded, semi-structured interview which will last approximately 60 minutes. Your participation in this study is
voluntary. If you choose not to participate or to withdraw from the study at any time, you can do so without penalty. The results of the research study may be published, but your identity will remain confidential and your name will not be disclosed to any outside party.

In this research no foreseeable risks exist for you as a participant. Although there may be no direct benefit to you, a possible benefit of your participation is that the findings from the study might add information to the body of knowledge on factors relating to African American women in leadership and the influence of spirituality and life events on career path choices.

If you have any questions concerning the research study, you can contact me at (615) XXX-XXXX.

As a participant in this study, you should understand the following:

1. You may decline to participate or withdraw from participation at any time without consequences.
2. Your identity will be kept confidential.
3. The researcher has thoroughly explained the parameters of the research study and all of your questions and concerns have been addressed.
4. If the interviews are recorded, you must grant permission for the researcher, to digitally record the interview. You understand that the information from the recorded interviews may be transcribed. The researcher will structure a coding process to assure that anonymity of your name is protected.
5. Data will be stored in a secure and locked area. The data will be held for a period of three years, and then destroyed.
6. The research results will be used for publication.

By signing this form you acknowledge that you understand the nature of the study, the potential risks to you as a participant, and the means by which your identity will be kept confidential. Your signature on this form also indicates that you are 18 years old or older and that you give your permission to voluntarily serve as a participant in the study described.

Signature of the interviewee _____________________________ Date _____________

Signature of the researcher _____________________________ Date _____________
APPENDIX F

CONFIRMATION OF RECEIPT OF INFORMED CONSENT

November 12, 2012

Consent to Participate:

I, ______________________, have received a copy of the Informed Consent Form. I understand and agree that my participation in the dissertation research conducted by Fonda M. Harris is completely voluntary and that I may withdraw from the interview at any time. By signing this form, I acknowledge that I understand the nature of the study, the potential risks to me as a participant, and the means by which the researcher will keep my identity confidential. My signature on this form also indicates that I am 18 years old or older and that I agree to serve voluntarily as a participant in the study described.

Signature of the participant ___________________________ Date: _____________

Signature of the researcher: ___________________________ Date: _____________
APPENDIX G

PARTICIPANT QUESTIONNAIRE

Name: __________________________________________

1. What is your age?
   _____40 - 54 yrs. old ___ 55 - 59 yrs. old _____ 60-65 yrs.

2. What is your gender?
   _____ Male _____ Female

3. What is your educational level?
   _____High School graduate_____Some College_____4 year college
degree_____Graduate Degree
   _____Post Graduate Degree

4. How long have you considered yourself a saved Believer?
   _____ 0-3 yrs. _____ 4-6 yrs. _____ 7-9 yrs. _____ 10-15 yrs. _____15-20 yrs. _____>20 yrs.

5. How long have you been in ministry?
   _____ 0-3 yrs. _____ 4-6 yrs. _____ 7-9 yrs. _____ 10-15 yrs. _____15-20 yrs.

6. Do you hold a senior pastor position?
   _____ Yes _____ No

7. If you hold a senior pastor position, how long have you been in that position?
   _____ 0-3 yrs. _____ 4-6 yrs. _____ 7-9 yrs. _____ >10 yrs.

8. What position do you currently hold in ministry?
   _______________________________________________________________
9. Did you hold a leadership position (manager, supervisor, director, assistant vice president, president, vice president, or equivalent positions) prior to your fulltime commitment to spiritual endeavors/ministry?

_____ Yes _____ No

10. If yes, what was your leadership position title?
PARTICIPANT QUESTIONNAIRE CONTINUED

DAILY SPIRITUAL EXPERIENCE SCALE

“The list that follows includes items you may or may not experience. Please consider how often you directly have this experience, and try to disregard whether you feel you should or should not have these experiences. A number of items use the word ‘God.’ If this word is not a comfortable one for you, please substitute another word which calls to mind the divine or holy for you.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Many times a day</th>
<th>Every day</th>
<th>Most days</th>
<th>Some days</th>
<th>Once in a while</th>
<th>Never or almost never</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I feel God's presence.</td>
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<td>I experience a connection to all of life.</td>
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<td>During worship, or at other times when connecting with God, I feel joy which lifts me out of my daily concerns.</td>
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<td>I find strength in my religion or spirituality.</td>
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<td>I feel deep inner peace or harmony.</td>
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<td>I ask for God's help in the midst of daily activities.</td>
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<td>I feel God's love for me, directly.</td>
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<td>I feel God's love for me through others.</td>
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<td>I am spiritually touched by the beauty of creation.</td>
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<td>I feel thankful for my blessings.</td>
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<td>I feel a selfless caring for others.</td>
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<td>I accept others even when they do things I think are wrong.</td>
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<td>I desire to be closer to God in union with the divine.</td>
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In general, how close do you feel to God?

Not at all  Somewhat close  Very close  As close as possible

**Moderator/Facilitator Interview Guide Introduction**

**Introduction**
Good Evening. My name is Fonda Harris and I’ll be your facilitator today for this very important discussion. This session will provide important information that is relevant to my research study, which will look at the experiences, personal journeys, insights and in-depth reflections of African American women who after experiencing leadership success in the corporate arena opt-out to pursue spiritual endeavors. My role as the facilitator is to direct the content and flow of the discussion and to make sure that we cover the interview questions.

**Introduction of Assistants:**
I would like to introduce (NAME REMOVED) and (NAME REMOVED) who will be observing and taking notes during this discussion.

**Objectives and Agenda:**
Our purpose today is to hear the lived experiences of African American women who transition from corporate leadership positions to pursue ministry endeavors.

Our primary objective is to examine the following research questions from the engagement of conversation of the participants:

1. What are perceived factors that contribute to African American women pursuing ministry after having leadership success in the corporate arena?

2. How does spirituality influence career path choices?

3. How do life events and critical life events influence life/career path choices?

**Ground Rules**
If you haven’t already done so, please read through the consent form and print and sign your name on the last page. We would like for you to sign two copies, one for you to keep and one for us to keep. If you have any questions, please ask. Please also turn in the questionnaire you were asked to complete and bring in with you.

Before we begin I would like to go over a few basic ground rules for our discussion.

- This session is being audio taped and maybe videotaped which allows me, as the facilitator and researcher, to focus on you, rather than trying to jot down specific details about the discussion. Please speak in a voice as loud as mine, so that the microphone can pick it up.
I will prepare a research report which reference information ascertained during this interview process. The report will not make reference to any one of you by name. By assuring your anonymity, I hope that you will speak openly and candidly about today’s topic.

I encourage you to share your opinions with the group, but please avoid side conversations while other participants are speaking.

And remember, there aren’t any right or wrong answers, so feel free to offer both positive and negative viewpoints. We expect that you will have differing points of view, so feel free to share your point of view even if it differs from what others have said.

Please respect the viewpoints of others even when their opinions may differ from yours.

We’re interested in hearing from each of you, so if you are talking a lot, I may ask you to give others a chance to speak. If you aren’t speaking much, I may call on you. We just want to make sure all of you have a chance to share your ideas.

Lastly, everything we say in here is confidential. Please don’t share anything you hear in this group with others outside this group.

**Self-introductions-Icebreaker**

I would like to quickly go around the group and give each person a moment to introduce him or herself.
APPENDIX I

SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Theoretical framework: Afrocentric feminist epistemology:

It supports a belief that the way in which African American women know and understand themselves and the world around them should be examined through the lens of four criteria – concrete personal experiences, an emphasis on dialogue, an ethic of caring, and an ethic of personal accountability.

RQ: What are perceived factors that contribute to African American women pursuing spiritual endeavors/purpose/meaning/ministry after having leadership success in the corporate arena?

1. As an African American woman, what specifically influenced you to pursue a corporate career?

2. What level of leadership did you achieve in the corporate environment?

3. In your experience, what are the barriers or challenges (if any) for African American women leaders in the corporate world? For each, why do you think these barriers or challenges exist?

4. What is your perception of the African American woman leadership experience in the corporate arena?

5. What skills do you believe are necessary for African American women to obtain leadership positions in the corporate arena?

6. What leadership qualities are most prominent in top-level African American women leaders?

7. Reflecting on your leadership in the corporate arena, what do you consider an instance of stereotyping?

8. What reasons influenced your decision to leave the corporate world to solely pursue spiritual/ministry endeavors?

9. Describe your attitudes about your work, comparing and contrasting the time you were in the corporate world with your current situation in spiritual/ministry work.
10. What factors or reasons (if any) would influence you to make the decision to return to the corporate environment?

11. Did you have a mentor in the corporate environment and do you have a mentor now in your current vocation? Is that mentor male or female? Is that mentor African American?

12. What influence did/does each have on your life?

RQ: How do life events and critical life events influence life/career path choices?

13. Many experience significant life changes periodically throughout their life. Such events or changes, distinguishable from chronic difficulties, are termed life events. These life events could include marriage, pregnancy, retirement, change in health, change in financial state, change in line of work, and personal achievement. Whether the events are positive or negative, an accumulation of life events over a short period of time can produce stress and vulnerability. Describe any life events (if any) that influenced your level of contentment on your job? Include life events that had both negative and positive impact on your level of contentment.

14. Many experience critical life events or change in their lives. These events are defined as life events that bring about a marked psychological or psychosocial change, such as chronic illness or death of a spouse. Describe any critical life events (if any) that affected your level of contentment on your job? Include critical life events that had both negative and positive impact on your level of contentment.

RQ: How does spirituality influence career path choices?

15. As an African American woman, what influence did spirituality have on your decision to leave the corporate arena?

16. Can you recall when and if balancing career and spirituality/ministry became challenging? Describe the situation.

17. What was most influential in affecting your decision to leave the corporate world to pursue ministry?

18. What has been most challenging about making the transition from the corporate arena to ministry?

19. What are the most important qualities or strengths you bring to ministry?

20. How would your life be different if you had not left the corporate arena to pursue ministry?
21. What are your recommendations for African American women who are trying to balance careers and ministry?
### APPENDIX J

#### CHARACTERISTICS OF PARTICIPANTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>P1</th>
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### APPENDIX K

**PARTICIPANT RESULTS OF DAILY SPIRITUAL EXPERIENCE SCALE**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>P1</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Q1. I feel God’s presence</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
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<tr>
<td>Q2. I feel a connection to all of life.</td>
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<td>Q3. During worship, or at other times when connecting with God, I feel joy which lifts me out of my daily concerns.</td>
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<td>Q4. I find strength in my religion or spirituality.</td>
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<td>Q5. I find comfort in my religion or spirituality.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Q6. I feel deep inner peace or harmony.</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
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<tr>
<td>Q7. I ask for God’s help in the midst of daily activities.</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
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<tr>
<td>Q8. I feel guided by God in the midst of daily activities.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Q9. I feel God’s love for me directly.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Q10. I feel God’s love for me through others.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Q11. I am spiritually touched by the beauty of creation.</td>
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<td>4</td>
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<td>Q12. I feel thankful for my blessings.</td>
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<td>Q13. I feel a selfless caring for others.</td>
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<td>Q14. I accept others even when they do things I think are wrong.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Q15. I desire to be closer to God or in union with the divine.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Q16. In general, how close do you feel to God?</strong></td>
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<td>6</td>
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**Average** 5.25  4.50  5.81

*Scale Values: 1=Never or almost never; 2=Once in a While; 3=Some days; 4=Most days; 5=Every day; 6=Many times a day

**Question 16 had only 4 responses, and therefore only 4 scale values: 1=Not at all; 2.66=Somewhat close; 4.32=Very close; 5.98=As close as possible.*