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African American Women's Experience With Invisibility and Hypervisibility in the Workplace: Does it Matter to Career Advancement?

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African American Women's Experience With Invisibility and Hypervisibility in the Workplace:

Does it Matter to Career Advancement?

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction

of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Education in Organizational Leadership

by

Elisha R. Peters

July 2024

Dedication

My mother, Yvonne Dunlap, a God fearing woman of noble character who taught me the importance and value of putting God first, genuineness, and using my gifts to make a differene in the world. This is dedicated to a myriad of African American/Black women who are leaders or aspire to be leaders. May you find your superpower in your authenticity. May you realize your worth and know that you are more than enough. May you continue to shatter glass ceilings and pave the way for future generations. May the joy of life inspire you to pursue your dreams and walk in your purpose.

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Abstract

Black women continue to be underrepresented in senior leadership positions in the workplace although they are the most educated in the workplace. This study explores the lived experience of African American women who work for the federal sector and their career advancement into leadership and managerial positions. A qualitative method was used, and the participants consisted of Black women who worked for the federal sector who had either promoted to a leadership position within the last 3 to 5 years or aspired to be in a leadership position. Interviews were conducted via Zoom, and in vivo coding was used to analyze the data. The study revealed that Black women have benefited from being both hypervisible and invisible in the workplace to advance their careers in the federal sector. Regardless of if it was through diversity and inclusion initiatives or simply not bringing attention to oneself, there was a positive outcome for them. However, the study also revealed the disparate treatment of Black women who work for the federal sector and their experiences. This research sheds light on how African American women show up in the workplace and how maximizing their social identity or minimizing their social identity can affect their career trajectory. The findings of this study support existing research and could inform future studies to delve deeper into the psychological effects of identity shifting and what solutions companies can put in place to support authenticity and Black women who work for the federal sector.

Keywords: hypervisibility, invisibility, intersectionality, career advancement, Black/African American

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Chapter 1: Introduction

The career progression for African American women continues to fall behind other groups by a substantial margin. According to the Institute for Women's Policy Research, African American women will not receive equal pay to White men until 2119. In contrast, White women will achieve equal pay compared to White males by 2055 (Thompson, 2019). More than 50% of African American women have earned a graduate degree and have stayed in the workforce longer than other women, yet they receive 61 cents to the dollar compared to White men (Thompson, 2019). This difference may be due to African American women being subjected to gender and racial bias in predominately White organizations (Hughes & Dodge, 1997).

African American women are underrepresented in leadership positions. Their career advancement has been stifled and their voices silenced in the workplace due to their race and gender (Holder et al., 2015). African American women are afforded less career guidance fewer opportunities to supervise people and lead projects (Lean In, 2020). Data from Lean In and McKinsey and Company's annual Women in Corporate America 2020 revealed that African American women who seek promotion at the same rate as their White male counterparts are only 57% likely to be promoted for a managerial position. Thus, the research is clear that African American women's unique characteristics are afforded fewer opportunities for career advancement.

According to Khosrovani and Ward (2011), "discrimination and inequality still exist in today's organizations, which is more covert, ambiguous, and hard to prove" (p. 135). Studies have revealed that minorities continue to experience workplace challenges like discrimination, covert insults, and invalidation in their day-to-day interactions (Siegel et al., 2015). Extensive research has shown that African Americans, as a racial minority group, acquire fewer

opportunities and career benefits in the workplace (Khosrovani & Ward, 2011). Researchers have explored the underrepresentation of minorities by showing the inequalities with the promotion system (Obenauer & Langer, 2019). Compared with their White coworkers, over time, minorities' performance ratings decline. Eventually, they hit an occupational glass ceiling (Obenauer & Langer, 2019). As is evident from the statistics—of the CEOs of the largest 500 companies, less than 5% are minorities (Obenauer & Langer, 2019). The first African American CEO, Franklin Raines of the Federal National Mortgage Association, was not selected or appointed until 1999 (Obenauer & Langer, 2019). In 2016, women filled 20 CEO positions at Fortune 500 companies, and only one of those positions was occupied by an African American woman (McDowell & Carter-Francique, 2017).

Moreover, women are now the majority (50.4%) of the U.S. workforce, and those of color (e.g., Hispanic or Latinas, Black, and Asian) comprise 40% of all women (Law, 2020; Sims & Carter, 2022). Yet, in 2019 women of color represented only 12% of managers, 9% of senior managers/ directors, 7% of VPs, 5% of SVPS, and 4% of C-suite positions (Sims & Carter, 2022). Despite the increase of women in leadership positions, African American women represent only 1.1% of corporate officers in Fortune 500 (Brown, 2004).

The federal sector is America's largest employer. When one delves deeper into the area of inclusion, they find that women from underrepresented social groups receive fewer levels of fairness, openness, and support in the federal sector but increased levels of empowerment and cooperation (Nelson & Piatak, 2021). This highlights the importance of the role intersectionality plays, particularly when it pertains to issues of inclusion, equity, and diversity in the workplace (Nelson & Piatak, 2021). The total civilian federal workforce comprises 18.4% African American, 8.6% Hispanic, 5.8% Asian, and 63.6% White. Black men make up 7.7% of the

population, whereas Black women make up 10.6% of the federal workforce (U.S. Department of Labor, 2020; U.S. OPM, 2017). Compared to the civilian force, Black men and women exceed their representation in the federal workforce. However, data received from the U.S. Office of Personnel Management Federal Equal Opportunity Recruitment Program Report to Congress in 2016 showed that African Americans had the most significant disparity among minorities who worked for the federal sector. The information revealed that Asians rose in senior executive positions from 3.2% to 3.5%, Hispanics increased from 4.4% to 4.6%, but African Americans dropped from 11.4% to 11% (U.S. OPM, 2017).

Statement of the Problem

African American women are underrepresented in leadership positions in today's workforce (Baskerville Watkins et al., 2019). As organizational demographics are changing to promote more diversity in the workplace, Black women are not rising to the senior management and executive-level positions at the rate of their peers (Baskerville Watkins et al., 2019; Kim & O'Brien, 2018). Researchers found that prejudice, marginalization, microaggression, and discriminatory behaviors all impact African American women's upward mobility into senior and executive leadership positions (Dickens & Chavez, 2017; Holder et al., 2015; Lewis et al., 2016; Mondisa, 2018).

African American women who do reach leadership status may be anomalies in their predominately White organizations and experience tokenism as they choose between trying to limit their visibility, which may render them invisible in the workplace (Kanter, 1977; McCluney & Rabelo, 2019). Conversely, women may choose to amplify their distinguishing characteristics, thus becoming hypervisible. Therefore, African American women leaders may find themselves

in a hypervisibility and invisibility conundrum (Dickens et al., 2019; McCluney & Rabelo, 2019; Roberts et al., 2019; Sims & Carter, 2022).

Furthermore, African American women who are hypervisible in the workplace may seek to capitalize on their token status by drawing attention to their culturally distinctive characteristics and the unique value they bring to their organization (Dickens et al., 2019; Roberts et al., 2019; Sims & Carter, 2022). Whether they are hypervisible or invisible, African American women feel vulnerable and unguarded in the work environment (Dickens et al., 2019). The problem is the lack of representation of African American women in leadership positions. There is a need to understand the significant role that invisibility or hypervisibility plays in their career advancement to leadership and managerial positions and whether those who are hypervisible receive more leadership opportunities and promotions than those who are invisible. This study will help us better understand African American women's workplace experiences and the relationship between hypervisibility, invisibility, and their impact on their advancement into leadership positions.

Purpose of the Study

The lack of significant representation of African American women in leadership positions in the federal government diminishes what it means for these organizations to promote diversity, inclusion, and equality (Zeller, 2003). The purpose of this qualitative study was to understand the lived experience of African American women who work for the federal sector and the role invisibility and hypervisibility play in their career progression to leadership positions.

My goal was to interview African American women who worked for the federal sector who had been promoted to a leadership position within the last 5 years. My qualitative research answered the question: Do African American women who are hypervisible have more leadership

development opportunities (e.g., mentoring, job shadowing, advanced training, leadership development program, etc.) than African American women who are invisible? This research will contribute to the discipline of education in organizational leadership and gaps in leadership opportunities for Black women by highlighting the disparities that can drive conflict in the workplace and also promoting workplace culture through collaboration, inclusivity and resiliency (Abilene Christian University, 2022).

Research Questions

RQ1: What is the experience of an African American woman who works for the federal sector?

RQ2: How do African American women describe mentorship, supervisory support, and leadership development opportunities as an employee of the federal sector?

RQ3: What role do hypervisibility and invisibility play on career advancement for African America women who work for the federal sector?

Definition of Key Terms

Black/African American. Having origins from Africa (U.S. Census Bureau, 2021). This term is used interchangeably throughout this research paper and satisfy women who identify as both.

Career advancement. The upward trajectory into a leadership or supervisory position in the workplace.

Hypervisibility. Being visible in the workplace and not assimilating to the majority group (Settles et al., 2019).

Intersectionality. When class, gender and race intersect (Merriam-Webster, 2021).

Invisibility. When a person is not valued or fully recognized (Settles et al., 2019),

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The purpose of this chapter is to provide an understanding of the literature search methods, theoretical foundation, and literature review as it relates to the research question: Do African American women who are hypervisible have more leadership development opportunities (e.g., mentoring, job shadowing, advanced training, leadership development program, etc.) to advance in their career and be selected for a leadership position than African American women who are invisible? The literature review will also provide insight into understanding Black women's ascension into leadership roles and positions.

Literature Search Methods

A literature search is when the researcher gathers, documents and catalogues information that will ensure salient works and enrich the topic (Machi & McEvoy, 2016). There are three tools to the literature search (Machi & McEvoy, 2016). These tools are data mapping, scanning, and skimming (Machi & McEvoy, 2016). Mapping organizes the skimming results and helps put the story together, building a core idea for the topic (Machi & McEvoy, 2016). Scanning is an organized search of the topic using the library, periodicals, encyclopedia, and online databases (Machi & McEvoy, 2016). Lastly, skimming is a perusal of the data to identify pertinent ideas and its contributions to the research (Machi & McEvoy, 2016).

I used multiple sources to find information on my research topic, such as the Abilene Christian University Brown Library, ProQuest, EBSCO, Business Source Complete and Science Direct. The keywords I looked up during my searches were the following: *African American women in the federal sector*, *invisibility*, *hypervisibility*, *diversity in the federal sector*, *leadership role progression for African American women*, *minority civil service employees*, *minorities in the federal sector*, *Kanter's theory of tokenism*, *intersectionality*, *African American general schedule*

employees, *identity negotiation theory*, *Black women and leadership roles*, and *the underrepresentation of Black women in leadership positions*. I used ProQuest to review dissertation topics similar to mine to help find additional references not discovered while researching my subject in the databases.

Lastly, I reviewed over 50 references and received articles from published work and those I networked with who thought the information would be relevant to my research topic. The information I found was a good starting point that lead to other research that helped me decide on the relevance, issues and significance related to my study (Machi & McEvoy, 2016).

Theoretical Framework Discussion

The theoretical framework that will inform my study is intersectionality. Intersectionality theory is appropriate for my study because Black women are discriminated against and treated differently in the workplace due to their gender, race and cultural identity (Crenshaw, 2013). The theory used for my theoretical framework have been applied in studies that highlight African American women, visibility, hypervisibility, leadership advancement and development and will help me explore the experiences of African American women who work for the federal sector and how they used invisibility or hypervisibility to advance to leadership positions (Crenshaw, 2013; Dickens & Chavez, 2017; Taylor et al., 2018).

Intersectionality challenges social inequality (Hill Collins, 2012). Crenshaw (2013) originated the theory of intersectionality and advanced that African American women have one intersectional identity that comprises multiple subordinate identities of race and gender. According to Hernandez et al. (2015), the combination of race and gender produces a particular identity for African American women, who experience oppression and discrimination. As these identities intersect, they may form an interactive barrier of inequalities and disparities (Smith et

al., 2019). Intersectionality theory explores that those who embody multiple diverse identity groups have perceptions and lived experiences that are different than those with only one salient identity group for example, race, gender or class (Biernat & Sesko, 2013). In addition to revealing the different realities experienced by those with multiple marginalized identities, intersectional theory investigates why and how some people are disadvantaged or marginalized (McDowell & Carter-Francique, 2017). A critical theory, intersectionality responds to the failure of legacy theoretical paradigms to address the unique circumstances in which those with intersectional identities may be subjected (Coles & Pasek, 2020).

Critical paradigm is a belief system that focuses on topics such as African American studies and women's studies, which emphasizes social creations confronted with power-rich environments that oppress meaningful conflict (Kim, 2018; Leavy, 2017). Intersectionality helps to identify systemic barriers and processes in place that contribute to the oppression of Black women (Coles & Pasek, 2020). Black women experiences are based upon systemic societal inequalities and these inequalities are unique to being a woman and Black (Coles & Pasek, 2020). Intersectionality theory seeks to understand why some people are disadvantaged or marginalized within an institution based on their race, gender, and other social identities (McDowell & Carter-Francique, 2017). It also examines dominant logics and social institutions in regard to the failure to address the uniqueness of African American women (Coles & Pasek, 2020).

African American women who live at the intersection of genderism and racism experience specific forms of oppression that are individual, institutional and cultural not realized when the system only recognizes one form of oppression at a time (Coles & Pasek, 2020). Intersectionality theory suggests that people's perceptions and lived experiences from diverse

identity groups are different because of their race or gender (Biernat & Sesko, 2013). African American women have multiple identities such as gender, race, and class that intersect with each other. These subordinate identities are a combination of race and gender. Smith et al. (2019) showed that these identities create an interactive barrier of inequalities and disparities.

Intersectionality is an excellent illustration of how certain groups of people encounter the interconnection of oppression and African American women are under a significant amount of pressure to change how they speak, dress, wear their hair, become more sociable, and less ethnic (Kramer, 2020; Shin et al., 2017). Studies show that as an intersectional minority, African American executive women's workplace experiences are qualitatively different from African American men and White women (Dickens et al., 2019; Smith et al., 2019). Intersectionality provides a critical viewpoint for possibly expanding a person's understanding of leadership (the concept of leadership and how one enacts it in the organization) in the workplace and also spotlight challenges to leadership opportunities and experiences (Breslin et al., 2017). This understanding from leadership (i.e., leadership meaning people who are in management or leadership roles in the organization) will help not to minimize or overlook the voices of marginalized groups and reveal social inequalities in the workplace (Bowleg, 2012; Gopaldas, 2013). An increasing number of intersectional research has improved our knowledge of promotions, gaps, and economic inequality (Bloch et al., 2020; Dickens et al., 2019; Williams et al., 2020).

Intersectionality was used to frame this study which aimed to explore the career experiences of African American women in the workplace who are in leadership roles. Intersectionality has been used to successfully study African American women in these fields of inquiry – in/visibility (Bloch et al., 2020; Dickens et al., 2019; Williams et al., 2020) and career

progression (Bloch et al., 2020; Dickens et al., 2019; Williams et al., 2020). These studies have described, explored the mechanisms, and made recommendations to address the experiences of those with intersection identities. Thus, support has been found for the value of using intersectionality to study African American women in both theory and practice.

Literature Review

Black women throughout history refined their ideas and understandings about being an African American woman in a society that historically denied them as a person (Hill Collins, 2012). The viewpoint of Black women has placed less emphasis on individual experiences within socially constructed groups than on the social conditions that construct them (Davis & Maldonado, 2015). Sex and race have been constant for Black women because they experience the intersectionality of race, gender and class that has compounded their oppression (Brown et al., 2013). Discrimination in organizations affect Black women's climb to leadership positions (Restifo et al., 2013). African American women experience more discrimination, when they are trying to advance in their careers into a leadership role (Restifo et al., 2013).

This literature review will give a review of secondary information and research that already exists regarding Black women, hypervisibility, invisibility and the impact it has on their career advancement within a company. Career advancement can be defined as obtaining a leadership position in an organization, training opportunities that will help with ascension and upward mobility and experience to hone skills. The theories I discussed informed my perspective of my literature on the following topics: civil rights, tokenism, identity negotiation theory, hypervisibility, invisibility, self-efficacy theory, stereotypical workplace images of Black women, leadership role progression for African American women, supervisory support, and the federal sector.

Civil Rights

The civil rights movement played an integral role in establishing law that would forbid employers from discriminating against employees based on their race, color, gender, national origin and religion (Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, 2021; Nelson & Piatak, 2021). Although this law protects members of a protected class, it does not address intersectionality or the apex of discriminatory behaviors Black women face who represent multiple categories (Nelson & Piatak, 2021). More specifically, Black women face the dichotomy of race and gender (Nelson & Piatak, 2021).

Tokenism

Employees that represent their respective racial or gender group are known as tokens and the patterns of behaviors specific to those individuals are known as tokenism (Nielsen & Madsen, 2019). Kanter defined token as a group that represents less than 15% of a work group (Stichman et al., 2010). The group that represents 85% of the work group are labeled the dominants (Stichman et al., 2010). Women are impacted by tokenism because of their low status, in particular when they are employed in nontraditional jobs (Settles et al., 2019). Kanter explored the experiences of women who worked in industrial supply corporations in 1977 (Stichman et al., 2010). Stichman et al. (2010) concluded that "tokens" or people who were a part of a "token" group were more than likely to have negative experiences in the workplace due to the low representation of their group.

Kanter's study revealed that underrepresented groups are typically prone to three tendencies: assimilation, visibility, and contrast (Stichman et al., 2010). Assimilation occurs when the token's characteristics are misinterpreted to fit a stereotype the dominant group deems to be appropriate for them (Stichman et al., 2010). The assimilation process can hinder

opportunities for advancement in the organization (Stichman et al., 2010). Visibility is when there are apparent differences between the group members, placing high visibility on the token. During this process, the token may feel they have to work twice as hard as their peers to prove themselves (Stichman et al., 2010). This is because of a phenomenon known as contrast.

Contrast happens when the dominant groups magnify the differences between them and the token person. The aftereffect of contrast is the feeling of being polarized and isolated from the group (Stichman et al., 2010). African American women are unique in how tokenism impacts their career advancement, and although Black women and Black men both occupy token groups, coaching and sponsorship is more attainable to Black men than Black women (Lewis, 2017). Tokenism happens when managers highlight successful employees in minority groups as artificial representation of diversity in their organization (Holder et al., 2015). The underrepresentation of African American women in managerial and leadership positions could increase the perceptions of tokenism (Dickens et al., 2019).

Stereotype threat means that a person will be judged based on their identity group rather than their performance and potential (Nielsen & Madsen, 2019). Black women's identity group that would render them a token invokes stronger perceptions of stereotyping, creating anxiety and lower job performance (Block et al., 2011). Gendered racial oppression and consciousness of detrimental stereotypes of African American women has proven to be harmful to Black women's mental and physical well-being (Coles & Pasek, 2020). When gender or race-based stereotypes decrease a Black woman's performance and career expectations in the organization, management aspirations begin to suffer (Roberson & Kulik, 2007). Therefore, it is not unlikely for African American women to suppress or not develop management aspirations resulting in Black women being limited to career advancement based on the intersections of their gender and race (Lewis,

2017; Nielsen & Madsen, 2019). If a Black woman feels pressure in token status to be the voice for their gender or racial group in exchange for more exposure, then they might be more inclined to shift their identity (Dickens et al., 2019).

Identity Negotiation Theory

Every person in an organization has various identities and these characteristics are interrelated and reinforced with each other, so depending on the environment, some identities are more noticeable than others (Dickens et al., 2019). Even though each person has to adapt to their work environment, Black women modify their behaviors to avoid stereotypes that they are aggressive in an effort to be viewed as professional (Dickens et al., 2019). They alter their language and mannerisms based on perceptions, expectations of others, and the feeling of being a pariah within the workplace (Dickens et al., 2019).

Identity negotiation is when a person looks for ways, consciously or subconsciously, to alter their identity when interacting with other people (McDowell & Cunningham, 2009). When identity negotiation occurs, the perceiver may influence the mental image one has of themselves (McDowell & Cunningham, 2009). For example, people perceive their own self-worth by internalizing the appraisal of others (McDowell & Cunningham, 2009). This perception usually is a direct result of stereotypes, which is consistent with expectations and leads to prejudice behaviors and injustice (McDowell & Cunningham, 2009).

Identity negotiation theory (INT) suggests that African American women may suppress the expectations and viewpoints of others in return altering their self-image (McDowell & Cunningham, 2009). There is insufficient data regarding the long-term effects of African American women's career advancement and the impact shifting their identity has on their upward mobility (Dickens et al., 2019). The stereotypical image of African American women

contrast with the ideal image of a leader or manager in most organizations or academia (Dickens et al., 2019).

Qualitative research have shown that African American women in permanent or apprentice management or leadership positions often have their expertise in the profession questioned (Dickens et al., 2019; Holder et al., 2015; McDowell & Carter-Francique, 2017). These studies have garnered anecdotal stories of Black women feeling the pressure to be the model employee with no room to let their guard down so that they appear competent at all times (Dickens et al., 2019; Holder et al., 2015; McDowell & Carter-Francique, 2017). African American women that have to shift their identity in the workplace are more likely to compromise who they are than their coworker with a lower professional identity centrality (Dickens et al., 2019).

Black women are more likely to adjust their behaviors and mannerisms to prove their professional identity over their race in the workplace (Dickens et al., 2019). African American women often feel the pressure of their actions being a reflection on their entire gender social group and race (Dickens et al., 2019). Therefore, they may or may not negotiate and alter their identity to climb the corporate ladder. In 1988, Ting Toomey introduced identity negotiation theory to suggest that validating personal identities and groups were vital to forming meaningful relationships (Dickens et al., 2019). A Black woman who is not confident or strong in their race and gender identities often will compromise their true authentic self to better work relationships with the dominant group (Dickens et al., 2019). An element of identity negotiation theory is that human beings crave identity acceptance across various situations and that desire impacts one's interactions, feelings, and thought process (Dickens et al., 2019).

Identity negotiation theory's most recent themes include the following: inclusion-differentiation, security-vulnerability, predictability-unpredictability, identity consistency-change across time, and connection-autonomy (Dickens et al., 2019). The feelings of being respected, understood and affirmatively valued are the three outcomes of the five themes (Dickens et al., 2019). The theme I would like to highlight is the inclusion-differentiation theme. According to the inclusion-differentiation, people feel more included in places that support their group membership identities opposed to experiencing differentiation in situations that taints their group identities (Dickens et al., 2019). The inclusion-differentiation theme encapsulates the nature of identity negotiation theory (Dickens et al., 2019).

INT involves "negotiating sociocultural membership identity in intercultural and interpersonal communication settings" (Dickens & Chavez, 2017, p. 761). INT is when people try to strike a balance between connecting with others through interaction while satisfying their identity-related goals (Swann & Bosson, 2010). Shifting one's identity can be viewed as being adaptive and affords them an opportunity to explore various facets of themselves to interface with a group of diverse people (Dickens & Chavez, 2017). People use company cues to decide on whether or not an environment requires them to shift back and forth (Dickens et al., 2019). Shifting covers a wide range of alterations such as behaviors, morals, and values (Dickens et al., 2019). The threat of being perceived as a stereotype can influence one's decision to maneuver their identity through shifting.

Identity shifting includes being deliberate in limiting visibility, becoming more socially invisible to decrease any negativity associated with stigmatization and discrimination (Dickens et al., 2019). Social identity is manufactured in such a way that people might self-identify as a particular group or have an identity group forced upon them by others (Nelson & Piatak, 2021).

A social group community, such as gender, affects how both people view themselves and how other people view them (Nelson & Piatak, 2021). An example of this is that a female can perceive herself as an "out group" member when working in an all-male organization, whereas she may perceive her male counterparts as a part of the "in group" members (Nelson & Piatak, 2021).

The social identity structure emphasizes the significance of diversity management for both addressing the concerns of being a member or various underrepresented groups and advancing inclusion to make sure all employees feel like they are a part of the "in group" (Nelson & Piatak, 2021). The social role theory, think-manager and think-male frameworks, and the incongruity model highlight that women do not represent the stereotypical characteristics of leaders or managers, contributing to their disadvantage and advancement into leadership positions (Sabharwal, 2015; Wynen et al., 2015).

Gender stereotypes are a hindrance to climbing the career ladder within organizations (Koenig et al., 2011). According to Schein (1975), female and male managers believe that the role of a manager is more masculine and is better suited for males. My theoretical framework to examining identity shifting involves the pros and cons of an African American woman shifting their identity (Dickens et al., 2019). Identity shifting in the context of identity management can be used to build relationships that are beneficial to social and professional advancement (Dickens et al., 2019). However, identity shifting focuses on Black women's intersectionality and how it impacts the work environment, tokenism and socialization (Dickens et al., 2019).

Shifting one's identity enables African American women who are hypervisible in the organization to navigate their actions to deter negative judgment from their counterparts (Dickens et al., 2019). Examples of shifting identities involve changing the way a person speaks,

the way they look and the way they behave. This type of modification mitigates the perceptions typically associated with their gender and race (Dickens et al., 2019). According to Rosette et al. (2016), in predominantly male and White companies, management's expectations for African American women is often limited because of their stereotypical expectancy of them. African American women's communication is often stereotyped as being frank and abrupt, which is accordant with the definition of European masculine communication.

Therefore, African American women can be perceived as not feminine in their communication style (Beall-Davis, 2017; Davis & Maldonado, 2015). The outcome of this perception deems Black women as members of their racial and gender groups that are less moldable (Dickens et al., 2019). Constantly navigating between race, gender and professional identities may be beneficial at times; however, it comes with a cost and can have a negative mental impact on a person (Dickens et al., 2019). Shifting identities for African American women can advance their interactions with coworkers, increase promotion opportunities, and help establish networks (Dickens & Chavez, 2017; McDowell & Carter-Francique, 2017).

Conversely, identity shifting is only sustainable for so long and becomes inauthentic over time (Hall et al., 2012). It can lead to self-judgment and take a toll on a person's psychological well-being (Hall et al., 2012). INT is important because it highlights the pressures African American women face when caught between being their true selves and the impact it has on the career progression and relationships in the workplace. Other researchers have applied INT in qualitative studies to show how gender, race, and identity development is used to investigate intersectionality and career progression (Dickens & Chavez, 2017; McDowell & Cunningham, 2009; Williams et al., 2020).

Identity negotiation theory has been used to successfully study African American women in these fields of inquiry – in/visibility (Dickens et al., 2019; McDowell & Cunningham, 2009; Williams et al., 2020), career progression (Dickens et al., 2019; McDowell & Cunningham, 2009; Williams et al., 2020). These studies have described, explored the mechanisms, and made recommendations to address the experiences of those with intersection identities. African American women may negotiate or shift their personal characteristics to blend in and gain membership into a workgroup of individuals who don't share their intersectional identities. Identity negotiation theory explores the career experiences of African American women in the workplace who are in leadership roles.

Hypervisibility

Black women who are considered tokens in the workplace might feel overexposed and hypervisible (Dickens et al., 2019). In Kanter's research of women working in a corporation, she revealed that gender composition impacted how women were treated in the workplace (Settles et al., 2019). Specifically, she showed that when women were the less dominant group and when they were considered tokens, they experienced more stressors that were not identified with women who worked with a larger number of women (Settles et al., 2019). More notably, Kanter theorized that women who experienced increased stress were due to their heightened visibility because of their small numbers (Settles et al., 2019).

Visibility is defined as the extent to which a person is appreciated and recognized (Settles et al., 2019). Visibility can be beneficial when a person has the ability to be heard and have a voice; therefore, African American women seek to be visible in an effort to increase their recognition and power (Settles et al., 2019). Members feel they have a sense of authenticity when they can be themselves in a public forum. However, when the marginalized group navigates

being visible there is often a tradeoff of their authenticity and belongingness (Settles et al., 2019). This is often manifested by assimilating to the dominant group and downplaying their gender or race (Settles et al., 2019).

Conversely, hypervisibility has been defined as being scrutinized for differences, which is often misinterpreted and can lead to an increase of being surveilled, marginalized and isolated by the predominant group (Wilkins-Yel et al., 2019). Kanter's theory of tokenism suggests that hypervisible members feel an amount of pressure to perform well to achieve future opportunities in their social group (Jackson et al., 1995). Choosing to value a Black woman's uniqueness does not guarantee inclusive behaviors that ideal distinctiveness promises (McCluney & Rabelo, 2019). Instead, it promotes hypervisibility, leading to more scrutiny of performance and exclusion from hi-vis projects, roles and mistreatment (McCluney & Rabelo, 2019).

African American women who are hypervisible have been able to employ their distinctive characteristics of race and gender to their advantage in their careers. It has its benefits when a person can successfully navigate how they are perceived and represented (Settles et al., 2019). In particular, hypervisibility can be empowering and advantageous when it facilitates an African American woman's voice being heard. Smith et al. (2019) stated that when African American women reach the height of their careers, they may capitalize on hypervisibility to make an impact. When African American women highlight and promote how others view them, it can play a significant role in their career advancement opportunities (Roberts et al., 2019). Studies have shown that African American women found benefits in their hypervisibility. When they spoke or had anything to say, people would listen and pay attention to them (Roberts et al., 2019). Therefore, for African American women to leverage hypervisibility, they must be confident in their image and who they are as an individual (Settles et al., 2019).

Moreover, hypervisibility can bring about more scrutiny and intensify how others perceive an African American woman in the workplace (Settles et al., 2019). Heightened visibility can lead to performance pressures at work, and Black women may fear making a mistake and being heavily criticized (Baskerville Watkins et al., 2019). African American women use coping mechanisms to shield themselves from humiliation, frustration, and microaggressions in the workplace. This is a manifestation of hypervisibility because changing their behaviors such as monitoring their speech and mitigating their racial differences to combat negative stereotypes deter the likelihood of not feeling included in the workplace (Jackson & Bouchard, 2015). A study conducted showed that African American women realized early in their careers when to be hypervisible and when to be invisible (Smith et al., 2019).

The complex experiences of African American women can be traced back to intersecting marginalized identities (Baskerville Watkins et al., 2019). Even though Black women are physically visible, they are often overlooked and disregarded making them simultaneously invisible because of their gender and race (Baskerville Watkins et al., 2019). Qualitative studies in the past have alluded to African American women being persistent throughout their career by addressing issues in the workplace, which is the diametrical opposite of shifting their identity (Livingston et al., 2012; Richie et al., 1997). Depending on the situation, where an African American woman might be hypervisible in one environment, they can be invisible in another context (Settles et al., 2019).

Invisibility

Placing a low value on a Black woman's distinctive characteristics can be seen as assimilation, whereby a Black woman feels the need to go along to get along at the expense of denouncing their own unique values (McCluney & Rabelo, 2019). Moreover, Black women who

assimilate to the majority group are not seen as the typical woman or Black person making them invisible (McCluney & Rabelo, 2019).

Companies have preferred people of color to suppress who they are to appease the dominant class norms instead of allowing them to express their cultural differences (Settles et al., 2019). For the dominant group, invisibility affirms the standards and norms, leaving privilege unchallenged and unquestioned. Therefore, the majority group sustains their authority and power (Settles et al., 2019). Similarly, invisibility often marginalizes a group or person by refusing them opportunities to be recognized, have a voice, or legitimacy in the workplace (Settles et al., 2019). Because of the fear of not having opportunities or being recognized, the minority group keeps elements of themselves hidden, such as the way they speak or their culture, hoping to be accepted and not ostracized (Settles et al., 2019). To shield themselves from racism, genderism, and oppression in the workplace, African American women resort to what is known as shifting (Gamst et al., 2020).

Shifting serves as a means to deal with potentially exclusively predominately White environments (Gamst et al., 2020). Former First Lady Michelle Obama provides an excellent example in her book Becoming about "speaking in a certain way, the 'White' way," and downplaying the African American culture (Koontz & Nguyen, 2020, p. 449). Additionally, trying to climb the leadership ladder in a White male-dominated company can put more pressure on African American women to assimilate to the corporate culture to deter from making their gender and race identities stand out (McCluney & Rabelo, 2019). Deemphasizing who you are and choosing to become invisible makes it challenging to alter the dominant narrative about your race and have an impact on organizational change that would reduce positional power differences (Settles et al., 2019).

African American women who are invisible blend in with the crowd. Specifically, African American women's faces are considered more masculine and less appealing than a White woman's face. Therefore, they are often mistaken for a Black man (McCluney & Rabelo, 2019). Furthermore, African American women's contributions to conversation are less valued and less memorable than their peers. Thus, African American women have to do more to stand out from other employees to be viewed as a potential leader (McCluney & Rabelo, 2019). Due to their invisible status, they may be relegated to nonthreatening lower-level employee status roles. These roles seek to minimize African American women's contributions and are an impediment to aspiring and climbing African American women leaders (Roberts et al., 2019). There are studies that have examined invisibility within the framework of intersectionality and revealed that Black women still experience the struggle between their gender, race and how it impacts them (Coles & Pasek, 2020; McCluney & Rabelo, 2019; Sesko & Biernat, 2018).

A different perspective is that intersectionality may benefit African American women (Epstein, 1973). Epstein (1973) noted three patterns that might explain why some Black women achieved success in their careers. First, Epstein (1973) pointed out that African American women are subjected to fewer negative stereotypes compared to prototypical members of their race or gender. Since the prototypical African American is the Black male, being a woman distanced Black women from stereotypes associated with Black men such as threatening or aggressive (Smith et al., 2019). Second, because race and gender created a different status for Black women, it made them unique, provided more opportunities for them and crafted credible professional representation in the workplace (Smith et al., 2019). In other words, African American women are unfamiliar with those rating them or evaluating them at work (Smith et al., 2019).

Epstein (1973) suggested with the third pattern that since Black women were free from stereotypes that applied to White women or Black men, they have more leeway to pursue meaningful careers and professions (Smith et al., 2019). Epstein's viewpoint is that African American women in managerial or professional roles have an opportunity to navigate their own career progression and advancement (Smith et al., 2019).

Leadership Self-Efficacy Theory

African American women experience success in both a negative and positive way (Rosette & Livingston, 2012). In spite of the history of African American women engaging in leadership practices, they have been excluded from the cycle of progression in leadership in the labor force (Sales et al., 2020). This contradiction makes their nontypical characteristics known when it comes to career advancement (Rosette & Livingston, 2012). Even though a Black woman's work performance is strong and favorable, their race and gender can be seen as not typical for a leadership role within the organization (Rosette & Livingston, 2012).

In order to be a leader, one would have to want to be a leader. Therefore, an individual's thought process about their capabilities to carry out and organize courses of action required to attain a certain type of performance is referred to as self-efficacy (Wells & Kerwin, 2017). According to Bandura (1997), self-efficacy drives a person's efforts, actions, and persistence in their career development.

A Black women's personal judgment predicts their ability to set goals, persistently pursue efforts, and attain expected outcomes (Wells & Kerwin, 2017). Self-efficacy can be obtained through learning experiences that are influenced by social interactions, environmental factors, difficulty of a job and contextual factors. However, the most important aspect of self-efficacy is

personal attainment (Wells & Kerwin, 2017). Self-efficacy can affect a person's persistence, efforts, and achievement (Schunk & DiBenedetto, 2021).

Leadership self-efficacy can shape an individuals' intentions to advance their leadership careers, and thereby influence their actual career advancement (Bandura, 1997). Leadership self-efficacy pertains to a person's confidence in their ability to effectively execute their leadership roles and display leadership skills required to carry out the job (Akyavuz & Asıcı, 2021). Leadership self-efficacy mirrors the personal self-efficacy feeling that a person can lead others and achieve their goals (Akyavuz & Asıcı, 2021). Black women with leadership self-efficacy are described as someone who takes on more tasks, makes an effort, and are not limited by difficulties (Akyavuz & Asıcı, 2021). An African American woman's leadership self-efficacy, mentors and network can be linked to their hypervisibility, which plays a part in the outcome of their career advancement to a leadership position (Seibert et al., 2017). Black women who are more deliberate on leadership self-efficacy are more likely to promote at a higher rate because they display confidence, persistence and the capability to mature as a leader (Seibert et al., 2017).

Specifically, the leadership self-efficacy theory helps to highlight how hypervisibility and invisibility play a role on career advancement for Black women because it will demonstrate the behavior a Black woman feels she would have to display to produce a certain outcome in the workplace (Hoffart, 2017). Self-efficacy has been used to successfully study women in these fields of inquiry – leadership (Akyavuz & Asıcı, 2021; Hoffart, 2017; Machida-Kosuga et al., 2016; Schunk & DiBenedetto, 2021; Wells & Kerwin, 2017), leadership development (Akyavuz & Asıcı, 2021; Hoffart, 2017; Machida-Kosuga et al., 2016; Schunk & DiBenedetto, 2021; Wells

& Kerwin, 2017), career progression (Akyavuz & Asıcı, 2021; Hoffart, 2017; Machida-Kosuga et al., 2016; Schunk & DiBenedetto, 2021; Wells & Kerwin, 2017).

These studies have described, explored the mechanisms, and made recommendations to address the experiences of career advancement for women in leadership. Self-efficacy has been associated and analyzed as a central cognitive process that impacts women's careers in leadership positions (Machida-Kosuga et al., 2016). Ultimately, a person's sense of personal operation in a leadership position may reflect a range of developmentally facilitating and inhibiting factors (Machida-Kosuga et al., 2016). Thus, leader self-efficacy may be a key factor in Black women who are more hypervisible having more career advancement opportunities than Black women who are invisible. Black women can utilize leadership self-efficacy to their advantage when pursuing their personal development and other proactive avenues needed to advance in their career and achieve leadership positions (Machida-Kosuga et al., 2016). Leadership self-efficacy theory explores the career experiences of African American women in the workplace who are in leadership roles.

Stereotypical Workplace Images of Black Women

Race and gender stereotypes seem to influence professional perceptions and African American women find themselves at a juncture of both gender and race (Hall, 2018; Reynolds-Dobbs et al., 2008). They experience specific and unfamiliar barriers that hinder their career as well as leadership opportunities and development (Reynolds-Dobbs et al., 2008). They are forced to cope with damaging stereotypes that can inhibit their professional career and connections with people in the workplace (Reynolds-Dobbs et al., 2008). Historical stereotypical images of Black women have been the following: Jezebel, mammy, sapphire, the crazy black women, and superwoman, all which can have an impact on professional goals, organizational experiences and

work relationships, especially those who aspire to be in a leadership position (Reynolds-Dobbs et al., 2008).

Black women who are viewed as a Jezebel are perceived as using their sexuality to climb the corporate ladder and are viewed as unqualified to be a leader (Reynolds-Dobbs et al., 2008). This stereotype restricts African American women's upward mobility due to their skills, abilities and credibility being questioned (Reynolds-Dobbs et al., 2008). African American women who are perceived as a mammy often hold a more supportive position in the company (Hall, 2018; Reynolds-Dobbs et al., 2008). They are typically seen as the comforter and advocate for African Americans resulting in little career advancement (Reynolds-Dobbs et al., 2008). In addition, this stereotype limits how Black women leaders and coworkers view their professional capabilities (Reynolds-Dobbs et al., 2008). Black women who are perceived as sapphire are seen as having attitudes, which hinder their professional development (Hall, 2018; Reynolds-Dobbs et al., 2008).

The sapphire stereotype overshadows a Black woman's capabilities and professional expertise because they are viewed as tough and hard (Hall, 2018; Reynolds-Dobbs et al., 2008). Leaders may give Black women who they view as a sapphire more difficult tasks that others do not want to do, implying that African American women can do the dirty work (Reynolds-Dobbs et al., 2008). This distribution of workload causes African American women to stress and be less vulnerable in the work environment (Hall, 2018; Reynolds-Dobbs et al., 2008). The negative depictions of Black women such as being loud, angry and aggressive all play a role in cross-cultural supervision (Hall, 2018).

Anger is a common emotion people experience and express in the workplace but when it comes to African American women, it can negatively affect their career progression (Motro et

al., 2021). Black women who are categorized as the crazy Black women are described as being capable, independent and intelligent; however, they are also limited in the workplace (Hall, 2018; Reynolds-Dobbs et al., 2008). The perception of a crazy Black woman only aids in justifying the idea of the glass ceiling because these women are viewed as unprofessional and tough to work with, which stifles their growth and ability to move up the corporate ladder (Reynolds-Dobbs et al., 2008).

Black women who are labeled as the crazy Black women are also seen as having an inability to work with others, argumentative and unfriendly, which does not exude leadership material (Reynolds-Dobbs et al., 2008). Black women who are seen as superwomen are considered high-potential employees and a contender for advancement in the organization (Hall, 2018; Reynolds-Dobbs et al,, 2008).

Unlike the crazy Black woman stereotype, a superwoman is a devoted employee, easy to get along with and approachable (Reynolds-Dobbs et al., 2008). Although this image is a more favorable alternative to the other mentioned stereotypes, it has its downsides, as well (Reynolds-Dobbs et al., 2008). A significant concern with being viewed as a superwoman is that they are often excluded from their peers because they are seen as more competent than them (Reynolds-Dobbs et al., 2008). They are also seen as a threat to their peers because they do not represent or conform to their gender or racial stereotypes and they are extremely talented (Reynolds-Dobbs et al., 2008). Another downside to being viewed as a superwoman is that this image develops a reputation of being able to do it all, and supervisors and coworkers expect just that at all times (Reynolds-Dobbs et al., 2008). This "can do it all" perception puts Black women in a position to get little help and instead of working normal work hours, they are asked to take on additional tasks (Reynolds-Dobbs et al., 2008). African American women who exhibit the superwoman

image are rendered as being an outstanding member of their race and hear comments like "You are different from other Black people" or "You are not like other Black people" (Reynolds-Dobbs et al., 2008). Superwoman are described as assimilators, fully immersing themselves in the White community while subconsciously denouncing their race (Reynolds-Dobbs et al., 2008).

In order to make real changes to improve the workplace for African American women, organizations have to recognize the inferences of these negative images and make it their responsibility to develop African American women managers and leaders (Reynolds-Dobbs et al., 2008). Even though not all African American women are affected by these stereotypes, many have suffered from it (Reynolds-Dobbs et al., 2008).

Leadership Role Progression for African American Women

The overrepresentation of White men and the underrepresentation of Black men, Black women and White women in mid and senior level managerial positions still remain a source of contention in America (Bloch et al., 2020). To become a leader, it depends on how individuals perceive someone's capabilities as a leader (Motro et al., 2021). African American women encounter unique barriers to senior managerial positions (Bloch et al., 2020). For example, the procedures that advance White women from occupational attainment promotion may differ from African American women (Bloch et al., 2020). Even though a larger number of women in leadership are favorable in increasing women's chances of promotion, White women benefit more from this than women of other races or ethnicities (Bloch et al., 2020).

African American women have been discouraged and faced many challenges when trying to navigate their corporate career (Erskine et al., 2020). Some researchers have described it as the concrete wall, black ceiling or concrete ceiling (McGirt, 2017; Nkomo & Ariss, 2014). Barriers

such as the "ceiling" or "wall" have had an emotionally taxing effect on Black women (Erskine et al., 2020). These challenges have forced Black women to approach their career path with the thought process of enduring, coping, and surviving rather than thriving while progressing to leadership positions (Erskine et al., 2020). Thus, Black women experience more negative perceptions as it pertains to leadership positions than Black men and White women with a single-subordinate identity (Rosette & Livingston, 2012). African American women have attributed the barriers and constraints they've faced in their career to their intersectionality when compared to White women, White men and Black men (Baskerville Watkins et al., 2019). Although Black women are more visible members of their identity groups, their accomplishments and potential to climb the corporate ladder become more invisible to the dominant group (Baskerville Watkins et al., 2019).

African American women are less likely to be viewed as leaders due to the overlapping of their gender and race (Rosette & Livingston, 2012). Moreover, people who display leadership characteristics that are not consistent with the typical leader are compared unfavorably to people who possess those high leadership qualities (Rosette & Livingston, 2012). This leadership concept supports the significant underrepresentation of African American women in leadership positions (Rosette & Livingston, 2012). African American women find themselves at a disadvantage when trying to relate and bridge the gap between White men in a position of power (Erskine et al., 2020). Research conducted by Sims and Carter (2022) shows that through the talent management lenses, Black women are considered double outsiders. They are not White and they are not men. Therefore, they are often excluded from mentors, sponsors and informal networks (Erskine et al., 2020).

Affirmative action and Equal Employment Opportunities (EEO) policies and laws have been established to promote a more diverse workforce and prevent discrimination in organizations (Park & Liang, 2020). A study conducted by Naff and Kellough (2003) shows that several agencies made strides towards diversity management; however, in the federal agencies, women and minorities are still being promoted at a slower rate (Schoen & Rost, 2021). Leadership development is deliberate and a vital component of career advancement. It is defined as someone being promoted to a higher position in an organization for members to engage in leadership roles and processes (Day, 2001).

Research is clear on what needs to be done to help someone develop as a leader or advance in their career. Some specific practices that are a fabric for successful leadership progression are coaching, mentoring, and networking (Day, 2001). Coaching is a more intimate setting that provides goal-focused objectives a person can improve upon to enhance their performance and organizational effectiveness (Day, 2001). Mentoring is a formal developmental relationship that pairs a junior person with a senior manager or executive outside of the chain of command, which allows for sponsorship, protection, challenging assignments, and exposure to strategic thinking (Day, 2001). Female mentors are scarce; therefore, women have to cultivate cross-gender mentoring relationships (Lim et al., 2015). Research has shown that African Americans are less likely to have an informal mentor and are subjected to more obstacles in obtaining one compared to Caucasian employees. (Lim et al., 2015). Mentoring is imperative to career development and growth; however, women have more barriers than men when trying to acquire a mentor (Lim et al., 2015).

Additionally, the correlation between formal and informal mentoring reveals that employees who participate in informal mentoring have more positive experiences resulting in an

increase in salaries, promotion opportunities, and career-related support (Lim et al., 2015). Both Black women and men have access to mentoring; however, Black men continue to be in higher leadership positions than African American women (Lim et al., 2015).

Mentoring has been linked to the career progression of women and access to mentoring is greater for White women than it is for African American women (Blake-Beard, 1999). This is because people who are more alike in identity tend to perceive each other as enjoyable to work with and predictable (Blake-Beard, 1999). For example, most mentors in organizations are White males thus these individuals are more geared to gravitate toward a protégé who looks like their identity group (Blake-Beard, 1999). This distinction results in White women having more access to mentor and mentee relationships than African American women (Blake-Beard, 1999). White women are promoted much quicker than other women in their identity group for two reasons. One is because they have been viewed as minorities due to their lack of power and the resultant disparity caused by their protection (Blake-Beard, 1999). The second reason is because by nature of their relationship with White men, White women have directly or indirectly been a part of corporate life making them more mainstream for a longer time than African American women (Blake-Beard, 1999). White women's familiarity with this life has given them an advantage over African American women, which has helped them with career advancement (Blake-Beard, 1999).

Networking aids in breaking down barriers with people from other functional areas. This leadership development method helps with knowing what and who to network with for problem-solving resources (Day, 2001). Cultivating a diverse network of people can be challenging for women in information technology or work environments where they are outnumbered by men and disproportionately hold positions in lower-status jobs (Bapna & Funk, 2021). In these

settings, women typically have fewer connections and have fewer informal connections, which makes it difficult for them to be connect with people who are sources of information (Bapna & Funk, 2021).

Since women in male dominated organizations occupy more outlying network positions, they are not as visible and miss out on opportunities to benefit from being introduced to people with useful information (Bapna & Funk, 2021). Women's networks tend to include majority women, so their contacts only slightly intersect with their male counterparts (Bapna & Funk, 2021). Consequently, women who work in a male-dominated profession or company are less knowledgeable about who can provide information that is beneficial such as manager or leadership positions (Bapna & Funk, 2021).

Carbajal (2018) showed that experience and exposure are vital strategies to becoming a leader. Exposure can include leadership training and seminars, which help prepare people for leadership opportunities in the future. Additionally, these training and seminars allow people to cultivate and prime their skills as a leader, particularly in communication, managing others, and organizational strategic planning (Stewart, 2016). People who the federal government employs can participate in leadership development programs through the Federal Executive Institute and the Management Development Centers to hone their managerial competencies and skills that can assist them with being competitive (U.S. OPM, 2017).

However, career advancement opportunities have been particularly challenging for African American women (Baskerville Watkins et al., 2019; Holder et al., 2015; Lim et al., 2015; Obenauer & Langer, 2019). Things that seem to be a hallmark of progressing in one's career are less likely afforded to African American women. Research shows that a lack of mentoring, networking, leadership programs, supervisory support, and intersectionality are all

barriers to African American women's career advancement (Atewologun et al., 2016; Baskerville Watkins et al., 2019; McCluney & Rabelo, 2019; Wilkins-Yel et al., 2019).

These identified influences affect their promotion into leadership positions and limit their opportunities to climb the organizational ladder (Lewis et al., 2016; McCluney & Rabelo, 2019; Mondisa, 2018). Despite the challenges, African American women have found success in the workplace. Like Oprah Winfrey and Kamala Harris, who are hypervisible and display authenticity, African American women have found a way to line up their intersectionality as they enact leadership (Roberts et al., 2019).

African American women who leverage hypervisibility may be more able to secure leadership development opportunities than African American women who downplay their race or gender (Roberts et al., 2019). Leadership role progression for Black women is not as accessible as their White female counterparts and my research question will answer the question of if hypervisibility or invisibility are a contributing factor to their underrepresentation in these positions.

Supervisory Support

Supervision is critical to developing and enhancing an employee's professional abilities within an organization (Hall, 2018). A supervisor's credentials whether it be experience or formal education contributes to the supervisor-employee relationship (Hall, 2018). In this relationship both the supervisor and employee bring their own peculiarities and struggles to the situation (Hall, 2018). Effective supervisors notice and value diversity of thought and tend to confront any disruptions to the supervisor-employee relationship (Hall, 2018). With cross-cultural supervision, the supervisor and employee must be willing to talk about their feelings or unconscious viewpoint of each other (Hall, 2018).

Davis and Maldonado's (2015) phenomenological research revealed that supervisors are not cultivating an environment that promotes the development and growth of highly skilled and qualified African American women. The absence of access to informal networks that can help propel an employee forward is another reason why Black women are not represented in upper management ranks (Davis & Maldonado, 2015). Despite major improvement toward equality, substantial evidence shows a disparity within executive-level positions for African American women in academia (Davis & Maldonado, 2015). As cited in Lewis et al. (2016), "According to the American Council on Education, between 2008 and 2013, the number of Black Americans in senior administrative positions declined from 3.7 percent to 2.3 percent" (p. 758). In a study conducted on race and ethnicity and the role it plays on advancement in the technology career field, the findings supported that social networks, bias, credibility, legitimacy, support, and skills contributed to different career progression experiences (McGee, 2018).

African American women fall behind other racial groups when it comes to acquiring undergraduate degrees in STEM (Washington-Lockett et al., 2018). African American hindrances to pursuing a science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) career are not due to their lack of motivation or abilities but more external factors like a lack of support structures that discourage them from getting into the field (Washington-Lockett et al., 2018). Institutional barriers still hamper the present success identities of African American women (Washington-Lockett et al., 2018). Mentorship, advising, and faculty support play vital roles in Black women's success in STEM fields (Washington-Lockett et al., 2018). Conversely, Black women, unlike White women and minority men, are faced with a dilemma because they are underrepresented in both gender and racial categories (Mondisa, 2018). According to Mondisa (2018), "Mentors can be ineffective due to a lack of knowledge about or training in effective

mentoring techniques" (p. 295). Lastly, prior studies show that having a mentor and mentorship programs help support the trajectory of careers in STEM (Mondisa, 2018).

Barriers to leadership opportunities are universal, and women compared to men are disproportionately represented in lower-level leadership positions (Davis & Maldonado, 2015). Qualified minorities in leadership positions are at a higher risk of being discharged from their job than White employees in leadership positions (Obenauer & Langer, 2019). Even though Black women work hard and excel at their job, biases are still a motivating factor behind why they become stagnant once appointed to a leadership position (Obenauer & Langer, 2019).

Supervisory support is vital for women and minorities, especially in companies where these employees feel an inequity aimed at people like them (Paustian-Underahl et al., 2017). Organizations that have a company culture of discriminatory behavior hurt women and their upward mobility up the company ladder (Paustian-Underahl et al., 2017). A previous study suggests that females and minorities tend to disconnect and hinder the career progression of other employees who look like them. Contrary to that, evidence also concludes that people are inclined to favor people who look like them in the workplace (Paustian-Underahl et al., 2017). There is an increase in satisfaction and contact when a mentor and protégé have similarities between each other. However, a lack of Black women at majority White organizations makes it difficult to match protégés to mentors who have the same race or gender (Jones et al., 2015).

Federal Sector

For this study, I am defining the federal sector as jobs in education, technology, any of the federal departments, engineering, science, and medical. The diversity climate within an organization is an indication of a company's commitment to diversity-friendly managerial practices and diversity-leadership that shows appreciation to all demographic groups (Moon &

Christensen, 2020). Affirmative action alone is not enough to advance the progress of workforce diversity; also, companies try to further managerial efforts and investments by reinforcing the assimilation of employees with different attributes and characteristics to improve competitiveness and productivity (Moon & Christensen, 2020).

Diversity recruitment is one of the ways an organization can aid applicants in deciding on if a company is a positive place to work (Moon & Christensen, 2020). Diversity training programs are often used to eliminate relational disputes between organizational members and enhance the competitive edge in the workforce (Moon & Christensen, 2020). Moreover, diversity-oriented leadership attempts to reflect all segments of society which allows employees to feel a part of the organization by facilitating communication of ideas, decreasing stereotypical perspectives (Moon & Christensen, 2020). When a company is devoted to diversity practices, employees start to cultivate a common sense of supportive diversity climate (Moon & Christensen, 2020).

Over the past few decades, the participation of women and people of color in the workplace have increased due to laws like the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and affirmative action programs (Lee et al., 2020). Since the 1980s, the workforce composition has changed drastically, which has resulted in more diversity within organizations (Lee et al., 2020). With the diversification of the public sector, it challenges the government to realize democratic ideals when the public workforce resembles the demographic makeup of the people it serves (Kingsley, 2015; Selden, 2015). Women have experienced career barriers when it comes to development and advancement (Lee et al., 2020).

In 1990, African American men and women held higher percentages of leadership and management positions in organizations that were federal contractors (Bloch et al., 2020).

However, as African American men's representation increased in management, African American women's representation decreased between 1990 and 2005 (Bloch et al., 2020). Conversely during this timeframe, little changed in White men and women's representation in organizations that were federal contractors (Bloch et al., 2020).

From 1991 to 2009, the Government Accountability Office (GAO) provided various data that revealed the lack of diversity in the federal sector for the Senior Executive Service (SES) for minorities and women (Jackson & Bouchard, 2015). Several reports from the Government Accountability Office showed government-wide that there was a low percentage of African American women in senior executive level positions (Jackson & Bouchard, 2015). Furthermore, the GAO discovered that out of 6,555 SES appointees only 232 or 3.5% were African American women. Additionally, the progression to GS-15 and GS-14 positions have been slow for minorities (Jackson & Bouchard, 2015).

Summary

Chapter 2 provided a review of literature that aided in gaining a better perspective and understanding of how hypervisibility and invisibility play a role in African American women's leadership progression. African American women are subjected to biases in the workplace, so they find ways to navigate the situations. African American women unknowingly and knowingly shift their identities to meet the needs of the predominant group. This shifting of identity implies that African American women will be rewarded for either emphasizing or deemphasizing who they are at work.

Therefore, invisibility and hypervisibility must be evaluated further to determine if either have its pros and cons to the career advancement of Black women in the workplace (Settles et al., 2019). African American women who deemphasize their culture and assimilate to the

dominant culture may find that it benefits their professional advancement and progress (Dickens & Chavez, 2017). Conversely, African American women who choose not to assimilate to the dominant culture may or may not incur a cost to secure leadership advancement (Dickens & Chavez, 2017). Overall, African American women learn how to navigate different work situations despite intersectionality, tokenism, invisibility, hypervisibility, and identity shifting.

The goal of this research was to provide more information that will bring awareness to hypervisibility, invisibility and its role on African American women leader's career progression. Findings from the literature review revealed a need to increase understanding about the lived experiences of African American women who work for the federal sector in education, technology, any of the federal departments, engineering, science, medical and aspire to move from a junior-level position to a manager/supervisor-level position. Delivering a study about how hypervisibility and invisibility impacts career trajectory for African American women will help federal sector managers support authenticity and leadership development and advancement for African American women. Chapter 3 will discuss the methodology used for this study. The chapter will detail the research design, approach, rationale, and provide a summary.

Chapter 3: Research Method

The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine the experiences of African

American women and the role hypervisibility and invisibility play in their career advancement to

leadership positions. This qualitative research will answer the question: Do African American

women who are hypervisible have more career advancement opportunities (e.g., mentoring, job

shadowing, advanced training, leadership development program, etc.) than African American

women who are invisible? This chapter will explain the specific methods used to answer the

question of if Black women who are hypervisible receive more leadership opportunities than

Black women who are invisible.

Research Design and Method

Qualitative research is used to understand and explore the meaning in which people

attribute human and social issues (Austin & Sutton, 2015; Creswell, 1998; Patton, 2015).

Qualitative research allows the researcher to tell participants' experiences from their perspective

and provide a vehicle to detail rich descriptions of the participants' experiences (Davidsen, 2013;

Roberts, 2010). Researchers that use the qualitative method focus on examining interactions,

documents, and experiences in their natural state while refraining from forming a hypothesis at

the beginning of the study (Flick, 2014).

The epistemology of my qualitative research is the critical paradigm. Critical paradigm is

a belief system that focuses on topics such as African American studies and women's studies,

which emphasizes social creations confronted with power-rich environments that oppress

meaningful conflict (Kim, 2018; Leavy, 2017). This paradigm covers injustices, inequality,

oppression, and hones in on pinpointing alternate approaches to advance social and individual

transformation (Kim, 2018). My assumption using this paradigm is that it will allow me to gain

new knowledge and possibly undercover the inequities that Black women face in the workplace (Locke et al., 2009). The critical paradigm came about because of the discontent with the traditional paradigms and practices and the limited research related with these epistemologies (Elshafie, 2013).

The traditional paradigms were picked a part by critical researchers because those epistemologies only focused on technicalities and neglected to highlight politics and power in society, which aimed to understand the research, not improve it (Elshafie, 2013). Despite the diversity connected to the critical paradigm, it remains a practice or a way to seek knowledge, to be certain, and this search for change is the intent of critical research (Elshafie, 2013). Therefore, the critical paradigm will allow me to illustrate how hypervisibility and invisibility impact the career advancement of Black women who work for the federal sector (Locke et al., 2009).

Critical research does not require the researcher to be completely objective; however, I made my objectivity known to the subjects because objective data are fact driven and derived from additional sources other than the participants, whereas subjective data can only be gained through the experiences of the participants (Leavy, 2017). Objectivity from research is free from personal opinion and attitude (Locke et al., 2009). Critical epistemology was a useful framework in determining if hypervisibility and invisibility play a role in Black women's ascension into leadership positions or leadership programs. The qualitative critical research approach was selected for this study and is relevant to share because other researchers have used this method to highlight the disadvantages of social subgroups and help us better understand the origin of injustices (Grant & Ghee, 2015; Locke et al., 2009; Patton, 2009).

There were several benefits to using a qualitative method for my research. First, it provided information that allowed me to have a better understand of my phenomena (Leech &

Onwuegbuzie, 2007; Saldaña, 2013). Second, the data I accumulated was holistic and provided a vivid picture of the complexity of my phenomena (Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2007; Saldaña, 2013). Third, since the qualitative method was focused on the sample group's lived experiences, it helped me decipher the meaning behind what my participants felt as it pertained to hypervisibility, invisibility, intersectionality, tokenism, identity shifting and career advancement (Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2007). Lastly, researchers have used qualitative data to highlight a problem (Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2007). Since I used qualitative research to understand the participants' social reality (Leavy, 2017), this research method allowed me to ascertain how African American women experience hypervisibility and invisibility and its impact on career advancement.

Content analysis or data analysis is an older research method that dates back to Scandinavia in the 18th century (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). Researchers have used content analysis as a form of qualitative analysis, lending to its accelerated popularity and use (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). Content analysis has two study designs; these study designs are the conventional content analysis and the direct content analysis. The conventional approach's aim is to describe a phenomenon when there is limited research literature or theory on topic, and the direct approach is used when previous theory or research exists about the phenomenon but it's not complete or could benefit from additional data or information (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). Text data can come in various forms such as focus groups, articles, open-ended survey questions, books, observations and interviews (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). Content analysis differs from ethnography, phenomenology and grounded theory because it focuses on the characteristics of language as communication and its contextual meaning (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). Additionally, phenomenology and grounded theory go beyond context analysis to create theory or exact

understanding through lived experiences, whereas content analysis is limited in theory and lived experiences (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). Since I am conducted interviews for this research, content analysis was a way for me to examine my participant's communication and text data (Leavy, 2017).

In this study, I used the directed approach of content analysis to identify themes of disparity and oppression by coding the text data I obtained through the interviews and existing research literature (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005; Leavy, 2017). Specifically, I listened and looked for words such as race, identity, racism, prejudice, White peers, different, visible, hypervisible, and invisible that allude to or are clear that African American women are treated differently when it comes to career advancement or leadership opportunities in the federal sector based on their race and gender. Based on the existing literature, I identified key concepts as my initial coding. This process helped me utilize my predetermined categories to shape my probing and open-ended questions. Therefore, when I analyzed the data text, it is imperative for me to develop a rich understanding of the context so that I did not miss any key themes or categories (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005).

Furthermore, a qualitative study helped me investigate the role of race and gender on leadership progression for Black women who work for the federal sector because it's based on their experiences from their perspective (Leavy, 2017; Roberts, 2010). Since I am using content analysis to understand the participants' social reality (Creswell, 1998; Leavy, 2017), this research method will allow me to ascertain how African American women experience the topic under investigation, which is hypervisibility and invisibility.

Population

      My criteria for inclusion were African American women who work for the federal sector in the United States or outside of the United States who were either promoted to a leadership position or a part of a leadership program within the last 5 years. My sample group were African American women who work for the federal sector and have been promoted within the last 3 to 5 years into a leadership position or Black women who are striving to be in a leadership position. I gained entry to this group through a moderator who works for the federal sector. I connected with the sample group via their personal email. The moderator provided me the first participant's email address and from there each participant recommended me to another person that met the criteria.

Study Sample

      Qualitative research relies on purposeful sampling (Leavy, 2017; Saldaña, 2013). Therefore, I was very specific when sampling because I wanted to ensure I interviewed Black women who met the criteria and who could provide rich dialogue to answer my research question on the phenomena (Locke et al., 2009; Saldaña, 2013). My sample size consisted of eight African American women. The sample size was determined by me as long as the sample group was not disproportionate, represented the target population and did not let external variables affect the findings. I knew that I had reached saturation when I started hearing the participants say the same thing multiple times (Leavy, 2017; Locke et al., 2009).

      The sampling of my qualitative study is known as purposive, which made sure I was intentional in who I selected to provide insight and rich dialogue on the phenomena. I used purposive sampling as my method since this is primarily used in qualitative research and allows for deliberate selection of participants who can provide insight and shed light on the phenomena

(Robinson, 2014; Saldaña & Omasta, 2016). Sampling is when the researcher selects a certain number of people for a study so that the participants represent the larger group from which they were selected and can provide insight into the issue (Patton, 2015; Roberts, 2010). Miles and Huberman (2002) stated that a sampling strategy could be theoretical, meaning the participants are chosen based upon a theoretical research rationale.

The sampling strategy I used for my study was snowball sampling. Snowball sampling is where each participant leads to selecting other participants (Leavy, 2017; Locke et al., 2009; Patton, 2015). This method allowed African American women to recommend other African American women who met the criteria. During this process, I gathered the names, email addresses, and phone numbers of those recommended and contacted them to see if were interested in participating in the study. The snowball sampling approach helped identify African American women who met the sample criteria to share their experiences on if hypervisibility and invisibility impacted their ascension into leadership positions and opportunities.

Materials/Instruments

Every study must identify the instruments and protocol for collecting data (Locke et al., 2009; Roberts, 2010). The data were collected via virtual face-to-face interviews using the Zoom Platform. Zoom is a cloud-based video communication application that allows for various collaborative capabilities (Powell, 2020). Interviews assisted me in revealing one's thoughts to acquire their experiences and stories (Patton, 2015). I used a semi-structured interview protocol of questions because it provided me with valid data points that gave me clear, concise, reliable, and comparable data (Leavy, 2017). The audio and video recordings from Zoom were dated and given a name. The Zoom platform allowed me to go back and listen to my participant's interviews to ensure I am effectively analyzed and categorized the data.

I asked the participants a series of questions based on the definition of career advancement and leadership. These questions started off generic and then I became more specific in my approach. Pseudonyms were utilized throughout the interviews and analysis process. I piloted my instrument to see how long it would take to conduct the interviews and if I needed to fine tune the question that I am asking, and if I am collecting the information I need to answer my research question. The below questions were asked during the interviews:

1. Tell me little bit about yourself (e.g., race, gender, marital status, education level, federal sector job title and total years of federal service).

2. Leader is defined as someone who has positional authority/power, makes decisions that impact the organization and may or may not supervise people. Based on the definition, do you consider yourself a leader? Why or why not? (If you answer no to this question, please skip down to question #4).

3. In general, African American women have had a history of challenges in the workforce. Can you please share with me your experiences as a Black/African American woman leader?

4. In the last 3 to 5 years, tell me about a time you had to display leadership in your workplace (skip this question if you answered "yes" to question #2).

5. During your experience as a leader, was it necessary to draw attention to your race and gender? Or did you seek to minimize or not draw attention to your race or gender?

6. Tell me a time you felt the need to minimize your race or gender and what were the circumstances.

7. As a leader, how did that make you feel?

8. From your experience, did minimizing your race and gender provide you more leadership opportunities? (Only answer this question if you stated "yes" to question #6).

9. Have you participated in job shadowing, training or a leadership development program that influences career advancement in the last 3 to 5 years? If so, specify which one. On a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 meaning not at all and 5 meaning extremely, how much did your race and gender have a part in your feeling visible or invisible? (If not, was the opportunity presented to you?)

10. Did mentoring or supervisory support play a role in your promotion/career advancement? If so, specify which one and explain how it played a role.

11. Talk about career advancement and what it means to you.

12. How did being visible with your race and gender help contribute to your promotion/career advancement?

13. Was there a time when you drew more attention to your gender and/or race for your promotion/career advancement? If yes, did it provide more benefits or not?

14. Is there anything else you would like to add that could help shine light on African American/Black women, intersectionality, leadership and career advancement?

Data Collection and Analysis Procedures

My data collection process consisted of capturing the information by taking copious notes, keeping a journal, audio and video recording the interviews, and through thought and reflection those methods helped trigger my memory when answering my research question (Saldaña, 2013). I found value in keeping a journal and recorder on me so that I could capture the ideas and thoughts as I worked on the research. Furthermore, constant comparison is a widely used type of analysis when using the qualitative method.

Another name for this type of analysis is called "coding" (Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2007). I accomplished this type of analysis by reading all of my data then breaking it down and grouping the information into smaller sections by themes (Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2007). The audio was also transcribed the audio to a written narrative using a platform called Rev. Once the interviews were transcribed to a written record, I sent it back to the participants to check the data for accuracy.

In vivo coding uses the participants' own words as a symbol for data analysis (Saldaña & Omasta, 2016). According to Saldaña and Omasta (2016), "This method is recommended to those who are learning how to code because it requires the researchers to be meticulous and pays close attention to every word the participant says" (p. 124). I maintained the integrity of the participants' language by using in vivo coding. In vivo coding did not limit my objectivity or focus so that codes evolved organically (Leavy, 2017). During the analysis of my data, I used the participants' own language and responses to identify trends and meaning and used coding to translate the raw data into themes and categories (Roberts, 2010; Saldaña & Omasta, 2016). Lastly, bracketing allowed me to set aside my assumptions and engage in revisiting the data I collected to aid in my evolving comprehension and understanding of the topic (Fischer, 2009).

Researcher's Role

A key element to research is trustworthiness (Roberts, 2010). As a researcher, I had to listen attentively and put aside any interpretations. I remained subjective and captured the participant's experiences. The four components of a trustworthy researcher are credibility, dependability, confirmability and transferability (Connelly, 2016). Credibility answers the question of how consistent the findings are with reality, which helps the readers trust the data analysis (Locke et al., 2009; Roberts, 2010; Stahl & King, 2020). Dependability is the stability of

information over time, and I kept a log of my notes and activities throughout the process (Connelly, 2016). Confirmability ensured that my findings were consistent and could be repeated showing a trend regarding African American women and my research topic (Connelly, 2016). Transferability ensured my findings were useful and that I was being transparent through providing a rich description of details like the location, context and participants interviewed (Connelly, 2016).

To establish trustworthiness as a researcher, I was not biased, and I did consult mentors, experts, and peers who have conducted related studies like my study (Saldaña & Omasta, 2016). I focused on the participants' issue and its context to ensure its relevance to the study. I documented my research procedures to make sure the inquiry was not compromised.

The researcher is also responsible for protecting the identities of the participants (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019). My role in the setting was one as a leader and a Black woman. Although I have had position experiences with career advancement, I had vested interest in my topic of choice because I know that African American women are underrepresented in leadership positions, and I wanted to know if hypervisibility or invisibility played a part in this phenomenon.

Therefore, the anonymity of the participants was critical. For my study, I protected my participants from unnecessary risks. I ensured that I had consent from the participants. I made sure I was honest and upfront with them about the study. I thoroughly answered any questions they had regarding the examination.

Lastly, I addressed the participants' needs by making sure there was no conflict of interest. Although the interviews were anonymous, and I protected the identities of the

participants. The participants were not given an option to choose and generate their own pseudonyms.

Ethical Considerations

According to the Abilene Christian University IRB website, studies involving human subjects must abide by federal regulations protecting human subjects (IRB ACU Website, 2021; see Appendix D). The Belmont Report is ethical principles and guidelines that protect human subjects in research (IRB ACU Website, 2021). The Belmont Report relates to my research in a significant way because my participants will be discussing their lived experiences and it's imperative that I uphold respect for each person, beneficence and justice (IRB ACU Website, 2021).

I was also required to take two courses through CITI: Social-Behavioral-Educational (SBE) and Responsible Conduct of Research (RCR) Basic. I learned a lot about consent and the anonymity of the participants. During the training, there was a reference to research integrity and remaining professional with the participants. Some of the content that I will present to the IRB are materials that I will provide to the participants, an explanation of my research and why it has merit, my step-by-step process in the study, recruiting, and my population.

I conducted the interviews during off-duty hours so the participants would feel more comfortable being honest about their experiences. The participants were personally invited with no affiliation with any institution except working for the federal sector. They signed a consent and confidentiality form before participating in the study and I preserved my research material by storing the information on a secure drive and a locked container at home. Lastly, I did not hire anyone to do my transcription, I transcribed myself.

Assumptions

Bloomberg and Volpe (2019) defined researcher assumptions as "statements that reflect what you hold to be true as you go into the study and from which you believe you will be able to draw some conclusions. Your assumptions are based on certain premises that may either hold up or be shown to be unwarranted. The researcher usually identifies four or five assumptions. These are the important issues around your topic that you believe to be true as you begin your research" (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019, p. 130).

Limitations

Every research has some limitations intrinsic to the analysis and design (Locke et al., 2009). One limitation of this research is the sample size. When targeting a particular demographic, there is a potential for the responses to be one-sided and not illustrate an accurate representation of all working single mothers.

Delimitations

Delimitation is time differences and geographical separation (Roberts, 2010). Given COVID restrictions, I used a hybrid of virtual and in-person platforms to interview the participants. The virtual platform I used was Zoom. Utilizing Zoom allowed for audio and video recording.

Summary

Chapter 3 discussed the design and method, described the population, setting, and sample, discussed the trustworthiness/reliability; assumptions/limitations/delimitations; and researcher role, explained the materials, instruments, data collection procedures, and analysis procedures, and talked about ethical considerations. Chapter 4 will restate the problem statement and go into more detail about the topics I discussed in Chapter 3.

Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore with eight African American/Black women on their experiences with hypervisibility, invisibility, and career advancement to leadership positions within the federal sector. As the researcher I believed that gleaning insight into the lives of the participants will provide a better understanding on whether being authentic or assimilating to the predominant group in a workplace creates more career advancement opportunities. In this chapter, I provide an overview of the research process, presentation of the findings, and a description of the participants. The participants' actual oral interviews and written transcripts contributed to the development of themes that emerged from the research, and the data analysis that was compiled. This chapter presents the key findings from eight extensive interviews.

The origin of this qualitative critical study was to examine the lives of Black women who have experienced hypervisibility and invisibility in the workplace and the impact it had on their career advancement opportunities. The research also explored how the participants viewed themselves as a leader. My interest in this research topic began in 2019 when I would hear Black employees who work for the federal sector state that they cannot be themselves in the workplace. I found myself intrigued by this statement because as an equal opportunity program manager, I could not imagine what it would feel like to not be my authentic self for the work week. During my encounters with various people over a 2-year span, this battle of "two different people" in the workplace and at home became more evident. Thus, it piqued my curiosity on if hypervisibility or invisibility presented more career advancement opportunities into leadership positions for Black women.

Initially, my research focused on soliciting African American women who identified with a sorority. I made numerous attempts to determine who would be eligible participants for what I wanted to study. There was a number of sources to talk to through the use of snowball sampling, and the individuals who contacted me had an appetite to participate in the study. However, not all individuals who volunteered to participate affiliated with a sorority. As a result, the study was amended to extend the participant pool to all Black women who work for the federal sector and met the criteria.

Participants

The eight participants of this study all work for the federal sector totaling 176 years of experience with the average time working for the federal sector being 22 years. The ages of the participants ranged from 41 and 62 years old with the mean age being 49 years old. These women lived in various parts of the world from the United States to Europe. Confidentiality was maintained throughout the process by assigning pseudonyms to the participants, so their names and other identifiers are concealed. The study focused on African American women who work for the federal sector and the impact hypervisibility and invisibility has on their career advancement opportunities. All women identified as female and African American. Through the participants personal narratives, I was able to collect additional demographic information about them.

Brenda has been working for the federal sector for 18 years. She works for an organization located in southeast region of the United States and is the affirmative employment program manager. She has a bachelor's degree in management studies and a minor in paralegal studies. Brenda did not only spend time with the federal sector, but she also devoted 14 years to

the private sector. Brenda is a general schedule employee with no military experience. Brenda is not a supervisor.

Farrah has been working for the federal sector for 23 years. She works for an organization located in the Midwest region of the United States and is a sexual assault advocate for her company. She has a bachelor's degree in business management and is currently working on her master's degree in business leadership. Farrah retired from the military after serving her country for 23 years but as a reservist has been working a civil servant job for 15 of those 23 years. Farrah is not a supervisor.

Chandra has been working for the federal sector for 22 years. She works for an organization located in the Midwest region of the United States and is the executive administrator for her company. She has a bachelor's degree in health administration and is currently serving in the military. Chandra is not a supervisor.

Helen has been working for the federal sector for 19 years. She works for an organization located in the southern region of the United States and is the assistant director and training and curriculum specialist for her company. She has a master's degree in psychology with a specialty in mediation and conflict management. Helen is a civil servant employee with no military experience. Helen is a supervisor.

Gill has been working for the federal sector for 18 years. She works for an organization located in the southern region of the United States and is the community readiness consultant and program analyst for her company. She has a master's in business administration. Gill is a civil servant employee with no military experience.

Diana has been working for the federal sector for 36 years. She works for an organization located in the southern region of the United States and is the alternative dispute resolution

program manager for her company. She has an associate degree in paralegal studies. Diana retired from the military after serving her country for 20 years and has been working as a civil servant employee for 16 of the 36 years. Diana is not a supervisor.

Elizabeth has been working for the federal sector for 18 years. She works for an organization located in another country outside of the United States and is the strategic planner/management analyst for her company. She has a doctorate in business management with an emphasis in industrial organization and a PhD in cognitive behavior therapy with an emphasis in trauma therapy. Although Elizabeth did not retire from the military, she is a veteran and currently works as a civil servant employee. Elizabeth is a supervisor.

Allison has been working for the federal sector for 29 years. She works for an organization located in the southern region of the United States and in the civil rights officer for her company. She has a bachelor's degree in psychology and retired from the military after serving her country for 20 years. Allison has been working as a civil servant employee for 9 years. Allison is not a supervisor.

Table 1

Demographics

Pseudonym	Fed job grade	Supervisory status	Age	Marital status
Brenda	NO-4	Nonsupervisory	59	Married
Farrah	General schedule 11 (GS-11)	Nonsupervisory	50	Married
Chandra	Master sergeant (E-7)	Nonsupervisory	41	Separated
Helen	Nonappropriated funds 4 (NAF-4)	Supervisory	49	Married
Gill	General schedule 11 (GS-11)	Nonsupervisory	43	Single
Diana	General schedule 13 (GS-13)	Nonsupervisory	62	Single
Elizabeth	General schedule 13 (GS-13)	Supervisory	46	Married
Allison	General schedule 13 (GS-13)	Nonsupervisory	49	Married

Research Questions

This study was guided by three research questions that aided the exploration of the participants' experiences as they relate to hypervisibility, invisibility and how it impacted their career advancement for opportunities and leadership positions. The questions included: (1) What is the experience of an African American woman who works for the federal sector? (2) How do African American women describe mentorship, supervisory support and leadership development opportunities as an employee of the federal sector? and (3) What role do hypervisibility and invisibility play on career advancement for African America women who work for the federal sector?

Participants' Experience

The participants' openness and full transparency demonstrated that they were impacted by how they were viewed in the workplace as an African American/Black woman. Each of what the participants have experienced played a vital role in how they established their own perception and viewpoints about the federal sector and the role invisibility and hypervisibility has on career progression into leadership positions. The fruitful commentaries expressed by the participants support the core which informed this research. The essence of this study is that African American women are underrepresented in leadership positions and how their hypervisibility or invisibility impacts their career progression. This essence summarizes most of the participants and how African American women can feel comfortable to be authentically themselves and the challenges they face to climb the career ladder. As such, they have had to find ways to navigate the system in an effort to garner leadership positions or opportunities. The eight participants were transparent in explaining how they felt invisibility and hypervisibility impact their career progression for leadership opportunities and positions. There was a total of 14 questions asked

during the interview. The questions helped identify codes which are backed by the genuine narratives drawn forth from the participants' transcripts.

During the analysis, the codes and frequency of them that surfaced illustrated the core of a Black woman's experience in the workplace as it pertains to career progression through the vantage point of eight participants. This was accomplished by revisiting the video recordings and reading over the narratives several times from the transcripts, which influenced these codes. The outcome of this process resulted in the identification of eight themes supporting the intent of this study and the interview questions that directed the research. Two themes correlate directly to the research question about leadership. Three themes speak to the research question on the impact of hypervisibility and invisibility in the workplace, and three themes speak to the research question about mentorship. All eight themes and the respective themes and subthemes are discussed in the section below.

Theme: Viewing Self as a Leader

Leadership experience was a strong central point during the discussions with the participants, especially since some participants had severed in the military prior to their current job. All participants stated that they viewed themselves as leaders within their organizations. This section addresses the research question: what is the experience of an African American woman who works for the federal sector? Two major subthemes emerged from the data analysis: (1) positional and (2) challenges. These themes and their respective subthemes are developed next.

Table 2

Viewing Self as a Leader

Subtheme	Codes
Positional influence	Functional expertise and position
	Supervisory and leadership roles
	Informal authority
	Informal influence
Challenges	Stereotype victimization
	Queen bee syndrome
	Assimilation
	Lack of support
	Discrimination
	Highly educated

Viewing self as a leader describes the participants power or influence based on a title or position. All participants identified themselves as a leader in their company. Given their profession and job title for by-law programs or support programs the participants believed that they played a major role in accomplishing the mission and being highly sought after advisors to senior management in their organizations. Viewing self as a leader theme emerged from data analysis in two ways which constitutes its subthemes.

Positional influence, the first subtheme, describes the participants as someone who has authority and/or power to makes decisions that impact the organization and may or may not supervise people. Challenges, the second subtheme, describes unique situations the participants experienced as leaders within their organizations.

Positional Influence

Positional influence showed up across all eight participants through the roles they held in the organization such as sexual assault advocate, supervisory management analysist, and lead strategic planner supervisory. The participants experience as an African American leader varied. They illustrated how they were a leader in the workplace with positional influence because they guided their superiors or someone they reported directly to on certain decisions, led or managed people who participated in their program and mentored some peers and coworkers.

All eight participants described positional influence by how they improved and optimized their contributions in the workplace not just for themselves but for their respective programs or employees. Positional influence allowed the participants to showcase their skills, experience and intellect to the senior leaders and coworkers they advise on company decisions.

For all eight participants, positional influence came as a result of one of four motivations. It was a matter of being a functional expertise and the position they held in the company for three participants, a matter of formal supervisory leadership roles for two participants, a matter of informal influence for one participant, a matter of informal authority for one participant and exerting self-leadership for one participant. The four participants that described positional influence as duty title and position were Allison, Brenda, Chandra, and Diana.

Functional Expertise and Position. Functional expertise and position relate to positional influence because it demonstrates how the participants influence was directly related to their title or position; however, it only holds as much weight as the position carries.

Allison described her role in the organization and how she contributes to the overall mission and goals. She goes on to explain why and how her role as a civil rights program manager gives her positional influence. Allison stated,

Although I am a civil rights officer, in my current position part of my job is to talk with employees, do a temperature check and try to cultivate an environment of cohesion. I do talk to complainants about what they're going through, whether it's discriminatory issues, whether it's sexual harassment, what they could do better, and how they can do better. I also talk to management and executives, giving them guidance on how they can do better in treating their people or even handling or having conversations with them. So, although I'm not directly supervising, in the sense of writing evaluations, I do speak with both management and employees, and I give them guidance from my position as a civil rights officer.

This quote was selected because Allison has functional expertise, and her supervisors rely on her as an advisor. Brenda shared the following: "My role in my organization is called affirmative employment program manager and my program has several different functions to it." This quote was selected because Brenda has functional expertise, and her supervisors rely on her as an advisor.

Chandra recounts her experience as a contributor to her organization as it relates to how things are administratively executed. Chandra stated, "I am consulted in certain areas and my opinion does influence some decisions in my organization." For the remaining five participants, positional influence was a matter of formal supervisory and leadership roles, community leader and mentorship, or delegation of authority over coworkers and peers for special work tasks. This quote was selected because Chandra not only is a functional expert, but she also consolidates information from other people for her supervisors.

Diana put herself in a subject matter expert role, which helped others and the company. Diana stated,

I consider myself a leader because I am able to embrace a project. I had to learn how to

stop doing everything myself, and that was a challenge for me because I always felt if I

had to continuously tell you how to do it, I might as well do it myself and get it over with.

However, to be a more effective leader, I had to learn how to let my counterparts do what

they're supposed to do.

This quote was selected because it shows how Diana not only was capable of being a self-starter, but she also used her expertise to assist others in her company.

Supervisory and Leadership Roles. Supervisory and leadership role is described as being a senior member in the company with direct reports who are placed in a position subordinate to the participant. This relates to positional influence because the participants make decisions and guide their team. They also influence company outcomes and employee performance.

Helen and Elizabeth formally and officially supervised employees within the organization. One participant was the first-level supervisor for 58 employees and the other participant was the first-level supervisor for 14 employees. Helen stated, "As the assistant director, I have 14 employees under me." This quote was selected because it illustrated Helen as a supervisor and how many direct reports she has aligned subordinate to her position. Elizabeth stated, "I am the first-level supervisor for 58 employees and 22 local nationals." This quote was selected because it illustrated Elizabeth as a supervisor and how many direct reports, she has aligned subordinate to her position.

Informal Authority. Positional influence was not about duty title and position or supervisor and leadership role for Gill. Informal authority can be described as not being officially recognized as a supervisor or leader but is knowledgeable and experienced, so

supervisors often seek them out for leadership opportunities. This relates to positional influence because although this participant has less authority, they still have influence. In fact, this participant expressed her experience of being exposed to leadership positions when her supervisor was not in the work center. This allowed her to build confidence as a leader and for employees and other managers to come to her for work related questions. Gill stated,

> If my flight chief or so forth is out for extended period of time, then I will step up in their place. I have held those leadership roles and responsibilities as the acting flight chief. So, I've pretty much served in all those capacities.

This quote was selected because it illustrates how Gill is being groomed for leadership roles.

Informal Influence. Informal influence can be described as being able to influence others based on credibility and reputation. This relates to positional influence because the participants do not hold a position of power others want to follow them. Farrah is an example of viewing herself as a leader within her organization from a different perspective. Moreover, Farrah stated,

> In this position, I feel I have a role as a leader in the community. I feel that I'm more of a mentor, so I would say that people, I know like my sisters, my family members, as well as some coworkers look up to me, and I mentor from time to time. Therefore, I feel that I still have that role as a leader.

This quote was selected because it demonstrates the influence Farrah has on people at work, in her family and in the community.

In summary, positional influence encapsulates the various ways the participants made an impact in their organizations. For all eight participants, positional influence was a matter of duty title and position, formal supervisory leadership, informal influence, informal authority, and

exerting self-leadership. Positional influence was used by the participants to advise leaders and guide others in their company and community. However, even though the participants had positional influence, they were met with challenges.

Challenges

The challenges subtheme describes the participants experiences as a leader in their organization. All eight participants shared examples of their experience as an African American woman in the workplace. As each participant reflected on their own individual perspective, it became very evident that there was commonality in all of them. There were challenges of stereotype victimization, competitiveness, assimilation, lack of employee support, discrimination, and being educated.

Stereotype Victimization. Stereotype victimization describes the concerns the participants felt which influenced their mannerisms in the workplace so they would not be perceived as a stereotype based on their race or gender. It illustrates what Black women who are leaders experience in the workplace. For all eight participants, stereotypes were a topic of discussion and it showed up in various ways. However, only six participants shared examples of how they experienced this by means of their profession, race and/or gender. An example of stereotype victimization was shared by Brenda, Helen, Allison, Elizabeth, Chandra, and Farrah.

Brenda, Helen, Allison, Elizabeth, Chandra, and Farrah all had leadership experiences where they were concerned that their behaviors or actions as an African American woman, both race and gender, would cause them to be stereotyped so they were mindful of how others perceived them. They did not want to be seen as the "angry Black woman" or "aggressive" or "Like you do not know what you are doing." Brenda stated: "I don't ever go into an environment

where I am boisterous or loud, but I do articulate my feelings and I do use facial expressions, but I have to make sure they are under control."

Helen stated: "You do not want to fail at what you do especially as an African American woman because of the stigma and stereotype or how people look at African Americans in charge." Allison shared: "In my position I have to hold back as a Black female and walk a fine line when I interact with management and employees just to make sure I am not seen as a stereotype." Stereotype victimization thus drove how some of the participants operated as a leader in their respective organizations.

Elizabeth stated, "Some said that they thought it was my mannerisms to be silent and quiet at the table, yet it was contradicting in the same breath to say that I am an angry Black woman." Chandra stated:

> Being a leader in a male nominated career field, I didn't want to be perceived as weak or emotional, so I had to minimize the feminine side of myself and be one of the guys. Me displaying this behavior to curve a stereotype made me feel less than and small.

Likewise, Farrah experienced the same thing in the workplace. Farrah stated:

> If you are too feminine then you are not seen as strong of a leader as a male. This mindset made me more of a direct person and as a female it could be looked at like you are taking on a male role. I've been told that I am not a feminine as I should be because of my directness.

Queen Bee Syndrome. Queen bee syndrome describes how a woman in a position of power treats other women, which is often more critically and harshly. Three of the eight. participants discussed their experiences of either witnessing or being directly impacted by

another Black woman in the workplace treating another Black woman poorly. Brenda, Diana, and Elizabeth all provided their examples of queen bee syndrome amongst Black women.

Brenda stated:

I feel that some of the minority women would rather put you down than to help build you up. So, when you talk about moving up in the federal government and challenges that African women African American women have had; I won't say it was just put on us by leadership that don't look like us. I think it's both sides.

By the same token, Diana witnessed the same thing as Brenda. Diana worked with Black women in leadership positions who did a lot of back biting. Diana believed this was because they each wanted to impress the higher ups in hopes it would get them promoted by putting the other Black woman down. Diana stated:

As a leader, it comes with challenges. I found myself being, which I thought at the time was in a unique position. The whole hierarchy was black women, but within that and looking at them, I lost faith. I saw a lot of backstabbing, back biting, tearing themselves down, which caused contention between them and a lack of mentorship or sponsorship for those behind them.

Although Brenda and Diana only witnessed the competitiveness amongst Black women leaders, Helen experienced it first-hand. She described her supervisor not helping her progress in her career because she looked at her like a threat to her position. Helen stated:

Honestly to tell you the truth, this is probably the first place that I've worked that had more African Americans in leadership positions than anywhere else that I've been. I will say that the struggle that I did have was with an African American, that was at the time, my first line supervisor.

Assimilation. Assimilation describes conforming to the predominate group in the workplace. Two participants mentioned the pressure they felt to assimilate in the workplace. For example, Farrah talked about working in a White male dominated organization. Farrah stated: "I did find that at times I'd have to tailor my discussion to those that I was speaking with or working with. I had to tailor myself to the environment." Similarly, Chandra experienced the same thing. Chandra said: "As an African American female, I felt that in most instances I did have to water down who I am to assimilate and therefore seem more professional. As I climbed through my ranks the assimilation varied."

Lack of Support. Lack of support describes as a leader not being able to get the support of a supervisor or higher leader to provide training for your employees. One of eight participants mentioned a lack of support. Elizabeth mentioned this as a source of contention for her as a leader. Elizabeth stated:

> You would think that with all these huge pots of money in the sky, for training, teaching, and becoming your better self that wanting us to be trained would be their number one or two job priorities. However, the challenge I have the most is opportunities to educate myself and my employees, in particular women who look like me.

Discrimination. Discrimination describes being treated differently because of your race, gender, or age. One of eight participants specifically mentioned the intersectionality of race, age and gender. Gill experienced the challenges of institutional racism, ageism, and gender. Gill stated:

> If I had to identify some challenges, I would say right off the bat race. I wouldn't necessarily say it has been a huge challenge, but it's definitely present. I've noticed

ageism a lot within federal careers, as well. I mean, honestly being a woman in general and institutional racism. I have experienced that, too.

Highly Educated. Highly educated describes the perceived threat that others feel in the workplace when a Black woman leader is highly educated or the "go to" person. Three of the eight participants mentioned how they have had challenges as it pertains to being viewed as highly educated or the person that people go to in the workplace. The participants were Allison, Elizabeth, and Gill.

Allison stated:

There is a stigma on Black women. Black women statistically are the most educated, the highest educated. I think the stigma doesn't just come from trying to place a label on us being angry or aggressive, but that stigma comes from fear of an intelligent black woman, the intellect of a Black woman.

In the same way, Elizabeth experienced not receiving the respect she deserved as a two-time PhD graduate. Elizabeth expressed how she had to demand her colleagues recognize her title as "doctor" and call her that accordingly. Elizabeth stated: "When my title changed and I required that I be called doctor, working in a room full of men it was like pulling their toenails off and their teeth without, you know, pain."

Gill experienced something a little different than Allison and Elizabeth as it pertains to being educated. Gill stated: "As a woman and woman of color, I've experienced opportunities be scarcer and more limited in nature when you are more knowledgeable, have more experience, and a higher education level versus a lot of male counterparts."

In summary, Black women leaders experience various challenges in the workplace. Black women have been forced to cope with the fear of stereotype victimization, queen bee syndrome,

assimilation, lack of support, discrimination, and being educated. These challenges shows that Black women face barriers and microaggressions at a much higher rate than any other demographic in the workplace.

Summary

In conclusion, the participants' narratives highlight their experience as a Black woman leader who is employed by the federal government. The overarching theme was Viewing Self as a Leader. There were two subthemes that emerged from it. Positional influence and challenges. The participants shared examples of how their positional influence impacted the company. Their positional influence was a matter of duty title and position they held in the company for three participants, a matter of formal supervisory leadership roles for two participants, a matter of informal influence for one participant, a matter of informal authority for one participant and exerting self-leadership for one participant.

Additionally, all the participants shared examples of challenges they faced as a Black woman leader in their organization. Six participants talked about stereotype threat, three participants mentioned competitiveness, two participants described their assimilation experience, one participant discussed lack of support and discrimination, and three participants illustrated their experiences of being educated in the workplace. The next section addresses the second research question: How do African American women describe mentorship, supervisory support, and leadership development opportunities as an employee of the federal sector?

Theme: Professional Development

The professional development theme describes the opportunities or advocacy provided to the participants that helped them move up into leadership positions. Elements of this theme were expressed by all eight participants. The participants described what those training opportunities

looked like and who play a vital role in their career progression. Two major subthemes emerged

in the data analysis: (1) training opportunities, and (2) career support system. These themes and

their respective subthemes are developed next. The subtheme training captures what type of

training the participants received for their career advancement. The second subtheme of

mentor/supervisor support captures if they had a mentor or supervisor who was key to their

career advancement.

Table 3

Professional Development

Subtheme	Code
Training opportunities	Formal training
	On-the-job training
	No recent training
Career support network	Mentor
	Supervisor

Training Opportunities

Training opportunities describe opportunities that were provided to the participants to

enhance their skills and knowledge on the job and advance their careers within the last 3 to 5

years. All the participants were afforded training opportunities in their careers; however, six out

of the eight participants received training within the last 3 to 5 years. The participants described

this training as on-the-job training where they shadowed a senior leader to learn more about the

job and formal training such as professional military education and organizational/professional

leadership courses.

On-the-Job Training. On-the-job training refers to giving the participants a level of exposure to a job or skill from a more experienced person in the organization. Two of the participants described their experience with on-the-job training. These participants were Allison and Brenda. Allison stated: "I was told to go to another office where somebody that worked at a different level could show me [what I needed to do] to be a future deputy." Allison shared that she shadowed a Black female deputy director in her company. Brenda described her situation as something to see. Brenda expressed: "I was able to rotate up to human resources and that was something because the perception in this work environment was that most of the African American people were support staff. They were not considered the professionals."

Formal Training. Formal training is described as a more regimented course that requires instruction or scheduled learning sessions. Four of the participants were afforded formal training opportunities within the last 3 to 5 years. These participants were Chandra, Elizabeth, Farrah, and Gill. Chandra shared her experience as an active-duty military member who received formal professional military education. Chandra stated: "I attended a military Senior Noncommissioned Officer Academy to teach you how to become a next tier level leader, manager, and supervisor of multiple employees." Elizabeth's experience differed from Chandra.

Elizabeth stated:

I was inducted into the honor society and offered a leadership position. I had to take several professional development courses for leadership and success in leadership which worked out well because I was taking on the coaching and mentoring aspect of my career as well.

Farrah stated: "I attended a senior leader course a few years back." Gill shared a similar experience as Farrah. However, she attended two formal training courses. Gill shared: "I have

attended the organizational leader course. I also attended the emerging leader course, as well within the last 3 to 5 years."

No Recent Training. No recent training describes those participants who have not participated or attended any training within the last 3 to 5 years that would advance their career progression. Two of the eight participants mentioned that they did not receive formal or on-the-job training within the last 3 to 5 years. These participants were Helen and Diana.

Helen stated: "My company is really good at sending the employees but since COVID and budget cuts we have not had the opportunity to attend management or leadership courses in person." Diana explained: "I have not participated in any training within the last 3 to 5 years but back in the day I did get a chance to shadow the office of general counsel."

In summary, training opportunities are key to professional development. It answered the research question about training opportunities African American women are offered who work for the federal sector. It captured the tools the participants were given to further excel in their career within the last 3 to 5 years. For two of the participants, their training came in the form of on-the-job training, whereas four participants received formal training whether it was in-person or virtual. Two participants expressed that they have not participated in training that would advance their career progression. Training opportunities is vital to provide the participants the tools they need to enhance their job performance and move up the company ladder; however, having a mentor or supervisory support who is deliberate about professional development is a key component to one's career advancement.

Career Support Network

Career support network describes a person or persons who was deliberate and intentional in helping or guiding the participants to achieve their career goals. The participants were asked if

having a mentor and being deliberate about professional development are key components to

one's career advancement. Most of the participants felt they had a great career support network

that helped them get promoted, taught them a lot about the profession and provided guidance to

them in their careers.

Mentor. Mentor describes a person in or outside of the company who advised and

provided guidance to the participants to help them grow and develop in the career. Five out of

the eight participants said that they had a mentor who helped them along in their career. These

participants were Allison, Chandra, Farrah, Gill, and Diana. Allison stated:

> When I was hired into my position, I was a GS-12. I was mentored by a Black female
>
> who was a director at the time and a Black male who was a GS-13. Their mentorship
>
> helped me get a promotion into a GS-13 position.

Chandra shares the same mentor demographic and sentiment as Allison. Chandra expressed:

> Throughout my career I have always had a mentor. They tended to seek me out. I've been
>
> mentored by Black men and women who taught me not only did I need to be
>
> knowledgeable, but I also had to learn how to play the game. This got me promoted into
>
> higher positions over the years.

Conversely, Farrah had a White female who mentored her. Farrah shared: "I've had a couple

strong mentors in the past. One of them being a White female. She taught me to never settle and

to go for my career goals."

Diana was promoted into a position because of a coworker. Diana said that she had

worked with a Hispanic male who was leaving the company for another job, so he helped Diana

get promoted into his position before he left. Diana shared: "I got the job I have now with the

assistance of the young man who had it before me, which is a Hispanic male."

Supervisor. Supervisor describes a person who directly oversees the participants and should be providing support to meet their professional goals. Three participants mentioned that their supervisors were also their mentors. Gill, Brenda and Helen. Gill expressed that as far as mentors' she tends to be more of a self-motivated type of person. Gill stated: "I had a Black male supervisor early on in my federal career who had a different leadership style, but you learned from it. The opportunities were always there." Gill also made mention of another supervisor who was big on training, education, and development.

Brenda shared that the two supervisors who helped her get promoted also mentored her. Brenda stated: "Supervisory support was my main possibility for promotion because the supervisor actually helped me to grasp and excel." Helen shared a similar sentiment as Brenda. Helen stated: "I worked directly for the assistant director. She would always teach me something new because she knew one day I would want to move into one of the higher positions. She was selfless and knew exactly what her employees needed." Helen's supervisor was a Black woman.

In summary, having a career support system was essential for the participants professional development. All of the participants recounted someone in their career who helped them get to the next level. The career support system came in the form of mentors, supervisors, and others that was not a mentor or supervisor. The nexus between five of the eight participants is that their career support system was Black/African American. Career support systems played a vital role in the participants well-being and workplace readiness.

Summary

A balanced assessment of the above information demonstrates the importance of the theme professional development. The two subthemes that materialized were training opportunities and career support system. It was evident that training opportunities and career

support systems aided in growth and advancement of the participants at one point or another in their career. Some of the participants experienced formal training or on-the-job training within the last 3 to 5 years, whereas others have not participated in training within that timeframe. All participants recounted a mentor, supervisor or someone else who made an impact on them and their upward mobility in their career.

In conclusion, professional development was key to thriving and success for all the participants. Six of the eight participants received either formal training or on-the-job training within the last 3 to 5 years. Also, all participants could recount a mentor, supervisor or someone who played a role in the career progression. The professional development the participants received helped them to enhance their skills, gain confidence, and new qualifications for higher job opportunities. The next section answers the question: What role does hypervisibility and invisibility play on career advancement for African America women who work for the federal sector.

Theme: Distinct Gender and Racial Identity

Black women experience the paradox of how they need to show up in the workplace in order to advance in their career. Distinct gender and racial identity theme describe how acceptance and distinctiveness impacted the participants in the workplace. Most participants did not differentiate between how they were treated as a woman compared to how they were treated because of their race. Matter of fact, most participants often coupled being woman and being Black together.

Components of this theme were expressed by all eight participants. Two major subthemes emerged in the data analysis: (1) invisible, and (2) hypervisible. The subtheme invisible is defined as minimizing race and gender authenticity and reinforcing assimilation to advance in

one's career. The second subtheme hyper/visible captures the authenticity of gender and race expression in career advancement.

Table 4

Distinct Gender and Racial Identity

Subtheme	Code
Invisible	Minimizing social identity
Hyper/visible	Maximizing social identity

Invisible

Invisible illustrates the participants behaviors to not draw attention to being Black/African American woman in the workplace. Three of the eight participants experienced this at some point in their career. These participants were Allison, Chandra, and Elizabeth.

Minimizing Social Identity. Minimizing social identity describes the participants who subscribed to cultural norms that are at odds with their social identity. Allison, Chandra, and Elizabeth narrated past experiences in their careers. Allison stated:

Going into the federal sector I had to polish my image and learn to pull back. I had to pull back because I did not want to be labeled anything negative or fall into the trap that is set for Black women sometimes and can hinder you getting promoted.

Allison had to pull back, but Chandra changed her hair to look more professional. Allison explained how she has to 'blank her slate' before going into an executive level staff meeting full of White males so that she is seen as less threatening and less aggressive. Therefore, making herself invisible during the meetings. Allison stated,

When I go into a meeting, which is typically an executive level meeting with White males, I can't carry my race in there. It's almost like you come in there with a blank slate,

you know that you're Black, but you must blank your slate for you to blend in. And I will

tell you if you blank, your slate, people see you as less threatening and less aggressive. I

believe it does give you more leadership opportunities.

Chandra expressed:

I think our appearance in how we wear our hair and how clothes fit on us is another thing

that makes us seem professional or unprofessional. There was a time where I felt I had to

relax my hair and make it look straight in order to be professional. Elizabeth experience

was different in that she felt if she only spoke when she had to then it would work out in

her favor.

Elizabeth stated:

When I first started in the federal sector being silent actually did help me. I used it as the

idea of I'll let my work show for itself. When I was placed in a room and had to talk to

my work, I talked to my work. Other than that, I wouldn't say anything. My silence

during that time got me promoted. The first 3 years being organization, I went from a six

to a nine in 3 years.

In summary, minimizing social identity can be demonstrated in various ways. It can be in

the form of pulling back on your identity like Allison, changing your hairstyle to conform like

Chandra, or just being silent and not rocking the boat like Elizabeth. Either way it helped three of

the participants advance in their career by being perceived as more professional or actually

getting promoted to a higher position.

Hyper/Visible

Hyper/visible illustrates the participants behaviors that drew attention to or did not take

away from being viewed as a Black/African American woman in the workplace. Five of the eight

participants experienced this at some point in their career. The participants were Gill, Diana, Farrah, Branda, and Helen.

  Maximizing Social Identity. Maximizing social identity describes the participants who did not subscribe to cultural norms that are at odds with their social identity. Gill, Diana, Brenda, Farrah, and Helen expressed past experiences in their careers. Gill stated:

   I would capitalize on those that appreciated my diversity versus me trying to downplay

   who I am. I may have been overlooked for promotion because of being vocal for

   speaking up, but I don't think it necessarily had anything to do with me being a woman of

   color.

Diana shared:

   I never hid my blackness. I am me in the way I talk and the way I do things. However,

   that within itself is an indication of why I'm only now where I am. Maybe if I had done

   things a little differently, I might have been ahead, but I wasn't raised that way.

Diana is implying that perhaps if she had minimized her social identity then she would be in a higher position than the one she is in now.

  Brenda stated: "I don't know that drawing attention to my race or gender contributed to my promotion, but it made it acceptable in the workforce. When you are your true authentic self, people will treat you as your true authentic self." Brenda's statement illustrates hyper/visible because she felt that being your authentic self in the workplace allowed supervisors and coworkers to appreciate you for who you are and not what you are pretending to be.

  Farrah shared a difference experience of being biracial both White and Black and how that was used to her advantage. Since she has a Hispanic last name and looks racially ambiguous,

she has been about to minimize her Black race while still being afforded opportunities because her White male leaders thought she was Hispanic. Farrah stated,

> Some supervisors would see me as a Black female while others saw me as a Hispanic female before they will see me as a white female. However, although I identify as a Black female, I would minimize that side of me. This afforded me more benefits and opportunities compared to women who looked Black.

Farrah stated, "In some situations, being visible benefited me when a quota had to be met. For example, when they needed more diversity in an organization that got me a jump ahead of some people." Helen stated,

> I kept applying for leadership positions but was not selected even though I exceeded the qualifications; however, it was not until I sat down with the white female hiring official and brought to her attention that as a Black woman, I felt overlooked when it came to promotions that I was considered and selected to fill a higher position in the company.

Farrah's and Helen's comments are an example of how they saw an opportunity to draw attention to their race to climb the career ladder in her organization.

In summary, hyper/visible illustrated the participants who drew attention or did not take away from the authenticity of being a Black woman in the workplace. Two participants maximized their social identity by capitalizing off of it at the peak of diversity initiatives in their company or challenging being overlooked for a job they were qualified to get. Other participants saw it as an opportunity to be their authentic selves in hopes that others will value what they bring to the company.

What was evident in the participants experiences is that only two women benefited from being hyper/visible; however, it was under certain conditions that focused on their race more

than it did on their talent alone. Additionally, the others had to seek out people who appreciated their race and not just their talent alone.

Summary

In conclusion, the participants provided experiences of how they needed to show up in the workplace in order to advance in their career. There were two subthemes that emerged from their responses. One theme was invisible, and the second theme was hyper/visible. Three of the participants minimized their social identity whereas five participants maximized their social identity. In both cases and depending on where the participants were in their career, some found being invisible to be beneficial and some found being hyper/visible to be beneficial.

Chapter Summary

This study was guided by three research questions that aided the exploration of the participants' experiences as they relate to hypervisibility, invisibility and how it impacted their career advancement for opportunities and leadership positions. The questions included: (1) What is the experience of an African American woman who works for the federal sector? (2) How do African American women describe mentorship, supervisory support and leadership development opportunities as an employee of the federal sector? and (3) What role does hypervisibility and invisibility play on career advancement for African America women who work for the federal sector? In this chapter, I provided an overview of the research process, presentation of the findings, and a description of the participants. The participants' actual oral interviews and written transcripts contributed to the development of the three themes that emerged, which were viewing self as a leader, professional development, and distinct race and gender identity and its subthemes. This chapter presents the key findings from eight extensive interviews.

The next chapter aims to provide and interpret key conclusions from the findings of this study. It will include a discussion of findings, significance of the research, implications, limitations, and recommendations for future research.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

The purpose of this qualitative study was to highlight the lived experiences of Black/African American women who work for the federal sector. Specifically, what was their experience as an African American woman leader who works for the federal sector, how they described mentorship, supervisory support and leadership development opportunities as an employee of the federal sector, and what role hypervisibility and invisibility played on career advancement for African America women leader. The research attempted to build on previous studies regarding the underrepresentation of Black/African American women in leadership positions and their career advancement in the workplace. It also aimed to contribute to the further study hyper/visibility and invisibility of Black women in the workplace improving the viability of this emergent leadership issue.

This chapter highlights the final analysis of the data and conclusions. The chapter aims to present and interpret key conclusions from the findings of this research. A discussion of findings, significance of the study, implications, limitations, and recommendations for future research follows.

Discussion of Findings in Relation to Past Literature

Viewing Self as a Leader

Viewing self as a leader can be subjective depending on who is asked the question. To become a leader, it depends on how individuals perceive someone's capabilities as a leader (Motro et al., 2021). African American women encounter unique barriers to senior managerial positions (Bloch et al., 2020). An interesting linkage between some of the participants is that they served in the military. Serving in the military instills that leadership concept in all members regardless of rank. Through the analysis of the data, one can assume that currently or previously

serving in the military supports why five of the eight participants felt strongly about being a leader in their organization, which illustrated a consistent thought process in viewing self as a leader. Viewing self as a leader aligns with leadership self-efficacy. Leadership self- efficacy pertains to a person's confidence in their ability to effectively execute their leadership roles and display leadership skills required to carry out the job (Akyavuz & Asıcı, 2021).

Positional influence theme describes the participants power or influence based on a title or position, but their leadership span of control can be limited. Having positional influence does not in itself constitute that a person is a leader within their organization or that others view them as a leader in their organization. Five of the eight participants who viewed themselves as a leader served in an administrative role, affirmative employment, conflict management or sexual assault advocacy role. Research shows that that Black women who fill these positions quickly leads to burnout and a fear of failure (Ellis, 2022).

The participants described various reasons for why they had positional influence and the impact they made within their company to achieve its goals or mission. They illustrated how they were a leader in the workplace with positional influence because they guided their leaders on certain decisions, led or managed people who participated in their program and mentored some peers and coworkers. Positional influence allowed the participants to showcase their skills, experience and intellect to the senior leaders and coworkers they advise on company decisions. Black women who are more deliberate on leadership self-efficacy are more likely to display confidence, persistence and the capability to mature as a leader (Seibert et al., 2017). This correlates with Holder et al. (2015) that African American women are a significant member of the increasing source of talent in the workforce and have been represented at the mid-level management positions.

Black women experience specific and unfamiliar barriers that hinder their career as well as leadership opportunities and development (Reynolds-Dobbs et al., 2008). Through the *challenges* theme, the participants described unique situations they experienced as leaders within their organizations. They faced various demands and had to navigate them with the utmost professionalism in an effort to not be viewed any other way than as a subject matter expert and leader, and not a stereotype in the workplace.

Furthermore, Rosette and Livingston (2012) made the case that Black women experience more negative perceptions as it pertains to leadership positions. The challenges theme illuminated what Black women go through who view themselves as a leader. They have to show up in workspaces knowing that there is no room for error and one mishap, which adds additional pressure on them internally and the position they hold in the organization. Overall, positional influence described the participants role within the organization and how they made an impact, and challenges described the unique circumstances and perceptions the participants experienced as a leader.

Professional Development

Professional development is the opportunities or advocacy provided to the participants that helped them move up into leadership positions. Even though Black women work hard and excel at their job, biases are still a motivating factor behind why they become stagnant once appointed to a leadership position (Obenauer & Langer, 2019). Prior studies show that having a mentor and mentorship programs help support the trajectory of careers (Mondisa, 2018).

All the participants experienced professional development in their careers. According to Parsons (2022), professional development is gained by obtaining higher education, training, and new skills after entering the workforce. It is important because it helps with promotions and

career advancement. The participants discussed their professional within the past 5 years. Not every participant sought or received professional development. Although COVID was a factor during this timeframe.

Companies are moving and evolving very rapidly, so it's critical for employees to look for programs that cultivates agile leadership and innovative strategies (Parsons, 2022). One of the key factors to professional development is training opportunities. The participants described their training opportunities within the last 5 years as on the job training like a shadowing a senior leader or professional military education training. Training opportunities such as what the participants mentioned are components of professional development but may or may not be the most beneficial to career advancement.

Furthermore, there is a correlation to professional development and building networks, bolstering credibility, and building confidence. The participants illustrated this correlation by the formal training they received. It allowed them to gain new skills which helped build their confidence and credibility in their role. Also, they mentioned how these training opportunities helped them get promoted in their careers.

The participants reflect their professional development. They described this in the career support network. The participants expressed who they considered their career support system. Although the absence of access to informal networks that can help propel an employee forward is another reason why Black women are not represented in upper management ranks (Davis & Maldonado, 2015), they showed a strong sense of appreciation to those who helped them throughout their career. The participants through career support network theme also reflected on who those people were that comprised of their career support system. Whether it was a supervisor, mentor or someone else inside the job or outside of it, most of the people who were a

part of the participants' career support network were the same race as them, Black/African American. This clearly demonstrates a contradiction because there can be a queen bee syndrome where Black supervisors can treat their subordinates more harshly or they can be very supportive of them. The participants all recognized training opportunities and a career support system are key elements to advancing in their careers.

Distinct Gender and Racial Identity

Black women modify their behaviors to avoid stereotypes that they are aggressive in an effort to be viewed as professional (Dickens et al., 2019). They alter their language and mannerisms based on perceptions, expectations of others, and the feeling of being a pariah within the workplace (Dickens et al., 2019). Identity negotiation is when a person looks for ways, consciously or subconsciously, to alter their identity when interacting with other people (McDowell & Cunningham, 2009). When identity negotiation occurs, the perceiver may influence the mental image one has of themselves (McDowell & Cunningham, 2009).

Distinct gender and racial identity focused on the participants lived experiences of intersectionality and how it manifested itself in the workplace. Most participants provided stories of invisibility and hyper/visibility. Many participants reflected on certain instances in the workplace as a Black woman and how it made them feel. Most participants even cited if they felt being invisible or hyper/visible helped them further their career or get more leadership opportunities. Therefore, this theme aligns with the literature review revealing that race and gender stereotypes seem to still influence professional perceptions and African American women find themselves at a juncture of both gender and race (Hall, 2018; Reynolds-Dobbs et al., 2008). Also, identity negotiation theory that even though each person has to adapt to their work

environment, Black women modify their behaviors to avoid stereotypes that they are aggressive in an effort to be viewed as professional (Dickens et al., 2019).

Hyper/visibility can be beneficial when a person has the ability to be heard and have a voice; therefore, African American women seek to be visible in an effort to increase their recognition and power (Settles et al., 2019). Members feel they have a sense of authenticity when they can be themselves in a public forum. When asked specifically if visibility contributed to the participants promotions and career advancement, the majority of the participants stated yes.

All of the participants in the study reflected on if they ever minimized their race, gender or both to assimilate to another group and if minimizing themselves helped with their career progression exacerbating invisibility. The majority of the participants expressed that they did not feel the need to minimize their attributes in the workplace. Yet, all participants were transparent in sharing their experience that at one time or another, they were conscience of how their mannerisms as a Black woman were perceived by White leaders in the organization. Most of the participants said that they were at times invisible in the workplace. Placing a low value on a Black woman's distinctive characteristics can be seen as assimilation, whereby a Black woman feels the need to go along to get along at the expense of denouncing their own unique social identity (McCluney & Rabelo, 2019).

Moreover, Black women who assimilate to the majority group are not seen as the typical woman or Black person making them invisible (McCluney & Rabelo, 2019). The core of this phenomenon is that Black women are still underrepresented in leadership positions within the workplace. Although all participants identified themselves as a leader, only two women directly supervised employees and officially held a supervisory position. The participants were transparent about how hypervisibility or invisibility contributed to their career advancement

opportunities. Many women stated that whether it was intentional or not they were mindful of their behaviors and mannerisms at work so they would not be viewed as a stereotype. The participants understood distinct gender and race identity as it pertained to career advancement and how to operate in the workplace that would benefit them in the long run.

Limitations

There are limitations to this study. An initial limitation was the location of the participants varied from the Netherlands to the south, Midwest, and east coasts of the United States. The first limitation is that the findings may only apply to the specified group of participants involved in the research. The study's targeted audience were African American women who promoted into a leadership position within the last 5 years or aspiring to be in a leadership position. The second limitation is that the participants have similarities that have not been controlled. Their ages ranged from 41-62, which is a broad scope, and the fact that some participants served in the military, never served in the military and one participant was still serving in the military contained too much variation.

A third limitation is that the findings may be skewed towards an African American/Black woman's perspective without the views of other minority women. Moreover, this research only focused on Black women who work for the federal sector. This is a limitation because the experiences of other women in a leadership position or aspire to be in a leadership position who work for the federal sector may provide further pertinent findings.

Another set of limitations comes from this being a phenomenological study. Although the sample size of eight participants was enough to reach saturation, a larger sample could provide more robust findings.

The assumption that experiences of the participants reflect all Black/African American women who work for the federal sector in a leadership position or aspiring to be promoted into a leadership position lends to a limitation due to uncontrollable variables that may have influenced the responses. Purposive sampling was utilized to mitigate the impact of this limitation.

Implications

Current research on leadership behaviors does not specifically highlight the experiences of African American women who work for the federal sector. While there is a good amount of research that explores the experiences of minorities in the workplace and their experience as a leader, few of these studies have explored the underrepresentation of Black women in leadership positions and if mitigating social identity of amplifying social identity aids in their career advancement. More research has focused on women, as a whole, being underrepresented in leadership positions.

Knowledge about Black women in leadership positions who work for the federal sector and if invisibility or hypervisibility plays a role in their career advancement is pertinent because as Black women climb the corporate ladder, they continue to encounter challenges that limit access to the senior executive levels and their overall career advancement (Holder et al., 2015). The findings from this research will add to existing leadership theories, particularly in the study of hyper/visibility and invisibility and the role it plays on achieving leadership positions. The themes identified in the research cover a multitude of topics in organizational leadership that will hopefully open up universal dialogue that describes Black women's experiences as a leader working for the federal sector.

The viewing self as leader, professional development, and distinct gender and racial identity themes encompasses a broad spectrum of experiences felt in the work environments. The

concise illustrations can aid organizational leadership theorists and practitioners in amplifying and delineating concepts in these topics more easily.

The findings of this research can inform hyper/visibility and invisibility and its impact on a Black women's career advancement who works for the federal sector. African American women who do reach leadership status may be anomalies in their predominately White organizations and experience tokenism as they choose between trying to limit their visibility, which may render them invisible in the workplace (Kanter, 1977; McCluney & Rabelo, 2019). This study highlights factors that impact Black women's career advancement and inform where management in companies can focus their efforts to deliberately develop everyone to reach their full potential and show up as their authentic selves.

Whether they are hyper/visible or invisible, African American women feel vulnerable and unguarded in the work environment (Dickens et al., 2019). This study outlines specific experiences that can contribute to making improvements in leadership advancement in the practice of intersectionality in the workplace, especially with respect to professional development and distinct gender and racial identity.

Intersectionality is important as it pertains to hyper/visibility and invisibility more so for Black women who work for the federal sector and desire career advancement into a leadership position or a higher leadership position. The professional development and distinct gender and racial identity themes provide a framework for deepening the understanding of the experiences that this particular demographic and how organizations can be deliberate about setting them up for success to thrive and advance in their careers.

Furthermore, truly understanding and comprehending the shared experiences of the participants in this study can help develop mentorship, sponsorship, and leadership programs that

are geared towards professional development of underrepresented demographics in leadership positions in the workplace. At the very least it could help support systemic equity to allow opportunities for all.

Lastly, this research focuses on Black/African American women who work for the federal sector and if invisibility and hyper/visibility plays a part on their career advancement. More robust awareness of working for the federal sector and career advancement can facilitate new theories and action plans for these similar experiences.

Recommendations

Previous to this study, the literature that was available discussed the underrepresentation of Black women in managerial and leadership positions and the perception of tokenism (Dickens et al., 2019) but did not specifically address if hyper/visibility or invisibility contributed to the career advancement of those who were in the managerial or leadership positions. This research filled some gaps in literature by addressing how Black women view themselves as leaders, their professional development, and how they navigated their distinct racial and gender identities working for the federal sector. However, the research did not address the psychological impact these experiences had on the participants. This research will inform and enhance future research. Future research might also look at the disparities of Black women who work for the federal and how they can close the pay gap and promotion gap compared to their counterparts in the workplace.

This study focused on a particular group of African American/Black women who work for the federal sector, so the findings are specific to just this group of women. Future research can broaden the scope and interview a larger population of Black women who work for various agencies to determine if hyper/visibility and invisibility played a role in their career advancement

in the company. Overall, a comparison of Black women who work for the federal sector and other nonfederal agencies is a strong area of opportunity in future research.

Lastly, the participants in this study still work for the federal sector. Future studies can focus on why Black women decide to stay working for the federal government if they experience challenges and are slower to move up the leadership ladder compared to their counterparts.

Recommendations for Practice

Practitioners should consider unique interventions to address hypervisibility and invisibility concerns. They should also conduct an overall assessment of perception of career advancement.

Recommendations for Research

This study suggests intersectionality affects the perception of this population, thus normalizing navigating between hypervisibility and invisibility to achieve career advancement. Recommended research should look deeper into effective ways to address intersectionality in the workplace.

Conclusions

This population of women are often faced with the realization of intersectionality, which can affect how they decide to show up in the workplace. Focusing on the perspective of African American women who work for the federal sector regarding how they view themselves as a leader, professional development, and distinct racial and gender identity highlighted elements that are necessary for helping this population overcome barriers to promotion opportunities and allow more advancement into mid to senior level positions in their organization.

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Appendix A: Participation Flyer

SHARE YOUR

STORY !

The Career Advancement of African American/Black Women in the Federal Sector

For more information contact
Elisha Peters at erp18a@acu.edu

Seeking study participants

You are invited to participate in a research study conducted by Abilene Christian University Doctoral Candidate Elisha Peters to share your experience regarding career advancement into leadership positions within the federal Sector.

Please ONLY respond if you are in a leadership position or are aspiring to be in a leadership position and have participated in leadership development programs.

Inclusion Criteria for Participation:

- You must be 18 years of age or older to participate in this study.
- You must be employed by the federal sector
- You must identify as an African American/Black woman.
- **Were promoted into a leadership position within the past five years or aspiring to be a in a leadership position.**

This study will include a survey and a virtual interview via Zoom. The interview should take no longer than 90 minutes.

Appendix B: Participation Recruitment Email

Hello,

Thank you so much for your willingness to participate in my research study. Attached is the consent form, which I will need signed and returned back to me. The consent form will provide you with a little more details about my topic. Also, the survey questions are what we will discuss during the interview process. Please feel free to complete it ahead of time and send it back to me. Once I receive your consent form back signed, I will schedule an interview with you via Zoom.

If you have any further questions or concerns, please let me know. Thank you and I look forward to hearing from you!

Warmest regards,

Elisha R. Peters, MA
Doctoral Candidate, Doctor of Education
Abilene Christian University
xxx-xxx-xxxx

Appendix C: Informed Consent

Introduction: The Career Advancement of African American/Black Women in the Federal Sector

The purpose of this research is to understand the lived experience of African American women who work for the federal sector and their career progression to leadership positions. The first part of the study will be a survey that asks a series of questions based on your experience as an African American/Black women who works for the federal sector and your ascension into leadership positions/opportunities. The second part of the study will be follow-up interviews. My research is not funded by any agency and this interview should take no longer than an hour and a half.

You may be able to take part in a research study. This form provides important information about that study, including the risks and benefits to you as a potential participant. Please read this form carefully and ask the researcher any questions that you may have about the study. You can ask about research activities and any risks or benefits you may experience. You may also wish to discuss your participation with other people, such as your family doctor or a family member.

Your participation in this research is entirely voluntary. You may refuse to participate or stop your participation at any time and for any reason without any penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

PURPOSE AND DESCRIPTION:

The lack of significant representation of African American women in leadership positions in the federal government diminishes what it means for these organizations to promote diversity, inclusion, and equality. The purpose of this qualitative study is to understand the lived experience of African American women who work for the federal sector and the role invisibility and hypervisibility play in their career progression to leadership positions.

My goal is to survey and interview African American women who work for the federal sector who have been promoted to a leadership position within the last five years. My qualitative research will answer the question: Do African American women who are hypervisible have more leadership development opportunities, such as mentoring, job shadowing, advanced training, leadership development program, etc. than African American women who are invisible?

If selected for participation, you will be asked to complete a survey and participate in a 90 minute follow-up interview.

RISKS & BENEFITS:

Appendix D: IRB Approval

ABILENE CHRISTIAN UNIVERSITY
Educating Students for Christian Service and Leadership Throughout the World

Office of Research and Sponsored Programs
320 Hardin Administration Building, ACU Box 29103, Abilene, Texas 79699-9103
325-674-2885

April 26, 2022

Elisha R. Peters
Department of Educational Leadership
Abilene Christian University

Dear Elisha,

On behalf of the Institutional Review Board, I am pleased to inform you that your project titled

"African American Women's Experience with Invisibility and Hypervisibility in the Workplace: Does it Matter to Career Advancement?",

(IRB# 22-038   )is exempt from review under Federal Policy for the Protection of Human Subjects.

If at any time the details of this project change, please resubmit to the IRB so the committee can determine whether or not the exempt status is still applicable.

I wish you well with your work.

Sincerely,

Megan Roth

Megan Roth, Ph.D.
Director of Research and Sponsored Programs