

**ACTIVATING THE POWER WITHIN:  
SPONSORSHIP AMONG  
BLACK WOMEN  
PROFESSIONALS**

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A Dissertation  
Submitted to  
The Temple University Graduate Board

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In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

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August 2018

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## ABSTRACT

This study examined how Black women professionals activate their power by sponsoring other Black women to remediate the chronic problem of the underrepresentation of Black women in positions of organizational leadership. This qualitative, multi-case, exploratory study animated the quantitative data about Black women professionals by giving them a voice and an opportunity to share their lived experiences as they related to the findings about studies on the leadership development of Black women. The firsthand insights of the Black women in this study provided data about the effects that race, gender, laws, policies, identity, and ethics have on Black women professionals' efforts to leverage their influence and elevate other Black women to leadership, i.e., sponsorship.

The data revealed the consensus of concern among the Black women in the study about the lack of Black women leaders. Major findings from the study include: the challenges that Black women experience in society and in the workplace that hinder them from practicing sponsorship; the origination of the Theory of Concentric Positionality of Identity, i.e., Concentricity, as a means to understand how positionality, identity, and in-group affiliations affect the practice of sponsorship among Black women; the historical and temporal factors that have affected the practice of sponsorship among Black women; and data that demonstrated the viability and effectiveness of sponsorship among Black women as a leadership development strategy to increase the number of Black women leaders.

**Keywords:** Black women, sponsorship, underrepresentation, education, leadership, identity, intersectionality, race, gender, women, law, ethics, ethical considerations, positionality, concentric, Theory of Concentricity, Concentric Positionality of Identity.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

As a proud Black woman, I am aware of my intersectional identities and how society views, and does not always value, my personhood, race, and gender. I cherish my kinship to the Black community and I advocate for the advancement of my people. As a conscious and discerning Black person, I know that what can hurt one of us can hurt all of us and I openly oppose injustice and oppression. As a woman, I am not desperate for the approval and acceptance of those who are content with the status quo that works to their benefit and to the detriment of women. As a result of conducting this research, I now know definitively what I will not tolerate and what I will lift my voice for. And, I do not fear losing money or things for expressing my views and my truths because I know that I am my most valuable possession.

My study was not written to comfort, it was written to confront the very real phenomena of the persistent biases that plague Black women professionals in the workplace. This research stirred my soul from slumber and helped me realize that it was imperative to explore sponsorship as a means for Black women to actively help ourselves rather than passively wait for others to do so.

Black women are brilliant, we are powerful, and we are legion.

My goal with this work was to be conscious, proud, impervious, unapologetic, and fearless in my Black womanhood.

Yes, this is personal.

I would like to thank the wonderful people who have been supportive of my research journey:

The great Black women who participated in this study: I appreciate your understanding about the urgency and necessity of our empowerment and I thank you for the candor with which you shared your stories. You are all amazing and I am honored that you gave your time and voices to my research.

My advisor, the extraordinary Dr. James Earl Davis, whose wise counsel was invaluable, whose office was an oasis, and whose friendship is a true and treasured gift. Dr. Davis, you are my exemplar.

To my committee members: Dr. Joseph DuCette for his openness and objectivity, Dr. Jayminn Sulir Sanford-DeShields for her constructive critique, and Dr. Valerie I. Harrison for her astute analysis; the best dissertation committee I could ever hope for.

Dr. Corinne Caldwell, in whose class I earned my first A letter grade in my doctoral coursework in a field that I had never studied or practiced. I am truly grateful to Dr. Caldwell for encouraging me and validating my ability to be successful in the doctoral program.

Dr. Michael Jackson, who encouraged me to pursue a doctorate and helped me put my aspirations into action.

Lisa Hoffstein, my mentor and lifelong sisterfriend to whom I am grateful for always believing in me and supporting my endeavors.

Sylvester Johnson for your friendship and constant calming presence in my life.

Romona Riscoe Benson: you amaze me every day with your dignity, grace, work ethic, and incredible wisdom. You are my paragon of professionalism and I am fortunate and proud to have you as my boss. With your sponsorship, Romona, I am living my dissertation.

My doctoral cohorts: Tyree Williams who encouraged me; and the incomparable and kind Dr. Kimberly Taylor-Benns, my dear sisterfriend who helped me get through the roughest part of my doctoral tempest and celebrated with me in triumph – we are bonded in friendship forever.

Robin Roberts, my sweet friend who helps me to see the beauty of life both literally and figuratively.

Dennis Dumpson, my dear fiend and personal sage who is the personification of love and light.

My dear sisterfriends, the Trailblazers, who are my personal champions: Rana, Roslyn, Kim, Christine, Danielle, and Katherine.

Shonda McClain, my absolute best friend who always lifts me up with love, and whose friendship I never want to live without.

Douglas Davis, my beloved husband who has known me for more than half of my life and whose love and support is a blessing each and every day. I love you, Douglas.

Skylar Davis, my brilliant and beautiful daughter whom I love with everything that I am.

Aaron and Jeffrey, my brothers: I hope this research paper makes you proud of me on Earth and from Heaven.

My marvelous parents: Gerald Horton Branson and Sandra Muriel Branson who gave me life and always encouraged me to think and dream. I love you both beyond words.

And lastly, I want to thank Maria W. Stewart who dared to speak the truth with power and without apology, and who demanded justice for and excellence from her people. I honor the legacy of Maria W. Stewart in this research paper by using her words from yesterday to insist on answers and real solutions for today.

Awake!

Arise!

## DEDICATION

I dedicate this research paper and the following poem that I have written to the two most important women in my life: my mother and the sponsor of my life, Sandra Muriel Branson; and my wonderful daughter and protégé, Skylar McKennan Davis.

My mother's dreams for me  
As manifold as the Sands  
On an ocean shore  
Fill my head  
With visions of infinity  
In her eyes  
There is nothing I cannot do  
She is the Key  
To all that I am and will be  
She loves me  
Beyond the moon  
That turns the tides  
And my mother's love  
Is my lodestar  
That guides my maternity  
As I encourage the life  
Of my brilliant daughter  
Radiant as the sun  
She is  
Whom I cherished first and only  
With boundless joy  
And abundant love  
I tell her  
Always  
My dreams for her  
Are as bountiful  
As the Sands of the seas  
And my belief in her  
Is as limitless  
As the Sky

- Keeya Branson-Davis

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

|   | Page |
|---|------|
| ABSTRACT .....  | ii   |
| ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .....  | iii  |
| DEDICATION .....  | vii  |
| LIST OF TABLES .....  | xii  |
| LIST OF FIGURES .....   | xiii |
| PREFACE .....   | xiv  |
| <br>CHAPTER   |      |
| 1. INTRODUCTION.....  | 1    |
| Statement of the problem .....  | 3    |
| Purpose of the Study .....  | 6    |
| Intersectionality and Positionality .....                                   | 7    |
| Laws and Policies .....   | 7    |
| Ethical Considerations .....  | 8    |
| Research Questions .....  | 8    |
| Definition of Terms .....   | 9    |
| Conceptual Framework .....  | 12   |
| Historical Underpinning .....   | 13   |
| Contemporary Literature .....   | 13   |
| Intersectionality of Race and Gender and Positionality of<br>Identity ..... | 13   |
| Affirmative Action Laws and Policies .....                                  | 14   |
| Multiple Ethical Paradigms .....  | 14   |
| Sponsorship .....   | 15   |
| Significance of the Study .....   | 16   |



|   |    |
|---|----|
| 2. REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE .....   | 18 |
| Purpose of the Literature Review .....  | 19 |
| Underrepresentation of Black Women Leaders: Assumptions Contradict<br>Actuality .....                         | 20 |
| The Intersectionality of Race and Gender and the Concentric Positionality<br>of Identity of Black Women ..... | 22 |
| The Limitations of Affirmative Action Laws and Diversity and Inclusion<br>Policies .....                      | 25 |
| The Ethical Dilemmas of Facilitating Equity .....   | 29 |
| The Ethic of Care: Perceptions of Discrimination .....  | 29 |
| The Ethic of Critique: The Effects of Patriarchy on Progression .....   | 31 |
| The Ethic of Justice: Affirmative Action and Diversity and Inclusion ....                                     | 32 |
| Sponsorship as an Advanced Form of Advocacy .....   | 33 |
| The Differences Between Mentorship and Sponsorship .....  | 34 |
| Recommendations for Sponsorship .....   | 36 |
| Black Women Activating their Power as Sponsors .....  | 39 |
| 3. METHODS AND PROCEDURES .....   | 42 |
| Qualitative Research Design .....   | 42 |
| Study Participants .....  | 43 |
| Data Collection Procedures .....  | 45 |
| Data Analysis .....   | 47 |
| Role of the Researcher .....  | 48 |
| Ethical Issues .....  | 51 |
| 4. FINDINGS .....   | 52 |
| Data Analysis of Findings.....  | 52 |
| The Effects of the Intersectionality of Race and Gender on Sponsorship Among<br>Black Women .....             | 53 |
| Themes: Intersectionality of Race and Gender .....  | 54 |

|  |     |
|--|-----|
| Theme #1: Being the Only Black Woman .....   | 55  |
| Theme #2: The Angry Black Woman .....  | 62  |
| Theme #3: The Nurturer or Mother Figure .....  | 63  |
| Theme #4: The Differences Between Black Women and White<br>Women .....                           | 65  |
| The Effects of the Law and Policy on Sponsorship Among Black Women .....                         | 73  |
| The Effects of Ethical Considerations on Sponsorship Among Black Women ....                      | 76  |
| Themes: Ethical Considerations .....   | 76  |
| Theme #1: Underestimation of Professional Ability .....  | 77  |
| Theme #2: Antagonism Among Black Women .....   | 79  |
| Theme #3: Salary Disparity .....   | 82  |
| Theme #4: Exclusion from Leadership .....  | 85  |
| Theme #4: Comparison to White Counterparts .....   | 87  |
| Concentric Racial and Gender Positionality of Identity .....                                     | 88  |
| Development of Concentric Positionality of Identity Theory .....                                 | 88  |
| Implementation of the Concentric Racial and Gender Positionality of<br>Identity Instrument ..... | 93  |
| Concentric Positionality of Identity Theory in Relation to Black<br>Women .....                  | 94  |
| Experience and Practice of Sponsorship Among Black Women Professionals ...                       | 95  |
| Sponsorship Among Black Women: Experience and Practice .....                                     | 97  |
| Sponsorship Experiences Among Black Women Professionals .....                                    | 100 |
| Sponsors and Influencers .....   | 102 |
| Historical and Temporal Contexts of Sponsorship Among Black Women<br>Professionals .....         | 104 |
| Historical Context: Timeline .....   | 104 |
| Historical Factors .....   | 106 |
| Temporal Factors .....   | 106 |
| Summary of Findings .....  | 108 |

|  |     |
|--|-----|
| 5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION .....                       | 109 |
| Discussion .....   | 109 |
| Limitations .....  | 110 |
| Recommendations for Future Research .....                | 112 |
| Implications.....  | 112 |
| Conclusion .....   | 114 |
| REFERENCES .....   | 116 |
| APPENDICES .....   | 130 |
| A. CONSENT FORM FOR RESEARCH .....                       | 130 |
| B. PROTOCOL .....  | 133 |
| C. CONCENTRIC POSITIONALITY OF IDENTITY INSTRUMENT ..... | 135 |

## LIST OF TABLES

## TABLE

|  |     |
|--|-----|
| 3.1 Participant Groups and Respondents .....                                 | 45  |
| 4.1 Themes: Intersectionality of Race and Gender .....                       | 55  |
| 4.2 The Effects of Laws and Policies on Sponsorship Practices .....          | 74  |
| 4.3 Ethical Considerations Themes.....                                       | 76  |
| 4.4 Concentricity Ranking Scale.....   | 91  |
| 4.5 Profiles of Concentric Racial and Gender Positionality of Identity ..... | 92  |
| 4.6 Concentricity Profile and Interview Comparisons .....                    | 94  |
| 4.7 Experience and Practice of Sponsorship Among Black Women .....           | 99  |
| 4.8 Respondents' Experiences with Sponsorship .....                          | 100 |
| 4.9 Sponsors and Professional Influencers .....                              | 102 |
| 4.10 Historical and Temporal Timelines of Respondents.....                   | 105 |

## LIST OF FIGURES

## FIGURE

|     |   |    |
|-----|---|----|
| 1.1 | Conceptual Framework Design.....  | 12 |
| 2.1 | An Example of a Concentric Racial and Gender Positionality of Identity<br>Profile for Black Women .....                       | 24 |
| 4.1 | Concentric Racial and Gender Positionality of Identity Instrument for<br>Black Women - Affiliations and Affinity Groups ..... | 91 |

## PREFACE

I looked around the room and took a deep breath.

It was the first administrative staff meeting that I had ever led in my career and we were discussing the event programming goals and schedule for an upcoming summer season. As the newly appointed Director of Programming, I was excited about being responsible for presenting the calendar for events that were going to be held at one of the most visited tourist destinations in a major city. Confidently, clear-eyed, and strategically, I proposed my vision within the context of previous successful events and cultural trends that were based on current demographic data and I projected what events would be best to add to the calendar.

As I made my presentation to the leaders of the company, I took note of the racial and gender composition of the group of attendees in the meeting. The President and Chief Executive Officer of the company was a White male, the Executive Vice President of the company was a White male, the Vice President of Operations was a White male, the Vice President of my department was a White female, and then there was me -- the lone Black woman. Everyone in the room had been with the company for at least five years except me, and the President had been at the company for twenty years by that time. The attendees were attentive, reviewed my proposal as I spoke, and seemed genuinely receptive to everything I said, until I began to talk about an annual event that had been held for ten consecutive years but had begun to decline in popularity and ticket sales.

I explained that according to my review of the previous programming strategy and target audiences, the budget, the ticket sales history, and my sales projections based on

my trend and demographic research, the event would continue to decline unless a new programming strategy was implemented. The event had been targeted to an audience that was predominantly composed of White families from the city and suburbs. Based on my research, it was my conclusion that the steady decline in attendance was due to those audiences choosing to go to the beaches of a neighboring state rather than remain in the city during the summer holiday weekend. And, since the targeted demographic had more discretionary income to travel out of town and a social proclivity to be among their families and friends while on vacation, the decline in ticket sales would continue unless there was an intervention. My suggested intervention strategy was to target demographic groups who have less discretionary income to travel out of town, yet enough income to afford recreational activities that are closer to home. As a Black person who was native to the city, I was aware that people who lived in my predominantly Black neighborhood and similar communities with people of color with similar socio-economic status did not travel to the beach for the summer holiday weekend and had gatherings in the city with their friends and family either at home or in the park. I knew that entertainment programming directly effects the composition of the audience, so if I booked a combination of entertainment that appealed to the previously targeted audiences as well to the audiences that had not been targeted in the past, we could attract new audiences while retaining the previously targeted audience and turn the downward trend in ticket sales around.

When I finished conveying my programming rationale, the room was quiet for several seconds that felt like an eternity. I waited patiently until the first person spoke.

“So, who do think will come to an event like what you are proposing?”

“The audience would be mixed,” I replied, “More demographically, culturally, and racially mixed than it has been in the past.”

The room went quiet again. There was a lot of thinking going on. I could hear their minds working and thoughts forming. I started to feel a warm wave of worry wash over me.

Then, there was another question.

“So, what do you think we should do to make people choose to attend the event rather than go down the shore? Programming wise, I mean.”

Hmmm... Okay..., I thought. I heard and felt what was being asked, but just to be sure I said, “Well, we could continue to book the types of acts that we’ve always booked, but that would just keep us in the situation we are in and the event will continue to decline. That is why I suggested looking at ways to attract new audiences.”

Then, it happened, the question that confirmed my suspicions.

“What was the security budget for last year’s event?”

“Excuse me?” I queried, feeling internal incredulity, annoyance, and sharp grating pangs on my nerves.

“The security budget. I want to know the impact that the new audiences you’re suggesting to target would have on the security budget.”

Sigh... There it was, and here we go.

It was evident to me what was going on. The discussion went from chilling my ideas about implementing new entertainment programming strategies to implying that the new audiences of color may pose security risks that had not occurred with the predominantly White audiences of previous years. As a person of color, a Black woman,



I was particularly offended about the issues that were being implied by inquiring about security when that had never been an issue of particular concern in the past when the audiences had been predominantly White. The event had always been booked by the people in the room and targeted to people who shared affinities with the people in the room. And there I was, the Black person -- and a woman, advocating for diversity and inclusion, alone. I felt like my ideas were being simultaneously scrutinized and disregarded.

The long measures of silence and two odd questions made it clear that there was resistance to what I was proposing.

But, was it resistance to my ideas, or to me -- or both?

Was the rationale behind the questions as insensitive and insidious as it felt to me?

If the insensitivity wasn't intentional, did that make it less bad?

Was I being too sensitive, defensive, or crazy for having those thoughts?

Did anyone else in the room hear and feel those questions in the way that I did?

Suddenly, I felt like the only Black woman in the room, because I was.

And, it was awful to feel unsupported, misunderstood, and alone.

This personal anecdote illustrates why I am interested in examining sponsorship among Black women professionals. While this is one of many such incidents that I have encountered in my career, I know from conversations with other Black women professionals that my feelings of alienation are not germane to only me. I am interested in examining ways to decrease Black women professionals' feelings of doubt and loneliness, and finding ways that Black women can create supportive communities

among each other and build a legacy of leadership to ensure that their voices are heard and that they are represented and empowered to leverage their influence in the workplace.

Therefore, I am conducting this study because I am interested in finding effective ways for Black women professionals to support and empower each other, and increase their numbers among the ranks of leadership in their organizations.

I have titled my dissertation “Activating the Power Within”, because I believe that it is worthwhile to: examine how Black women leaders wield the power they possess within themselves and their organizations; explore whether they are helping other Black women achieve their leadership aspirations through sponsorship; and investigate whether sponsorship is a successful professional development strategy for Black women. I also believe that an exploration of sponsorship will reveal whether it is an effective way for organizations to activate their power internally among their employees, and whether a case can be made to encourage more organizations to support sponsorships among Black women.

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

O, ye daughters of Africa, awake! Awake! Arise! No longer sleep nor slumber, but distinguish yourselves. Show forth to the world that ye are endowed with noble and exalted faculties (Stewart, 1831; Stewart & Richardson, 1987).

Transcending dual histories of racial discrimination and gender bias in the United States, Black women have overcome limitations that have been imposed upon them by the government, organizations, and individuals. With purpose and determination, Black women have demonstrated their social consciousness and advocacy for each other as agents of change in activist movements for social justice (e.g., civil rights and racial equity) (Stewart & Richardson, 1987; Rogers, 2002); personal freedoms (e.g., reproductive rights) (Price, 2010), and gender equity (e.g., women's rights) (Andrews, 2011) throughout American history (McDuffie, 2012; Woodard, Theoharis, & Gore, 2009). Black women have survived societal challenges, earn the requisite educational qualifications for leadership positions, and are ambitious in their pursuit of professional advancement (Hewlett & Green, 2015). However, even with the merits of their education, social consciousness, ambition, and moxie, Black women in America continue to be unduly underrepresented in managerial, leadership, and executive positions in the contemporary workplace (Bell, 2004).

Being both Black and a woman in America presents special challenges to attaining positions of organizational leadership (Beckwith, Carter, & Peters, 2016;

Elliott & Smith, 2004; Nelson, 1975). The responsibility for facilitating diversity is often assigned to C-Suite officers and executives of equivalent authority who have significant influence within organizations, but who oftentimes are not Black or female and may not understand the complexities of the intersectionality of the race and gender identities of Black women (Crenshaw, 1989; Rosette & Livingston, 2012; Shelton, 2013).

Consequently, the challenges that are unique to Black women may not be recognized (Nelson, 1975), which may lead to discrimination and flawed perceptions about their leadership abilities which can obstruct their professional advancement (Livingston, Rosette, & Washington, 2012), and racial and sexual harassment that impedes their progress in the workplace (Tinuoye, 2015).

The barrier of the glass ceiling continues to deny opportunities for economic and personal advancement in America to millions of minorities and women, including Black women (Reich, 1995; Hesselgrave, 2009) despite the enactment of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and affirmative action laws which were intended to prohibit discrimination, foster equity, and facilitate equality in the workplace. Women and minorities encounter increasing inequality in the workplace as they achieve higher levels of authority and power; however, Black women seem to experience unequal access to workplace power as a result of direct discrimination against both their race and gender (Elliot & Smith, 2004). Diversity and inclusion policies based on affirmative action laws have been implemented to varying degrees of efficacy or success (Thomas, 1990; Hewlett & Green, 2015); however, according to the findings from research conducted by Catalyst (2015a, 2015b) a research organization that reports on workplace issues, the dearth of Black women in positions of organizational leadership remains a chronic problem.

While education, qualifications, and ambition are necessary for leadership, the persistent lack of Black women leaders as evidenced by statistical data suggests that merely possessing those attributes is not enough for Black women to advance to leadership positions within organizations. According to Bell (2004), myths about Black women professionals have persisted because there are so few Black women in executive leadership and, as a result, few biographical accounts have been written about their lived experiences. Sponsorship among Black women to increase the number of Black women in organizational leadership positions is a topic that has not been widely explored, neither have the ethical considerations about the ways Black women use their agency to change organizations and systems from within received significant examination.

Therefore, I conducted a qualitative study that elucidated how Black women professionals leverage their leadership as sponsors of other Black women in order to remediate the problem of the underrepresentation of Black women in leadership. The Black women professionals in my study shared their stories about how the intersectionality of their race and gender identities, laws and policies, and ethical considerations have impacted the ways in which they affect change from within organizations.

#### Statement of the Problem

Let our girls possess whatever amiable qualities of soul they may; let their characters be fair and spotless as innocence itself; let their natural taste and ingenuity be what they may; it is impossible for scarce an individual of them to rise above the condition of servants (Stewart, 1832).

The underrepresentation of Black women leaders is rooted in historical underestimations about the abilities of Black women as expressed by Maria W. Stewart in 1832 during the period of the enslavement of Black people in the United States of

America. Black women have leveraged what Stewart (1832) referred to as their “amiable qualities of soul” to “rise above the condition of servants” and become educated, qualified, and competitive candidates for organizational leadership positions. The data show that Black women earn more higher education degrees than both women and men in other minority groups (Journal of Blacks in Higher Education, 2006; U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2012; Catalyst, 2015c); Black women are qualified and ready to lead (Hewlett & Green, 2015); and Black women actively seek opportunities for professional advancement (Hewlett & Green, 2015). Theoretically, it would seem that the educational achievements, strong work ethic, and ambition of Black women professionals are merits that should qualify them as some of the most desirable candidates to be hired for leadership positions. However, that has not been the reality for many Black women professionals, and data shows that their merits are not aligned with the realities of their circumstances.

The problem of the misalignment between logical predictions and reality is evident upon reviewing the statistics about the number of Black women who hold positions of organizational leadership. According to Catalyst (2015a, 2015b) and the Bureau of Labor Statistics (2015), the number of Black women in C-Suite and executive organizational leadership positions is less than the number of Black men, White women, and White men, which limits the influence and power of Black women. Women of color, which includes Black women, comprise almost half of the low-wage workforce in America (Entmacher, Frohlich, Robbins, Martin, & Watson, 2014); thus, Black women have fewer opportunities for advancement, less wealth, and are “greatly underrepresented in positions of power in all levels of government” (Ahmad & Iverson, 2013).

According to a population survey conducted by the Bureau of Labor Statistics (2015), women in general hold 51.5% of management, professional, and related positions; however, Black women comprise a mere 9.2% of that group. In 2016, women in general held a mere 4% (i.e., 20) of CEO positions at S&P 500 companies, and from 2009 to the time of the writing of this research paper, only one of those positions had been held by a woman who identified as Black (Catalyst, 2016). In addition to positions of organizational leadership, seats on Boards of Directors are also influential positions where women in general are underrepresented, and Black women hold 11.7% of S&P 500 Board seats held by women (Catalyst, 2015a, 2015b). It is predicted that the population of Black women in the United States will grow from 15.42% to 19.16 % between 2015 and 2060 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012). The quantitative data suggest that although the population of Black women is growing, the number of Black women in positions of leadership may not increase at a proportionate rate. Given the slow rate of progress and the minimal increases in the number of women leaders, it is projected that it will take 40 years for women to achieve representational parity with men in top corporate officer positions of organizational leadership, and 70 years to achieve parity with men in corporate board seats (Catalyst, 2006a, 2006b).

The problem of the underrepresentation of Black women leaders has been addressed in literature in a variety of forms. Quantitative studies have been conducted to examine possible reasons for the abysmal lack of Black women in organizational leadership positions (Livingston, Rosette & Washington, 2012). Anecdotal accounts about the challenges Black women face in society and the workplace have been recorded (Beal, 2008; Hewlett & Wingfield, 2015). A report conducted by the United States

Federal Glass Ceiling Commission asserted that hiring women and minorities is “good for business” (Reich, 1995) to promote an increase in the hiring of women and minorities. Recommendations have been made to address the lack of Black women leaders with trainings and organizational policies (Carlton, Klassen, Baskerville-Watkins, & Craven, 2008; Carlton, Smith, Baskerville-Watkins, & Craven, 2016). However, additional qualitative research can assist in understanding: how Black women practice and experience leadership, the factors that affect them in the workplace, and how they are actively leveraging their influence from within organizations as sponsors to remediate the persistent problem of the dearth of Black women leaders.

#### Purpose of the Study

Research has shown sponsorship to be a viable leadership practice that can propel professional advancement (Carlton et al., 2016; Hewlett, 2013; Hewlett, Peraino, Sherbin & Sumberg, 2010), therefore, this study was not a case to prove the validity of sponsorship. Rather, the purpose of this study was to examine whether and how Black women are practicing sponsorship among each other as a strategy to advance each other into positions of leadership, and investigate the factors that affect the practice of sponsorship among Black women. This study explores whether sponsorships among Black women can help remediate the chronic problem of the underrepresentation of Black women in positions of organizational leadership, and I investigated the factors that affect the perspectives and practices of each Black woman professional in my study and how they were informed by their personal experiences, defined by their racial and gender identities, guided by laws and policies, and influenced by their ethical considerations.



### *Intersectionality and Positionality*

The effects of the intersectionality of race and gender (Crenshaw, 1989) on sponsorship among Black women professionals was examined to understand the implications of their subjective perceptions of themselves as individuals, professionals, and as members of groups (i.e., positionality, affinities, and affiliations), as well as the effect of society's perspectives about Black women on their status and progression. This study examined race, gender, and identity within the following contexts:

- The implications of the intersectionality of the racial and gender identities of Black women professionals as individuals;
- The ways that race and gender affect their interactions with other Black women professionals;
- The ways that race and gender affect subjective and societal views about Black women professionals; and
- The effects of race and gender on the leadership and sponsorship practices of Black women professionals.

### *Laws and Policies*

My study examined how laws (i.e., the Civil Rights Act of 1964) and policies (i.e., Affirmative Action) affect the way Black women leaders facilitate the professional advancement of other Black women. This study was not intended to be a strict analysis of laws or policies; rather, it was an examination of the narratives of Black women who operate within the parameters of laws and policies in order to facilitate the professional advancement of other Black women. The intention of this study was to provide information for the creation of lawful policies and ethical programs in the workplace that are conducive to fostering the development of Black women professionals. Assessing the effectiveness of affirmative action policies and diversity and inclusion initiatives from the

perspective of Black women provided insight about workplace and industry challenges that can be mitigated specifically for Black women, and contributed to the formulation of recommendations for fostering equitable workplace conditions that break the cycle of the underrepresentation of Black women in leadership positions.

### *Ethical Considerations*

Ethical considerations about leadership and sponsorship were analyzed to gain insight about the humanistic experiences of Black women; i.e., how they were led and how they lead. The phenomenology of sponsorship among Black women was examined within the context of multiple ethical paradigms (Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2016) to show the implications of their decisions and actions as individuals in relation to the advancement of other Black women professionals; e.g., the need for support and the availability of guidance for aspiring Black women leaders, and the ways that Black women activate the influence of their roles as leaders and as potential sponsors of other Black women.

### Research Questions

I was curious to know about the phenomenon of sponsorship among Black women and whether it was a viable and effective practice for increasing the number of Black women in positions of organizational leadership. Therefore, this dissertation examined the following central research question and sub-questions that are associated with the phenomenon of sponsorship among Black women as it relates to leadership:

- Central Research Question: Do Black women leverage their leadership as sponsors within organizations to increase the number of Black women leaders?

- Sub-question #1: Does the positionality of identity and the intersectionality of race and gender affect sponsorships among Black women?
- Sub-question #2: Do affirmative action laws and policies affect sponsorships among Black women?
- Sub-question #3: What are the ethical considerations that affect sponsorships among Black women?

I believe that the central research question adequately identified the potential contribution of my study about understanding sponsorship as practiced and experienced by Black women. The central research question was integrated in the protocol within the following contexts: the intersectionality of race and gender and the positionality of identity, law and policy, and ethical considerations. The voices of the Black women in the study animated the central research question and connected their experiences to their practices by providing insight about how Black women leverage the influence of their leadership to empower other Black women through sponsorship.

#### Definition of Terms

The following terms are referred to in this study as defined:

**Affirmative Action:** According to Executive Order No. 11246 (1965), affirmative action was intended:

To ensure that applicants are employed, and that employees are treated during employment, without regard to their race, color, religion, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, or national origin. Such action shall include, but not be limited to the following: employment, upgrading, demotion, or transfer; recruitment or recruitment advertising; layoff or termination; rates of pay or other forms of compensation; and selection for training, including apprenticeship.

**Agent:** An entity with the capacity to act and cause an effect; agency is the manifestation of the capacity of an entity to act and cause an effect; agentic is the state of possessing the capacity to act and cause an effect.

**Black:** A racial appellation that refers to an American citizen who has ancestral origins in any of the Black ethnic groups of Africa and shared social and cultural characteristics with those groups (Rastogi, Johnson, Hoeffel, & Drewery, 2011). Black people are categorized by the following terms that are used synonymously and interchangeably: African-Americans, minorities, and people of color.

**C-Suite:** A term used to describe senior executives whose title includes the designation of “Chief” to denote their position of authority and the significant level of influence they wield within an organization.

**Concentricity (i.e., Concentricity Theory, Concentric Positionality of Identity Theory):** A theory that describes the propinquity of identity as existing at a common center point while simultaneously being both affiliated with and surrounded by other variables, e.g., individuals, in-groups, and social constructs. Concentricity is conceptualized by the configuration of a center point that is completely surrounded by circles of progressively increased radii. The degrees of affiliation and separation are denoted by the size of the annulus between each circle and the proximity of each circle to the common center point. The variables can be modified to represent different entities and illustrate various types of identity relationships, affiliations, and affinities.<sup>1</sup>

**Discrimination:** The unequal treatment of individuals or groups on the basis of their race, ethnicity, or gender.

**Ethics:** A set or system of principles that are products of and accepted by society, as well as influence behavior and decision-making.

**Exemplar:** An esteemed person or thing with attributes worthy of being adopted or replicated.

**Generation:** A collective of people who are born and living at about the same time; generation timespan: 30 years.

**Intersectionality:** The interconnection of the racial and gender identities of an individual or group that affects their social status and foments discrimination and bias (Crenshaw, 1989).

**Leader:** A person who creates ways for people to contribute to achieving goals by influencing and guiding people toward the aspired outcome (Kouzes & Posner, 2007); leadership is the practice of being a leader.

**Leadership Perspective:** How a person practices a phenomenon.

**Leverage:** The use of influence or power to maximum advantage to achieve a desired result.

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<sup>1</sup> I developed my Concentricity Theory to conceptualize the positionality of identity and frame it within the contexts of individual affiliations and group relationships.

**Mentor:** A person who provides counsel and advice that is beneficial in assisting another person in the progression of their life.

**Mentorship:** an asymmetric relationship with the mentor as the provider and the mentee as the receptor; the mentee is the primary beneficiary of the experience, mentorship is distinct from sponsorship (Hewlett, 2013, pp. 19-20).

**Morals:** Perceptions of right and wrong regarding standards of behavior or belief.  
**Positionality of Identity:** The societal position of an individual or group in relation to other people and groups with which they have similar or dissimilar affinities, affiliations, and status such as culture, ethnicity, gender, and socio-economic level.

**Principles:** The rules and codes of individual and societal conduct.

**Self-Determination:** An individual and collective right to determine political status and pursue economic, social, and cultural development (United Nations General Assembly, 1966); the unalienable right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness (The Declaration of Independence, U.S. 1776, para. 2).

**Sponsor:** A “powerfully positioned champion” within an organization who uses their influence to actively advocate for the advancement of qualified and talented individuals (Hewlett, 2013).

**Sponsorship:** A reciprocal relationship with the sponsor leveraging the relationship to their advantage; sponsorship is an advanced form of mentorship in which both the sponsor and protégé invest in the relationship for mutual advantage; sponsorship is distinct from mentorship (Hewlett, 2013, pp. 18-20).

**Subordinate Perception:** How a person experiences a phenomenon.

**Values:** Principles that are regarded as important or of worth.

## Conceptual Framework

My research on the phenomenon of sponsorship among Black women was grounded in historical and contemporary literature that guided my analytical direction, as illustrated in Figure 1.1:

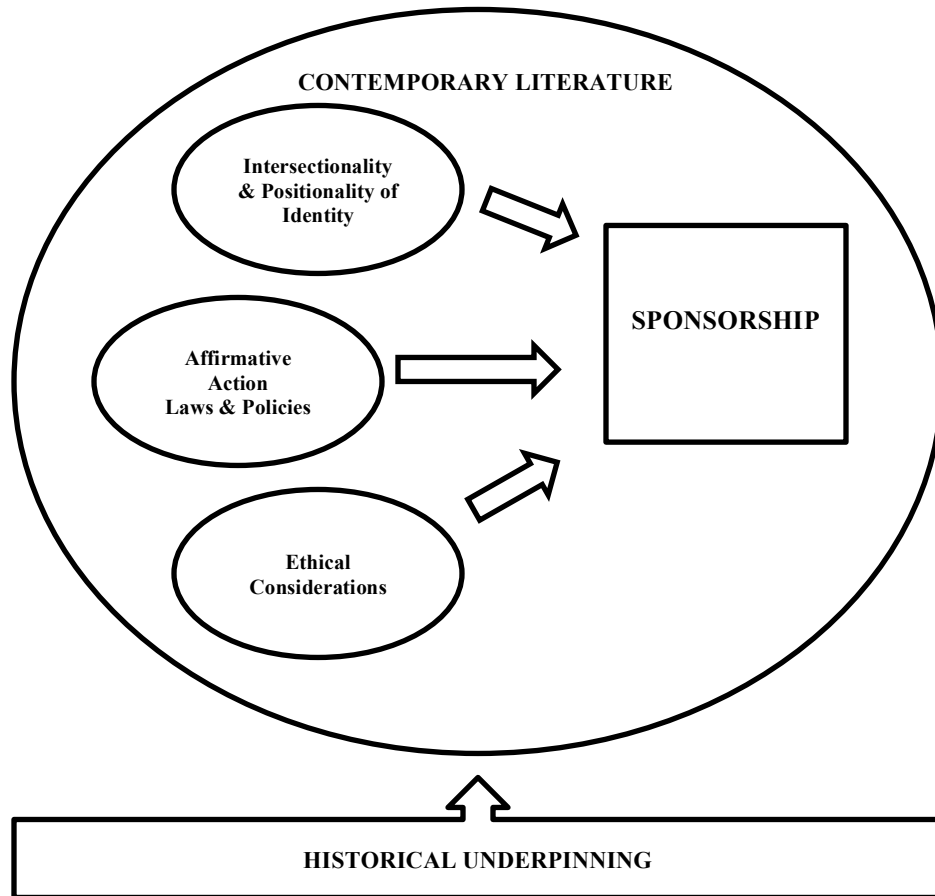


Figure 1.1: Conceptual Framework Diagram

### *Historical Underpinning*

In this study, Maria W. Stewart's writings about Black women served as an historical underpinning for building a temporal dialectic about the challenges that Black women have experienced in America. Stewart's ideas about race, gender, laws, and ethics from centuries ago have retained their relevance and are indicative of pervasive, recurring themes in research on Black women. Select quotations from Stewart's essays served as thematic inspirations for various sections of the literature review and provided the basis for comparing historical perceptions with contemporary attitudes about Black women in American society with regard to race, gender, leadership, and sponsorship. This study elucidated how the themes of self-determination and empowerment among Black people that were paramount to Maria W. Stewart in the 1830's continue to maintain a contemporary resonance today, nearly two centuries later.

### *Contemporary Literature*

#### *Intersectionality of Race and Gender and Positionality of Identity*

The changing racial demographics of the United States and the increasing number of women in the workforce are two critical factors that have had serious implications for Black women whose identities embody the intersection of race and gender (Crenshaw, 1989). Every aspect of the lives of Black women is permeated and affected by their race and gender; indeed, the designations "Black" (i.e., race) and "women" (i.e., gender) distinctly denote the two most important factors of their identity. The lenses of race and gender holistically affect the *Weltanschauung* (i.e., self-perception) of Black women and how they see and move through the world, and those lenses affect how others perceive and act toward them; i.e., positionality of identity. Therefore, it is imperative to recognize

the intersectionality of the race and gender and positionality of identity of Black women in order to understand the concentric nature of their positionality of identity as part of and surrounded by a dominant White patriarchal culture.

#### *Affirmative Action Laws and Policies*

Affirmative action laws and diversity and inclusion policies evolved from the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 which harkened an era of aspirational employment policies. The Civil Rights Act of 1964 and Executive Orders 10925 and 11246 provided the basis for the development of the protocol in this study that examined how the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and policies derived from the law (i.e., affirmative action, diversity and inclusion) affect the leadership practices of Black women. The responses of the interviewees showed that laws and policies do not present any limitations that inhibit Black women in their leadership practices, nor do laws and policies restrict the ways in which Black women use their influence to sponsor other Black women who aspire to become leaders.

#### *Multiple Ethical Paradigms*

Ethical considerations are necessary in making decisions that will yield the most benefit and inflict the least harm. Ethical paradigms (i.e., lenses) can assist in the comprehensive analysis of dilemmas from various perspectives and are critical in making decisions that are caring, fair, just, and professionally consistent with organizational values (Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2001; Center for Ethical Leadership, 2013). In this study, ethical paradigms provided a context for understanding the human condition in relation to the personal values, principles, and motives that influence Black women's decision-making, and provided a framework for examining their experiences. Shapiro and



Stefkovich's Multiple Ethical Paradigms (2001) were used as a framework for the development of the protocol for examining the ethical considerations Black women face in their real-world practice of sponsorship:

- The Ethic of Care: Asks that individuals to take care in considering the consequences of their decisions and actions.
- The Ethic of Critique: Asks decision makers to deal with the hard questions of fairness regarding social class, race, gender, and other areas of difference as well as the benevolent use of power.
- The Ethic of Justice: Focuses on rights and laws and is part of a liberal democratic tradition that is characterized by faith in the legal system and hope for progress.
- The Ethic of the Profession: Focuses on adherence to the moral codes of conduct of a profession.

The use of ethical paradigms in my data analysis also explicated the ways that the intersectionality of identity (i.e., race and gender) impacted the decisions the Black women in this study made for themselves, and the ways in which Black women professionals interact with other (e.g., leading, managing, sponsoring, and counseling).

### *Sponsorship*

The Black Women's Executives Research Initiative Findings (Carlton et al., 2008) and the Black Women Executive Research Initiative Revisited (Carlton et al., 2016) are two studies of longitudinal research on Black women leaders that informed my examination of sponsorship, undergirded the framework of my protocol, and served as references for the analysis of the data from the interviews.

I also drew from the sponsorship research of Sylvia Ann Hewlett (2013) which provided a contemporary representation of Stewart's ideas and framed my discussion about sponsorship and the efficacy of its application for the advancement of Black

women in positions of organizational leadership within the contexts of positionality of race and gender identities, affirmative action laws and policies, and ethical considerations.

### Significance of the Study

There is an economic need to qualitatively examine practices that empower Black women leaders to sponsor other Black women and assist them in pursuing their professional aspirations. According to Reich (1995), “Minorities and women make up a growing percentage of the workforce and consumer market. Thus, managerial talent must be drawn from an increasingly diverse pool.” Reich (1995) also noted:

It is not only a matter of fair play, but an economic imperative that the glass ceiling be shattered. It matters to the bottom line for businesses and to the future economic stability of America’s families (pp. 4-5).

It is imperative to examine the validity of sponsorship among Black women as an efficient leadership practice that can assist in “making full use of the nation’s human capital” (Reich, 1995) by effectively integrating Black women into the workforce. The findings of my study provided insight about the effectiveness of relationships in the workplace that are promoted and managed by organizations (e.g., diversity policies) as compared to sponsorships that are initiated and cultivated by individuals.

Chronicling the phenomena of sponsorship among Black women provides insight to future generations of Black women about the ways that they can leverage their leadership to empower other Black women to become leaders. Interviewing Black women professionals and engaging in authentic discourse with them allowed me to collect nuanced qualitative data that represented the real people behind the statistical data. On a broad scale, I believe that the findings of this study contribute to the body of

knowledge about the phenomena of sponsorship, and about leadership in general among various industries, and generated data that is robust, complex, and insightful, and transcends the specificity of the lives and professions of the subjects.

## CHAPTER 2

### REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

How long shall the fair daughters of Africa be compelled to bury their minds and talents beneath a load of iron pots and kettles?... Until we begin to promote and patronize each other (Stewart, 1831).

Maria W. Stewart was the first Black feminist to publicly share her activist views, the first female orator to speak before audiences comprised of both men and women, and the first American female political essayist to publish her writings (Stewart & Richardson, 1987). Although she lived during the period of the enslavement of Black people in America, Stewart herself was not enslaved. Stewart followed what she believed was a divine calling to uplift Black people and speak out against insouciance to the institution of enslavement and its horrible effects on Black people and the nation as a whole (Stewart & Richardson, 1987). In addition to being troubled about the future of Black people in the United States in general, Stewart was also specifically concerned about the future of Black women and their status as members of American society (Stewart & Richardson, 1987). Stewart's essays are thought to be the first published accounts of the misconceptions about Black women in America and the genesis of a canon of literature about Black women.

As a Black woman of her time, Stewart demonstrated that she was acutely aware of the intersectionality of her own racial and gender identities as an individual who was Black and a woman, and she was attuned to the discrimination that White society imposed upon Black women as a collective. Stewart feared that Black women's abilities

would be forever suppressed by White patriarchal dominance if Black women did not take dominion over their own destinies and reject stereotypes that contradicted their true potential (Stewart & Richardson, 1987), and she advocated for Black women to empower each other through education and sponsorship. Stewart's writings are cautionary prognostications about the grim future that she believed Black women would face if they passively accepted the injustices inflicted upon them as fate, and her ideas about Black women as agents of empowerment which she first expressed nearly two centuries ago remain at the nexus of research about Black women in leadership and served as a thematic inspiration and historical basis for this study.

#### The Purpose of the Literature Review

The purpose of this literature review is to examine sponsorship among Black women as an individualized, self-deterministic method of agency and empowerment in complement to the general research on leadership that has been primarily centered in White culture and masculinity (Gündemir, Homan, de Dreu, & van Vugt, 2014; Koenig, Eagly, Mitchell, & Ristikari, 2011) and focused on group and team facilitated diversity strategies initiated by organizations (Shore, Randel, Chung, Dean, Ehrhart, & Singh, 2011). According to Chin (2015), a study of 80 scholarly research journals published between 1999 and 2012 revealed that the focus of many organizational leadership studies has been on teams of workers who received strong direction from a designated leader of a group, as opposed to individualized leadership interactions such as sponsorship.

The challenges that Black women face in the workplace and the lack of Black women leaders are often perceived and addressed as organizational deficiencies. The literature review for this study includes research which examines possible reasons why,

to date, organizational initiated measures have had limited effects on increasing the number of Black women leaders; and presents the findings of studies which support the rationale for examining sponsorship among Black women as means to remediate the problem of the underrepresentation of Black women in leadership.

The Underrepresentation of Black Women Leaders:  
Assumptions Contradict Actuality

Shall it any longer be said of the daughters of Africa, they have no ambition, they have no force? By no means (Stewart, 1831).

Black women are the largest group of minority women in comparison to Hispanic women and Asian women (United States Census Bureau, 2014); however, research shows that Black women are underrepresented in executive leadership positions in proportion to the number of women in the overall workforce (Entmacher et al., 2014; Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2016). A study commissioned by the Executive Leadership Council (ELC) found that the number of Black women in executive leadership positions in the United States (1.1%) was lower than the number of Black men (2.6%) and significantly lower than the number of White women (14.4%) and White men (77.2%) in organizational leadership positions (Carlton et al., 2008). Studies found that in 2005, women of color (which includes Black women) had just 1.7% of corporate officer positions at Fortune 500 companies and represented only 1.0% of Fortune 500 top earners, and held a scant 3.4% of corporate Board positions among Fortune 500 companies (Catalyst, 2006a, 2006b).

It could be reasonably assumed that the dearth of Black women in positions of organizational leadership is due to a lack of educated and qualified Black women, however, statistical data shows this not to be true. A survey conducted by the Journal of

Blacks in Higher Education (JBHE) (2006) found that Black women outnumber Black men in earning higher education degrees with Black women earning two-thirds of all baccalaureate degrees, 70% of all master's degrees, and more than 60% of all doctoral degrees. While it may seem that Black women have an advantage over Black men when advanced degrees are considered as requirements for organizational leadership positions, studies have shown evidence to the contrary (Ahmad & Iverson, 2013; Carlton et al., 2008). Given that Black women significantly outnumber Black men in the number of conferred higher education degrees, the conclusion that Black women would also hold more organizational leadership positions than Black men seems logical. In fact, the statistics about Black women out-numbering Black men at high-ranking higher education institutions and Black women earning degrees at higher rates than Black men led the JBHE (2006) to incorrectly conclude that Black women would attain leadership positions in greater numbers than Black men. Although research shows Black women are earning academic degrees at higher rates than Black men, the reality is that Black women still occupy fewer organizational leadership posts in comparison to Black men, and Black women have fewer job opportunities at every level (Ahmad & Iverson, 2013). A report commissioned by the Executive Leadership Council (Carlton et al., 2008) found that the number of Black women in executive leadership positions in the United States (1.1%) was lower than the number of Black men (2.6%), and significantly lower than the number of White women (14.4%) and White men (77.2%) in organizational leadership positions.

The specious assumption that more educated Black women will lead to more Black women in leadership positions (i.e., *post hoc ergo propter hoc*) is a prime example of a logical fallacy and is a correlation that does not imply a causation. As the data show,

the number of Black women in leadership positions is low and the imbalance is real. The statistical data reveal that assumptions contradict actuality and Black women can only leverage their leadership as agents of change if they are in positions of power and are empowered to do so.

### The Intersectionality of Race and Gender and the Concentric Positionality of Identity of Black Women

The uniqueness of Black women's identity in the United States is rooted in the history of slavery that has shaped impressions and has warped perceptions about their status in American society (West, 1995; Patterson, 1982). Black women's opportunities to demonstrate their true abilities have been limited as a result of being encumbered with a history as enslaved, domestic, and menial workers (Ahmad & Iverson, 2013; Sesko & Biernat, 2010); which has attributed to myths about the extent of their aptitudes (Nelson, 1975; Thomas, Witherspoon & Speight, 2004) and false conceptions about Black womanhood (hooks, 1981; Reid, 2004). Women in general face a daunting set of challenges regarding perceptions about whether their gender affects their capability to be effective leaders, i.e., role congruity (Eagly & Karau, 2002). Perceptions about the leadership capabilities of Black women are further complicated by racial stereotypes and gender biases that present challenges to their professional advancement in the workplace (Hewlett & Wingfield, 2015, Cheeks, 2018). In her landmark work, "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine", Kimberlé W. Crenshaw (1989) popularized the term "intersectionality" to describe her theory of the interconnection of identity and its relation to systems of domination, oppression, and discrimination as demonstrated through the example of the dual and interconnected racial and gender identities of Black women. Women and minorities



encounter discrimination and increasing inequality at higher levels of power; however, Black women seem to experience differential access to leadership opportunities because of direct discrimination that is fomented, in part, by nescience about the complex intersectionality of their race and gender (Crenshaw, 1989; Elliot & Smith, 2004). Thus, the phenomenology of Black women is characterized by unique lived experiences that are inherent to a “Black female experience” that women and men of other races do not encounter (Crenshaw, 1991; Elliott & Smith, 2004).

To offer an interpretation of the nature of identity that complements intersectionality and describes the propinquity between individuals and their affinities for different groups in society, I submit a theory of concentric positionality of identity; i.e., “Concentric Positionality of Identity Theory”, “Theory of Concentricity”, or “concentricity”. My concept of Concentric Positionality of Identity Theory expounds upon Tajfel’s (1969) social identity theory that a person’s sense of self is based on their group membership; and is reminiscent of Allport’s (1954) use of concentric circles to illustrate the propinquity of variables (e.g., group membership identifications) and the affiliations between “in-groups” (i.e., groups of individuals with commonalities such as race, gender, culture, affinities, etc.), and “out-groups” (i.e., individuals or groups with few or no commonalities with an in-group) (p. 43). The variables represented by the concentric circles can be modified to illustrate a variety of identity relationships, i.e., familial, organizational, societal, etc. Concentricity can be used to illustrate the positionality of Black women’s intersectional identities in relationship to the in-groups with which they are affiliated. For example, I propose that the concentricity of Black women can be described with the following elision:

Black women exist in the center of their lives as members of and surrounded by in-groups comprised of Black women (i.e., intersectional racial and gender identity), Black people (i.e., the collective of women and men), and women (i.e., gender identity), while simultaneously being both in-group members of and surrounded by a dominate White male patriarchal culture (i.e., American society or society in general) that holds biases against the in-groups with which Black women are affiliated: Black women, Black people, and women. As members of society, Black women are intrinsically affiliated with the in-group of White patriarchal culture. However, the affiliation is weakened by racial and gender discrimination which affects Black women's perception of their affiliation with the in-group of White patriarchal culture, as well as White patriarchal culture's perception of Black women's affiliation with and acceptance into their in-group. Thus, Black women are treated as and feel like an out-group of White patriarchal culture.<sup>2</sup>

An example of a concentric racial and gender positionality of identity profile for Black women is illustrated in the following diagram (Figure 2.1):

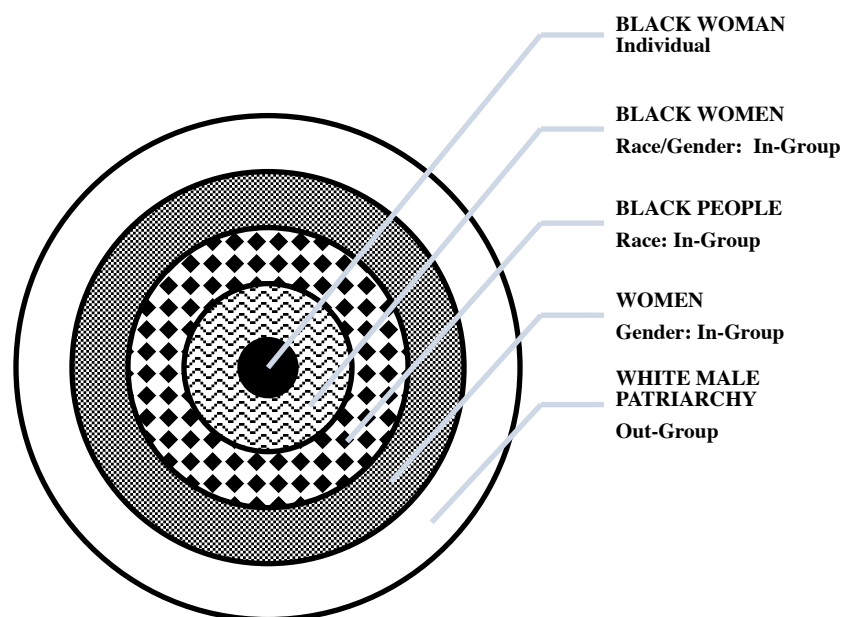


Figure 2.1: An Example of a Concentric Racial and Gender Positionality of Identity Profile for Black Women

<sup>2</sup> See definition for “Concentricity”; i.e., Concentric Positionality of Identity.

Theories for intersectionality and the positionality of identity provide a basis for understanding the conditions that instigate disenfranchisement, i.e., American pragmatism (Hill-Collins, 2012); the factors that incite discrimination, i.e., intersecting oppressions (Hill-Collins, 2000); and the societal and cultural implications of the intersection of power, race, gender, and the law, i.e., critical race theory (Bell, 1973; Crenshaw, 1995, 2011; Delgado & Stefancic, 1998; Matsuda, 1987, 1990; Williams, 1991). My Theory of Concentricity, as it relates to Black women, provides a context for understanding the factors that contribute to their underrepresentation in leadership, Black women's relationships among each other and in society, and the ways that Black women practice leadership and sponsorship.

#### The Limitations of Affirmative Action Laws and Diversity and Inclusion Policies

As the United States evolved socially in the 1960's, the passage of Executive Order 10925 (1961), the enactment of the Civil Rights Act (1964), and the passage of Executive Order 11246 (1965) began the enforcement of affirmative action by law and the implementation of "any measure, beyond simple termination of a discriminatory practice, adopted to correct or compensate for past or present discrimination or to prevent discrimination from recurring in the future" (United States Commission on Civil Rights, 1977). Civil rights laws were created to abolish discrimination and foster equity in the workplace (Executive Order 10925, 1961; Civil Rights Act, 1964; Executive Order 11246, 1965). As a result of affirmative action legislation, the number of women and minorities in the workforce increased and organizations realized that the conditions that had primarily advantaged White men needed to be changed in order to facilitate parity and enfranchisement (Guy & Fenley, 2014). Subsequently, affirmative action prompted

organizations to develop diversity and inclusion policies that reflected the changing demographics of the workforce and reinforce affirmative action laws that prohibited discrimination (Collins, 2011; Kelly & Dobbin, 1998; Lynch, 1997). However, affirmative action remains controversial (Teigen, 2010) and policies that promote diversity and inclusion range from being viewed as ethically appropriate responses to remediating discrimination (Crenshaw, 2009; Molinari, Amselle, Cohen & Bolick, 1996); to being perceived as unnecessary legislative mandates for non-existent problems (Sowell, 2004; Patrick, Lee, Greenberger & Wu, 1996).

When Justice Sandra Day O'Connor delivered the majority decision for the landmark case of *Grutter v. Bollinger* (2003), she optimistically conjectured that, "We expect that 25 years from now, the use of racial preferences will no longer be necessary to further the interest approved today"; however, evidence shows that prediction to be wishful thinking. The inequities and inequalities that have resulted from biased perceptions of race and gender and discriminatory practices in American society were created over a very long period (Delgado & Stefancic, 1998), and it is only logical and realistic to portend that they will take a very long time to eradicate (Lundberg & Startz, 1998; Feagin, 2013). According to Bowles, Loury, and Sethi (2007), the effects of past discrimination are likely to persist well into the future, even in the absence of ongoing discrimination. Societal changes have been mandated by civil rights laws that call for "expanding and strengthening efforts to promote full equality of employment opportunity" (Executive Order 10925, 1961); "[enforcing] the constitutional right... to confer jurisdiction upon the district courts of the United States... to extend the Commission on Civil Rights, to prevent discrimination in federally assisted programs, to

establish a Commission on Equal Employment Opportunity, and for other purposes” (Civil Rights Act, 1964). Civil rights laws have had significance influence on encouraging the inclusion of Black women in society as leaders, however, appointing Black women to leadership positions as an affirmative action response to civil rights laws has still not eliminated the systemic inequities and inequalities that have resulted from of years of racial discrimination and gender bias (Carlton & Tang, 2016).

While people can be penalized for actions that violate the law and policies, it is much more difficult to legislate and regulate the individual personal perceptions that instigate discrimination. Legislation and policies may palliate overt biased behavior and actions that violate laws prohibiting discrimination (Delgado & Stefancic, 1998); however, prejudiced beliefs are not always suppressed by the repercussions of legal punishment and have resulted in unconscious or implicit bias (Staats & Patton, 2013; Johnson, 2016; Holroyd, 2012), and have contributed to dire conditions and consequences for Black women in the workplace (Barnes, 1989; Purdie-Vaughns, 2015). According to Molinari and Tyner (2012), “workplace bigotry has been the byproduct of mass immigration to the United States as individuals of diverse cultural, ethnic, and racial identities have historically competed for opportunities in the American workforce”. The ineffective implementation of diversity policies has resulted in some organizations appearing to follow affirmative action laws; however, the exclusion of minorities and women from executive decision-making opportunities has limited their agency to affect organizational change (Shore et al., 2011).

One of the significant repercussions of the ineffective management of a diverse workforce is that it has impeded Black women from advancing in their professions and

attaining leadership positions, which is evident by the fact that Black women comprise a larger percentage of the low-wage workforce (11.6%) than of the overall workforce (6.1%) (Entmacher et al., 2014, p. 2). According to Thomas (1990), the denial of leadership opportunities has had a chilling effect on the progression of Black women in the workplace:

Women and minorities no longer need a boarding pass, they need an upgrade. The problem is not getting them in at the entry-level; the problem is making better use of their potential at every level, especially in middle-management and leadership positions (p. 108).

This statement suggests that while organizations may adopt diversity and inclusion programs to improve talent development and retention efforts, they are most successful when women and minorities are empowered to fully exercise the agency of their leadership. Thomas (1990) also commented on the dire consequences of the ineffective implementation of diversity and inclusion initiatives:

Women and Blacks who are seen as having the necessary skills and energy can get *into* the workforce relatively easily. It's later on that many of them plateau and lose their drive, quit, or are fired. It's later on that their managers' inability to manage diversity hobbles them and the companies they work for... I don't think affirmative action alone can cope with the remaining long-term task of creating a work setting geared to the upward mobility of all kinds of people... (p. 108).

Meyerson and Fletcher (2000) also found that even after women in the workforce have progressed as professionals along the executive track and have achieved corporate success, many become “frustrated or disillusioned with the business world” and drop out.

The inclusion of Black women in the workforce is vital to expanding the pool of workers for high-impact jobs that are integral to the global competitiveness of the United States and a prosperous economic future (Ahmad & Iverson, 2013; Reich, 1995). In their study on diversity, Bendick, Egan, and Lofhjelm (2001) found that diversity initiatives

have changed from compliance-based training to systematic approaches that enhance business performance by integrating diversity throughout all aspects of organizations.

The intention of enacting affirmative action laws and policies to facilitate diversity and inclusion policies was to compel organizations and corporations to be equitable in their hiring and employment practices and to correct historically institutionalized discriminatory practices that unfairly excluded minorities and women from positions of influence and power (Tomaskovic-Devey & Stainback, 2007). The passage of civil rights laws and decades of implementing diversity policies have yielded a significantly low number of Black women leaders (Carlton et al. 2008; Carlton et al., 2016; Carlton & Tang, 2016). The fact that laws and policies have not completely abolished the problem of the dearth of Black women leaders suggests that there are limitations to remediation through laws and policies and they are only as effective as their acceptance and implementation. Therefore, this study sought to fill the gaps in literature about the connections between the limitations of law and policy and the underrepresentation of Black women leaders by examining sponsorship among Black women as an individualized and self-deterministic method of empowerment as opposed to relying primarily on affirmative action governmental legislation and diversity and inclusion policies that are initiated by organizations.

### The Ethical Dilemmas of Facilitating Equity

#### *The Ethic of Care: Perceptions of Discrimination*

Recognizing the relevance and effects of discrimination requires an ethic of care that considers the consequences of actions by first acknowledging the existence of discrimination and then facilitating equity with empathy and understanding (Shapiro &

Stefkovich, 2001). The literature shows that Black people and White people care about, perceive, are affected by, and address discrimination differently. Among the findings of the African-American Workgroup Report (Equal Employment Opportunity Commission [EEOC], 2013), the following obstacles were identified as workplace barriers to equal opportunity for Black professionals:

- Unconscious bias: i.e., social behavior that is driven by learned stereotypes that operate automatically (i.e., unconsciously) when people interact with each other.
- Lack of adequate mentoring and networking opportunities for higher level and management positions.
- Narrow recruitment methods that negatively affect Black professionals.
- EEOC regulations and laws that are not adequately followed or effectively enforced.

In contrast to the perceptions and effects of discrimination as experienced by Black people, according to Pager and Shepard (2008), “the majority of white Americans believe that a black person today has the same chance at getting a job as an equally qualified white person, and only a third believe that discrimination is an important explanation for why blacks do worse than whites in income, housing, and jobs.” Norton and Sommers (2011) conducted a study and found that the emerging belief among White people is that racism is a “zero-sum game” and that “decreases in perceived bias against Black people over the past 60 years are associated with increases in perceived bias against Whites—a relationship not observed in Blacks’ perceptions”; and Whites’ conceptions of racism are so extreme that they view anti-White bias as a bigger societal problem than anti-Black bias (p. 215). Nicholas Kristoff (2014, 2016) wrote a series of seven articles within a two-year period which noted the very different ways that Black



people and White people perceive racial discrimination by providing historical examples that explained the origins of racism in America, as well as empirical and anecdotal evidence that debunked misperceptions held by White people about Black people.

Black women suffer a double jeopardy of discrimination in the workplace due to the intersection of their dual racial and gender identities and the discrimination that is leveled against Black people and women, which are two of the main concentric in-groups to which Black women belong (Greenman & Xie, 2008; Rosette & Livingston, 2012; Sesko & Biernat, 2010; Crenshaw, 1989). These discrepancies denote the differences in the ways that Black and White Americans perceive the existence of discrimination in contemporary society through the ethical lens of care, and the implications of the contrasting ways they interpret and deal with discrimination (Kristoff, 2016; Kluegel, 1990; Shorter-Gooden, 2004).

*The Ethic of Critique: The Effects of Patriarchy on the Progression of Black Women*

Since their arrival to the United States, the fortunes and fates of Black people have hinged on their position within a White patriarchal system or “White racial frame” (Feagin, 2013) that perceives and values education, work, and wealth as indicators of individual worth and societal status (i.e., class) (Adeleke, 2015; Orr, 2003; Nickliss, 2002). Research on the remediation of racial discrimination and gender bias often places the bulk of the onus on White males for whom leadership is perceived to be a White prerogative (Gündemir et al., 2014), as well as a perquisite of masculinity (Koenig et al., 2011). Leadership is often assigned to agents who are, not exclusively but often, White men who may have limited experience with implementing affirmative action policies or diversity and inclusion management practices, and who may have apprehensions about

the effects that diversity and inclusion may have on their own employment security (Shteynberg, Leslie, Knight & Mayer, 2011; Shelton, 2013); the consequences of which are explained by Mohamad and Tyner (2012, p. 62):

Companies have been forced to contend with greater levels of complaints of harassment and discrimination that have come at a cost to both their bottom line and their reputation. Many times, these grievances stem from the inadequate training methods of trainers and other times from the reluctance of some employees to cooperate in perceived biased sessions.

Facilitating equity (i.e., fairness) involves an ethic of critique that considers difficult questions about differences such as social class, race, gender, and other areas of dissimilarity as well as the benevolent use of power (Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2001). Research shows that placing the responsibility primarily on allies of White patriarchy to change biased institutional practices and foster equity neglects the ethic of critique and has resulted in decades of stymied progression for Black women professionals (Beckwith, Carter & Peters, 2016).

*The Ethic of Justice: Affirmative Action and Diversity and Inclusion*

According to Shteynberg et al. (2011), legislation and diversity and inclusion policies to facilitate equity have been shown to have a limited effect due to efforts to protect the subjective interests of those who are in positions of leadership. The literature shows that enacting affirmative action laws, implementing diversity policies, and appointing qualified members of racial minority groups to leadership positions does not sit well with many members of the racial majority group, even in an effort to achieve equity (Shelton, 2013; Duke, 1991). The adherence to a White racial frame (Feagin, 2013) and the reluctance to facilitate equity implies that an ethic of justice (Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2001) is being neglected by those in control of the current paradigm and

justifies the examination of sponsorship as a practice for inducing a new progressive paradigm for Black women professionals who aspire to attain and maintain leadership positions.

Considering the ethical implications of the aforementioned challenges: i.e., the dearth of Black women in organizational leadership positions; the mismanagement of diverse workforces and inefficient implementation of diversity and inclusion policies; the racial prejudices and gender biases that impede the progress of Black women; and the consequences of neglecting to recognize the significance of Black women's presence in and contributions to the workforce, it is evident that the present culture in the United States and its workforce needs transformation; i.e., paradigm shifts that reflect diverse populations, accommodates their needs, and encourages their inclusion in leadership and decision-making. A question that emanates from the challenges is: who will take the lead as the agents of change in the transformational shifts of the paradigms?

#### Sponsorship as an Advanced Form of Advocacy

O, ye daughters of Africa! What have ye done to immortalize your names beyond the grave? What examples have ye set before the rising generation? What foundation have ye laid for generations yet unborn? (Stewart, 1831).

Research about the phenomenon of mentoring among Black women exists within the cannon of literature about leadership; however, there is a dearth of literature specifically about sponsorship among Black women. Within the field of higher education, Grant (2012) noted the paucity of literature about mentorship among Black women in higher education and the need for more mentoring relationships to develop more Black women leaders in the field. Other literature notes the general merits of mentorship, but

does not provide specific insights about the lived experiences of Black women within sponsor relationships (Grant, 2012; Banner, 2003).

### *The Differences Between Mentorship and Sponsorship*

Hewlett (2013) describes mentorship as an asymmetric relationship with the mentor as the provider and the mentee as the receptor, i.e., mentors listen to issues, offer counsel, and review problem-solving approaches with their mentee (Hewlett, 2013, pp. 19-20). With mentorship, the mentee is the primary beneficiary of the experience.

In contrast, Hewlett (2013) defines sponsorship as a reciprocal relationship with the sponsor leveraging the relationship to their advantage. In effect, sponsorship is an advanced form of mentorship in which both the sponsor and protégé invest in the relationship for mutual advantage; protégés cultivate strategic alliances with individuals capable of propelling them into leadership positions and protecting them from other contenders (Hewlett, 2013, p. 18), and sponsors develop their protégés into leaders in order to advance their own career, organization, and vision and help build their professional brand and legacy (Hewlett, 2013, p. 20). A way to describe the difference between mentorship and sponsorship is: mentorship (i.e., counsel and guidance) can prepare a protégé for sponsorship (i.e., consideration and promotion).

The concept of sponsorship is not new; nevertheless, the distinctions between the concepts of sponsorship in contrast to mentorship are critical. Although there is no standard definition for mentorship, it traditionally involves a person who provides counsel and advice that is beneficial in assisting another person in the advancement of

their career and life. Mentorship can be general in that an advocate can provide guidance that may have no direct effect on career progression within or outside of an organization. In contrast, sponsorship is a more advanced form of advocacy that involves a “powerfully positioned champion” within an organization who uses their influence to actively advocate for the professional advancement of qualified and talented individuals (Hewlett, 2013). Internal advocacy among members within an organization is what distinguishes sponsorship from mentorship and it is what makes sponsorship a critical factor in career progression for Black women. Black women can follow the research recommendations for career advancement; however, influential people within an organization who can advocate for them or directly install them in positions of leadership must recognize their efforts.

Among their findings about the factors that hinder minorities from progressing professionally, Giscombe and Mattis (2002) noted that the lack of people of color in leadership positions may lead to a lack of mentorship and sponsorship, which makes it “more difficult for them to obtain mentors and build the type of developmental relationships necessary to long term career development”. As a consequence, Black professionals have less access to role models than their White counterparts, which decreases their ability to network and build relationships with potential advocates who can help advance their careers (Friedman, Kane, & Cornfield, 1998). According to Dovi (2002), an authentic and effective way to achieve diversity is to empower women and members of racial minority groups who are “descriptive representatives” of their race and gender and who have more affinity for the groups that they represent. Considering that there are advantages to having historically marginalized groups represented by members

of the marginalized group, I believed that the phenomenon of sponsorships among Black women warranted further exploration, hence, the impetus for this study.

In the conclusion of their study on the reasons why the underrepresentation of Black women in positions of leadership persists, Beckwith, Carter, and Peters (2016) surmised the following:

Research agrees that African American women face the duality of race and gender bias in the workplace. This combination presents many challenges from barriers to promotion to obstacles for career growth. Research also shows that many African American women have overcome these challenges, but overall numbers are still far and few. More mentoring is needed, specifically sponsorship, to aid African American women to gain the visibility necessary for promotion as well as develop the skills and confidence for ascension. Current strategies vary amongst African American females who have made it to the C-suite, thus no one succinct route exists. Further study may aid in identifying common traits and possible resolutions to overcome the known challenges faced by African American women (p. 130).

As Beckwith et al. noted, further examination of sponsorship among Black women professionals presented an opportunity to examine how this advanced form of advocacy and leadership practice may assist in remediating the underrepresentation of Black women in positions of organizational leadership, and the possibility of contributing to the body of knowledge on this subject was the inspiration for this study.

#### Recommendations for Sponsorship

Two empirical studies commissioned by the Executive Leadership Council (ELC) identified key findings about what Black women executives can do to ensure their own success and how CEOs and other executives of organizations can be supportive (Carlton et al., 2008; Carlton et al., 2016). The ELC longitudinally researched the professional development of 76 Black women executives, 18 CEOs, and 38 of their peers and published two studies eight years apart that analyzed the success factors and impediments

that Black women experienced in their pursuit and attainment of C-Suite and comparable executive leadership positions (Carlton et al., 2008; Carlton et al., 2016).

In the ELC 2008 study “Black Women Executives Research Initiative Findings” (Carlton et al., 2008), the following factors were identified as being integral for the professional development and advancement of Black women:

- **Alignment of Values:** Matching personal values with organizational values highly correlates to C-Suite success.
- **Relationships with Senior Executives:** Developing comfortable, trusted and strategic associations at the senior level is essential for professional growth. Amicable relationships are especially important with regard to relationships between Black women professionals and White males who hold the predominance of leadership positions.
- **Aspiration:** Creating a strategic plan for achieving executive success is important for career progression.
- **Work-Life Balance:** Mastering the management of work and personal life is necessary for competing at the highest professional levels.
- **Feedback and “Coachability”:** Constructive performance critiques greatly assist professional advancement.
- **Experiences leading to the C-Suite:** Taking advantage of C-Suite level opportunities to display one’s experience and skills to perform as an executive helps CEO recognize talent.
- **Bias and other negative factors:** Being cognizant of work performance, political acumen, and personal attributes creates character familiarization and can overcome bias and negative factors that are beyond direct control.

According to the subsequent 2016 ELC study “Black Women Executives Research Initiative Revisited”, the following key findings were noted:

- **Alignment of Values:** The leading reason for Black women’s passion for their work; lack of alignment was a primary reason for dissatisfaction with work.

- Relationship-building as Politics: Developing political relationships with allies (e.g., networking) can engender personal understanding and support.
- Agility and “Repurposing”: An ability to move rapidly and seamlessly between challenges in a dynamic environment is key to practicing effective leadership.
- Sponsorship: Black women can benefit greatly from a relationship that is internal or external to an organization which goes beyond career guidance (i.e., mentoring), and advances one’s career in tangible ways or protects one from challenging situations that are detrimental to career advancement.

While both the 2008 and 2016 ELC studies mentioned recommendations that were organizationally initiated (i.e., policies and strategies to be implemented by authority of the organization), the findings in the 2016 ELC study also showed that individualized, self-initiated actions by Black women were vital to their professional advancement. According to the 2016 ELC study (Carlton et al., 2016, p. 7), the leadership traits and tools from the 2008 study applied to the 2016 study with one notable exception, sponsorship. In the 2016 study, the importance of sponsorships (i.e., people who advocate for others within an organization) was emphasized as being key to career gains and professional advancement (Carlton et al., 2016, pp. 9-11). In fact, a study conducted by the Center for Talent Innovation (CTI) showed that sponsors can affect career paths in three critical areas: salary increases, high-profile assignments, and promotions (Hewlett, Peraino, Sherbin & Sumberg, 2010). In a comparison study of women with and without sponsors, Hewlett et al. (2010) found that women with sponsors were more likely to request and receive pay raises and high-profile assignments, and having a sponsor contributed to the higher satisfaction that individuals had with the rate of their professional advancement, i.e., the “sponsor effect”. Research by Hewlett et al. (2010) also revealed that the sponsor effect on professionals of color was also profound with



65% of sponsored minority professionals being more satisfied with their career advancement than their unsponsored cohorts. The contrast in successful outcomes between sponsorships and mentorships becomes more evident when it is noted that 15% more men receive promotions even in cases when more women are mentored than men (Ibarra, Carter, & Silva, 2010).

### Black Women Activating their Power as Sponsors

It is useless for us any longer to sit with our hands folded, reproaching the Whites, for that will never elevate us (Stewart & Richardson, 1987).

The lack of Black women in positions of leadership has not been effectively remediated with legislation or policies, and many White leaders who have traditionally held positions of influence have not induced a proportionate representation of racial and gender diversity in the organizations they lead because they have often been reluctant to move beyond their own self-interests, biases, and allegiances to White male patriarchy (Kimmel, 2013; Shelton, 2013). Shteynberg et al. (2011) found that the racial beliefs of White leaders affect whether they perceive race-based affirmative action policies as being biased against them, and they are averse to policies when they believe they may hinder their groups' chances of receiving favorable outcomes such as being hired or promoted. According to Hewlett and Wingfield (2015), leaders often select, groom, and promote those who remind them of themselves, which is a serious disadvantage for Black women who are reliant on the recognition of those whose race and gender are different from theirs. In a laboratory experiment conducted over a ten-year period by Dovidio and Gaertner (2000) to study self-reported racial prejudice and bias among Whites selecting candidates for employment, it was found that when applicants had acceptable but ambiguous qualifications the participants were nearly 70% more likely to recommend the

White applicant than the Black applicant (Pager & Shepherd, 2008). A field experiment on racial discrimination in the labor market conducted by Bertrand and Mullainathan (2004) found that applicants with names associated with traditional White-sounding names as opposed to African-American names received 50% more callbacks for interviews, and the callbacks were more responsive to resume quality for White names than for African-American ones. The study also noted that the racial gap was uniform across occupation, industry, and employer size which led to the conclusion that differential treatment by race remains a prominent practice in the U.S. labor market (Bertrand and Mullainathan, 2004).

In her analysis of Maria W. Stewart's "seductive optimism of belief in the innate goodness and rationality of human nature", Richardson (1987) noted that Stewart "was at times an early advocate of the position that Whites, shown irrefutable evidence of Black worthiness, refinement, virtue, and ability, would be awakened to the inherent equality of the races and, spontaneously perhaps, be moved to repent of ever having degraded a people in whom 'nothing is wanting ... but opportunity', and welcome them into the mainstream of American life." Stewart's belief in the notion that "acceptance can be won through hard work and clean living, has long persisted as one thread in the weave of Black social thought" (Richardson, 1987). According to Katherine Phillips, senior vice dean of Columbia Business School and the Paul Calello Professor of Leadership and Ethics, Black women possess characteristics of "worthiness" or what Maria W. Stewart (1832) deemed as "amiable qualities of soul" that overlap with normative assumptions about leaders; e.g., confidence, assertiveness, and conviction; however, "people won't open the door for Black women" (Hewlett & Wingfield, 2015). This is a particularly

daunting situation for Black women who are trying to succeed in a meritocracy that often does not appreciate or even recognize their merits and contributions (Walton, Spencer, & Erman, 2013; Sesko & Biernat, 2009).

As shown in this literature review, empirical research and anecdotal accounts about the historical and contemporary experiences of Black women suggest that waiting for and relying on the recognition, altruism, and actions of “other people” (i.e., non-Black women, which in most cases refers to leaders of organizations who are often White and male) has been a major contributing factor to the stagnancy of the professional advancement of Black women and the lack of Black women leaders. My belief was that further examination was needed about whether Black women may have common concentricities (i.e., affinities) and similarities in their positionality of identity as a result of a shared Black female experience (Dovi, 2002) which make Black women more optimal agents of change and “descriptive representatives” (Dovi, 2002) for other Black women (i.e., sponsors) than women or men of other races.

Succinctly, this study was an examination of the validity of the self-deterministic notion that Black women do not have to wait for other people to open the door for them, and they can open doors for each other.

## CHAPTER 3

### METHODS AND PROCEDURES

#### Qualitative Research Design

The lack of Black women in positions of leadership has been examined in various quantitative studies and surveys (Carlton et al., 2008; Carlton, 2016; Catalyst, 2015); however, narratives that give voice to the women who represent the statistics and their personal experiences are not often recorded in these studies. Statistical data about the lack of Black women leaders do not provide context about the historic prejudices that have plagued Black women, and quantitative data do not provide information about the challenges that have contributed to the underrepresentation of Black women in positions of organizational leadership. In contrast, the value of qualitative data for this topic is that they provided robust phenomenological insight about the specific lived experiences of Black women and provided a means for them to express their perspectives.

Using an interpretive/constructivist approach allowed for descriptions and interpretations of the phenomenon of sponsorship among the three categories of Black women professionals with an understanding that there are multiple realities that are subjective to each person. A narrative analysis of the experiences of each participant in this study was used to examine the data that were provided in response to the protocol prompts.

## Study Participants

Through my network of Black women professionals from a variety of fields, I identified Black women who were willing to participate in the study and provide the data for a robust study on leadership practices among Black women. I conducted a qualitative, multi-case, exploratory study and collected data from a select group of Black women that were homogenous by race and gender categorization (i.e., Black women). Prior to selecting the participants, I determined that examining sponsorship among Black women who were at the beginning, middle, and end of their careers would provide a more comprehensive view about how Black women in different phases of their careers and from different generations were experiencing sponsorship. Therefore, I interviewed a total of twelve participants whom I categorized in three groups:

- Group I - Burgeoning Leaders: Black women who are at the start of their careers or at middle management level who do not have high levels of organizational influence, yet demonstrate ambition and leadership potential and aspire to executive leadership positions.
- Group II – Established Leaders: Black women who hold C-Suite executive and comparable senior organizational leadership positions in different professions that are within two levels of their chief executive officer; are established in their careers; and who have influence within the organizations by which they are employed (e.g., hiring, promoting, terminating, policy making, etc.), or have influence within the profession they practice.

- Group III: Transitioned Leaders: Black women who have retired from formally working within an organization, yet maintain reputable stature and continue to wield influence with the organization at which they were formally employed and among colleagues within their profession.

The strategy of purposeful sampling (Patton, 2002) was employed regarding the types of women who were selected for this study (i.e., professional Black women). I wanted to examine whether Black women were practicing sponsorship and how sponsorship was practiced among the Black women in each of the three groups. To clarify my participant selection process: I decided upon the group categorizations first, and then I selected women who were aligned with each category based on their career stages and levels of leadership and influence. The Black women selected for this study were of varying ages, from different cultural backgrounds, and hailed from various geographic locations, and practiced a variety of professions, such as: a president of a major cultural institution; two C-Suite Executives from two different Fortune 100 corporations; a high-ranking law enforcement official; two top higher education executives; an award-winning journalist; and a communications specialist. Limiting my study to a select group of women enabled me to conduct comprehensive interviews and immerse myself in the phenomenological analysis of the women's careers, and allowed me to acquire rich detailed descriptions about the intersection of race, gender, and their lived experiences with sponsorship.

Table 3.1

*Participant Groups and Respondents*

| Group                     | Industry / Position                         | Age |
|---------------------------|---|-----|
| I. Burgeoning Leaders     | Communications / Specialist                 | 27  |
|                           | Education / Writer                          | 31  |
| II. Established Leaders   | Health Care / Senior Vice President         | 46  |
|                           | Journalism / Editor                         | 47  |
|                           | Law Enforcement / Executive                 | 53  |
|                           | Higher Education / Senior Advisor           | 55  |
|                           | Higher Education / Assistant Vice President | 56  |
|                           | Arts & Culture / Executive                  | 58  |
|                           | Corporate Relations / Executive             | 58  |
| III. Transitioned Leaders | Health Care / Executive                     | 67  |
|                           | Marketing / Consultant                      | 65  |
|                           | Higher Education / Consultant               | 67  |

To preserve the confidentiality of the identities of the women in my study, I referred to them by the industries in which they work and their positions (i.e., job titles).

#### Data Collection Procedures

My primary method of data collection was to conduct in-person interviews in environments that were conducive to eliciting candor from the participants (e.g., private offices or out-of-office locations). In-person interviews allowed me to hear the participants' voices as well as witness the nuances of their body language and facial expressions in order to interpret their responses and understand the breadth of the experiences of Black women professionals in a more personal and comprehensive manner than statistical analysis. A secondary method of a telephone interview was employed when one of the participants, Healthcare / Senior Vice President, was not available to meet in person. Although I was not able to see the participant in person, her expressive voice and forthright responses were sufficient in conveying her perspectives, perceptions, and experiences. For the telephone interview, I employed the member check methods of asking follow-up questions and requesting the participant to approve my

summaries of her responses for accuracy of interpretation. The respondents answered the questions comprehensively for both the in-person and telephone interviews and the quality of the responses and the data that was collected were not affected by using different interview methods.

The participants in this study are busy professional women who preferred participating in interviews that were conducted in locations that were most convenient to them. The respondents were requested to select locations where they would be comfortable and able to speak freely without intrusion or interruption. The interviews were conducted as reflective, candid conversations and the questions from the protocol guided the discussions. Each interview was between 45 minutes and 90 minutes in duration, and the length of the interviews varied according to the amount of follow-up questions that were necessary to clarify the initial responses (i.e., member check), and the level of detail the respondents provided to the open-ended questions. The responses of the participants in the study were audio recorded and transcribed, and field notes were taken during the interviews for subsequent analysis.

I designed my protocol to elicit information about my central research question as well as additional questions that incited deep discussions about the specific ways in which the Black women whom I interviewed practice sponsorship with other Black women (Appendix B). The protocol was comprised of two sets of questions that elucidated two different viewpoints. I determined the appropriate set of questions to ask based on the categorization of the professional status of the subject:



- Subordinate perception: Provided insight about how the women were sponsored.
- Leadership perspective: Provided information about how the women sponsor.

The protocol consisted of concrete questions about the experiences of the women regarding race and gender, law and policy, and ethics that elicited rich, detailed, and nuanced responses and provided a deep understanding about sponsorship among Black women professionals (see Appendix B). The interview style was semi-structured to lessen the risk of the interviewee going off-topic and providing information that was not useful; however, the questions were open-ended and allowed the participants to elaborate, enliven, and bring context to their responses. To establish the trustworthiness of the collected data and the interpretation of the findings, I conducted member checks during the interviews by summarizing the respondents' comments and inquiring about the accuracy of my interpretation of their responses, which allowed me to record the comments exactly as they were stated by the respondents with confidence that my interpretations and correlations to the literature were correct. The participants of the study were also allowed the opportunity to review a transcript of their narrative for clarity and accuracy. To assist in the analysis of their concentric racial and gender positionality of identity, each participant was also requested to map a concentricity instrument that provided insight about their personal perceptions of themselves and their affinities for other groups to which they affiliated their identities.

### Data Analysis

The analysis of the data from the interviews began after the first interview was conducted. The data from this study were analyzed using a constant comparative method, which is an efficient methodology for identifying and analyzing themes for qualitative

research (Merriam, 2009, 2014). Data were collected through interviews, the interviews were reviewed to determine which themes emerged from the responses, and cross-case analysis was used to identify and compare the themes of each case to each other to highlight the commonalities and deviations among the participants. The responses were analyzed for themes that revealed germane and common phenomena among the Black women interviewed in this study. The coding process of the narratives began with open coding and the categorization of the common themes that emerged, and progressed into a more in-depth axial coding process with more concrete identification and categorization of themes and key words that connected the participants' ideas and the data (e.g., verbal responses, body language, and concentric profiles).

The participants' responses were also compared to the sponsorship recommendations made in the Executive Leadership Council (ELC) (Carlton et al., 2008; Carlton et al., 2016) studies to determine whether the Black women in the study were implementing the recommendations from the ELC studies. Comparing the professional practices to research recommendations showed whether the ELC recommendations were being practically applied and whether the applications of the recommendations affected sponsorship among Black women. The responses of the individual Black women professionals in this study were analyzed to understand how they perceived their own roles in the advancement of Black women.

#### Role of the Researcher

I prefaced this study with an account about my own experience as a Black woman who has held leadership positions throughout my professional career, and my experiences compelled me to select this topic to examine the experiences of other Black women

professionals. As I aspired to achieve leadership positions in the organizations that I worked with and as I advanced in my pursuit of a terminal degree, I encountered hindrances and had experiences that I noticed my peers of other races and ethnicities did not. Throughout my educational and professional careers, I have been in many classrooms and boardrooms where I have felt alone as the sole Black person, the only woman, and as the lone Black woman. There have been instances in my life when the nuances of Black culture and womanhood were not shared by my academic peers and work colleagues and, consequently, I felt unsupported and sometimes even ignored, i.e., intersectional invisibility (Sesko & Biernat, 2009; Purdie-Vaughns & Eibach, 2008). Oftentimes, I felt as if I had to perform above and beyond my assigned work and academic responsibilities in order to combat the stereotypes associated with the double jeopardy of my intersectional racial and gender identities as a Black woman (Shorter-Gooden, 2004) Rosette and Livingston (2012) found that Black women are particularly susceptible to the phenomenon of the double jeopardy perception due to the perceptions of their dual-subordinate identities. As a Black woman professional, I felt that my performance was judged critically and I felt the weight and pressure to prove my worth, while my peers of other races and genders were granted allowances and critiqued less harshly (Rosette & Livingston, 2012). My experiences led me to wonder if the challenges that have I faced were phenomena that were unique to me, and whether my career and life could have been different if there had been someone who could have actively recognized my contributions, supported my professional development, and advocated for my advancement.

As a Black woman who has experienced the dual positionality of leadership from the perspectives of being led as well as being a leader, I understand the subjective perception as well as the leadership perspective and I can reference my own experiences in interpreting the nuances of each position. As I conducted this study and read the literature, I found that my own experiences were reflected in some of the research. Nevertheless, I want to be clear that I understand that my perspectives are relative to my own experiences and I did not layer my perspectives onto the participants' responses in my study. Throughout my study and data collection, I maintained an objective view and followed the research wherever it led me while interviewing the participants; I recorded the participants' accounts and reported their responses as they were conveyed to me. However, I will note that sharing the same racial and gender affiliation as my subjects were assets that allowed me to understand the subtleties and nuances of their responses and aided in my interpretation of the data that I collected.

Although Black women may share similar experiences associated with the intersectionality of and perceptions about their racial and gender identities, Black women as a group are not homogeneous and a variety of factors contribute to the uniqueness of each woman's experience. As an objective researcher, I understood that my role was to remain open to conveying experiences that were unfamiliar to me and responses that were unanticipated in order to convey each woman's personal responses within the context of her lived experience. It is my belief that understanding our differences as individuals and as groups of people will lead to a more ethical and humane society and a more equitable workforce. Therefore, I designed my protocol to examine how the perspectives of each Black woman in my study were informed by her experiences and

identity perspectives, guided by laws and policies, and defined by her personal ethics. I conducted detailed analyses of the women's personal experiences and examined the factors that affected their perspectives, decisions and careers to determine what effect, if any, their experiences had on their sponsorship relationships with other Black women.

#### Ethical Issues

I followed the ethical standards of research and fully disclosed the purpose of my study to the participants before interviewing them, informed them of their anonymity in the study, and took measures to ensure the confidentiality of the data they provided. I used pseudonyms to protect the anonymity of the participants. I shared a written statement of the motives, intentions, and goals of my study with each participant before I interviewed them. The data I collected were protected and secured during the study and after the study was completed. I remained neutral in my positionality and followed the data as they were divulged and evolved, and I grounded any claims that I made in supportive research. I was also cognizant of not inserting any personal opinions or biases in my analysis of the data and limited such interpretations to the discussion. I complied with all of the rules and regulations of the Institutional Review Board to ensure the ethical integrity of my study and the protection of the subjects who participated in my study.

## CHAPTER 4

### FINDINGS

#### Data Analysis of Findings

This study highlighted the voices of Black women professionals across various industries and allowed them to shed light about their sponsor relationships with other Black women. A qualitative approach allowed me to analyze the narratives of Black women professionals, humanize the statistics, and capture data that illustrated how the members of these groups function as leaders and as aspiring leaders. In my analysis of the phenomena associated with the underrepresentation of Black women in positions of organizational leadership, I asked questions from three perspectives:

1. Intersectionality of Race and Gender:
  - To examine whether race and gender have affected the women's perspectives on leadership and sponsorship.
2. Laws and Policies:
  - To determine whether laws and policies, i.e., the ethical paradigm of justice (Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2016), are factors in how the women in the study practice and experience leadership.
3. Ethical Considerations:
  - To reveal the ways in which the ethical paradigms of care and critique (Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2016) influence the moral principles that inform the perceptions and practices of leadership for the women in the study.

Questions were asked from these three perspectives to determine if they presented any hindrances to the practice of sponsorship among the Black women in this study.

The Black women professionals who participated in this study practiced in a variety of occupations, held varying levels of status in their organizations or industries,

varied in age, and were in different stages of their careers. It is interesting to note that despite the diversity of the women, common themes emerged that demonstrated how Black women professionals, while individual as people, are subject to what is commonly referred to as a “Black experience” that is the result of a collective historical trajectory and shared societal existence (Crenshaw, 1991; Elliott & Smith, 2004; Wilkins, Whiting, Watson, Russon, & Moncrief, 2013) that will be discussed in the findings of this study.

### The Effects of the Intersectionality of Race and Gender on Sponsorship Among Black Women

Being Black in America has its challenges regarding contending with implicit racial biases that originated when people of African descent were enslaved and persist to the present day (Wilkins et al., 2013; Staats, 2014). I included the following questions in my protocol to determine if the intersectionality of the racial and gender identities of the Black women in my study were factors in their workplaces and whether intersectionality affected how they experienced and practiced sponsorship among other Black women (Appendix B):

#### Research Questions:

1. How have race and gender affected your interactions with other Black women professionals?
2. What are some of the ways that race has affected you as a Black woman professional?
3. What are some of the ways that gender has affected you as a Black woman professional?
4. What are some of the ways that societal views about Black women have affected you as a Black woman professional?

*Themes: Intersectionality of Race and Gender*

The section of questions on intersectionality was designed to examine issues related to the confluence of the multiple facets of the identities of Black women leaders, i.e., race, gender, and authority. During my interviews, the following themes emerged regarding the intersectionality of the racial and gender identities of the Black women in my study:

Intersectionality of Race and Gender Themes

- Theme #1: Being the Only Black Woman
- Theme #2: The Angry Black Woman
- Theme #3: The Nurturer or Mother Figure
- Theme #4: Differing Experiences Between Black Women and White Women

Table 4.1 shows the primary themes and sub-themes that emerged from the responses of the Black women respondents to questions about the intersectionality of race and gender.



Table 4.1

*Themes: Intersectionality of Race and Gender*

| Themes  | Industry / Position  |
|---|--|
| 1. Being the only Black woman<br>Sub-themes:<br>- Gender bias<br>- Self-consciousness<br>- Female stereotypes<br>- Individualism, Self-othering<br>- The need or desire for sponsorship | <u>Group I</u><br>• Communications / Specialist<br>• Education / Writer<br><u>Group II</u><br>• Journalism / Editor<br>• Law Enforcement / Executive<br>• Higher Education / Senior Advisor<br>• Higher Education / Assistant Vice President<br>• Corporate Relations / Executive<br>• Health Care / Executive<br>• Arts & Culture / Executive<br>• Health Care / Senior Vice President<br><u>Group III</u><br>• Marketing / Consultant<br>• Higher Education / Consultant |
| 2. Angry Black woman<br>Sub-themes:<br>- Personal conduct<br>- Barrier to connecting with colleagues  | <u>Group I</u><br>• Communications / Specialist<br>• Education / Writer<br><u>Group II</u><br>• Law Enforcement / Executive<br><u>Group III</u><br>• Marketing / Consultant  |
| 3. Mammy, Nurturer, Mother Figure<br>Sub-themes:<br>- Societal stereotypes<br>- Intersectional racial and gender stereotypes<br>- Interpersonal dynamics in the workplace               | <u>Group II</u><br>• Arts & Culture / Executive<br>• Law Enforcement / Executive<br>• Higher Education / Senior Advisor<br>• Health Care / Senior Vice President   |
| 4. The differences between Black women and White women<br>Sub-themes:<br>- Different social agendas<br>- Different cultural agendas   | <u>Group I</u><br>• Communications / Specialist<br><u>Group II</u><br>• Health Care / Executive<br><u>Group III</u><br>• Marketing / Consultant  |

*Theme #1: Being the Only Black Woman*

For the Black women in my study, the malignancy of racial prejudice was exacerbated by gender discrimination thus creating onerous challenges for the women in both the workplace and in society. According to a report by the National Women's Law Center, Black women are among the groups that are overrepresented in the low-wage workforce, while White, non-Hispanic women are underrepresented compared to their

share of the overall workforce (Tucker & Patrick, 2017). Black women comprise 13% of women in the overall workforce, 18% of women in the low-wage workforce, and 16% of women in the lowest wage jobs (Tucker & Patrick, 2017). At the upper management and executive levels, the number of Black women who hold such positions are vastly underrepresented. Catalyst, a non-profit research firm, found that only 1.3% of executives and senior level managers in S&P 500 companies are Black women; among S&P 500 companies overall, almost 5% of executives are women of color, and nearly 22% are White women with the remainder being primarily White men (Catalyst, 2004).

With unanimity, the Black women professionals interviewed for this study all reported an experience with being the only Black woman in their workplaces as shown in Table 4.1. The women expressed that their intersectional racial and gender uniqueness in their workplaces has caused them to find ways of coping with feeling like “the only one”, “other”, or simultaneously visible and conspicuous, yet invisible and ignored, i.e., “unicorns” (Hewlett & Wingfield, 2015):

Until I got to [diverse company] I was always “other”. Prior to working in the position and with the agency that I am now, I was the only or one of maybe three or four Blacks, and one or two Black women who worked in my department or my entire company (Communications / Specialist, personal communication, February 27, 2018).

I think that having my perspective in the newsroom and in a small editorial situation where I’m basically the only woman with a group of males, I think that it’s important to have my voice there (Journalism / Editor, personal communication, August 20, 2017).

The Journalism / Editor expressed that she had to fight to have her voice heard and that the male editors in her workplace were not cognizant of the fact that they were ignoring her. When asked how she fought to have her voice heard she responded with this strategy:

You basically keep talking until they [men] stop. (*Laughs*). And, then you get your point across as clearly as you can and you go from there. Because they will try to over-talk you in those types of situations. Over-talk, out-talk. So, you have to go toe-to-toe with them (Journalism / Editor, personal communication, August 20, 2017).

Another respondent spoke of an instance when she reflected a disrespectful remark by a White male supervisor with a similarly disrespectful remark to impress upon

I'll share another story with you about risk: one of the presidents called me in his office to do something and he said, "You know what, little brown bunny..." (*The interviewer gasps and falls silent in shock, respondent pauses and raps twice on table and comments on the interviewer's shock*) I know, it's okay, you did what I did. He said, "So, this is what we're gonna do...", And I looked at him and I said, "[Called the president by his first name], how would you feel if I called you 'fat White honky'?" That was a risk. He said, "Guess you got a point there." So, we never had that issue and we never had that discussion again. So, you know, we were respectful of one another. So, so, again, there are times when you just gotta go at it. 'Cause I couldn't believe that's what he said, but that's what he said (Health Care / Executive, personal communication, February 9, 2018).

The Communications / Specialist talked about how she was hyper self-conscious of her behavior in the workplace which caused her to seek a workplace environment where she could be relieved of the stress associated with being a minority as both a Black person and as a woman.

Well, being either the only Black person or Black woman, you're more -- I, in my personal experience, I've been more prone to remain quiet at work because, for one, I didn't want to have anything attached to me as far as being labeled as a typical Black woman in the workplace. I can recall being in meetings and I laughed the loudest, and I get a side-eye for the way that I laughed. Or, I -- the way in which I speak, I'm very animated when I speak, so I tend to talk with my hands a lot. Although I don't necessarily use what's considered slang or Ebonics that could be considered to be too much within the workplace... And, when I noticed that those things were things that sort of worked against me as opposed to being attached to, you know, my personality or my individuality and could honestly be used as a plus within the workplace, I just sort of was more timid at work. I didn't really speak up much, but if I had creative ideas, I tended to not vocalize those ideas out of fear that it would be shutdown

and I started to seek out other career opportunities in which I would not be the minority (Communications / Specialist, personal communication, February 27, 2018).

Self-consciousness about being in the minority as a woman in the workplace and labeled with stereotypes was also expressed by the Journalism / Editor:

I feel that because I am in a room full of men most of the time that I have to be more professional, I can't be emotional because that's seen as a weakness (Journalism / Editor, personal communication, August 20, 2017).

One respondent spoke of her acute awareness of her environment and the necessity of acting accordingly to her surroundings and seeking out other Black people:

In some ways I try to be universal in my engagement with others. And, in some ways I walk into a room knowing very clearly that I am the person of color, and I start to look for other people of color, particularly African-Americans. I also then look to understand gender difference; if there are people of color in that room, if there are African-Americans in that room, how many of them are female and how many of them are male? (Corporate Relations / Executive, personal communication, February 14, 2018).

The prevalence of males in law enforcement presented a special set of challenges for the Law Enforcement / Executive respondent who voiced intersectional realities that are consistent with the findings by Martin (1994) who studied the double jeopardy of being both Black and a female in law enforcement:

I would say it [race] has affected me. Coming on this job [by law] the racial makeup class had to be reflective of the community, which meant, for once, a large amount of white males weren't hired. So, there was some resistance... It felt like you had to be accepted by those [White males] who were already on the job... But they were unsure – or, maybe they were believing some things, folklore from years ago, like we [Black people] were going to come in and not do the job... So, over time, with people who learn you or get to know you, you don't really see you as much pushback because of your gender or your color. But, for those who don't know you, that is where you'll see, or you'll feel, you know, just some negative vibes... It's not what a person says, you know how a person makes you feel when you're in their company. So, there are some people on this job

who are very, very challenged with my gender and my color (Law Enforcement / Executive, personal communication, October 31, 2017).

One respondent spoke about how some Black women who do not have sponsors to advise them unwittingly present themselves in ways that cause people to perceive them as other, i.e., self-othering (Southerton, 2011):

It is those little things that you need to be aware of. And, sometimes somebody has to tell you. So, you know, little things. Like, in this profession you're around a lot of rich white folks, and you know old money doesn't show, right? So, don't walk in there with all your [designer] labels on showing that, you know, you have new money and all your new money goes to, you know, this label or that label. Pay attention. You know, if you look around, and you know that woman across from you has millions of dollars, she might be wearing quality, but it doesn't show, "Money, money, money!" Then, maybe you need to make a different kind of [self] presentation. And sometimes, the subtleties are ones that you have to point out to people. That's just an anecdote. If they're making decisions about you, your organization, they need a comfort level with you. And, if you are in so many ways labeling yourself as other, then that doesn't mean you're completely losing your own integrity or conforming, it's just playing the game and understanding the environment (Arts & Culture / Executive, personal communication, February 10, 2018).

Othering by physical presentation is of particular concern for Black women for whom hairstyles are not just a physical attribute, but also political and personal identity statements (Patton, 2006; Caldwell, 1991). The Health Care / Senior Vice President (personal communication, April 4, 2018) recalled how she wondered whether she would be perceived as a professional after she styled her hair in locs, and similarly, the Law Enforcement / Executive (personal communication, October 31, 2017) commented during her interview that she wondered whether her blonde hair color would be a liability in terms of how she would be perceived in the workplace (Green, 2011).

The necessity of sponsorship regarding providing role modeling and guidance to Black women who aspire to leadership can be seen in these respondents' comments:

Especially for the field that I am looking to go into [script writing for film and television] the majority is White male. So, I have to find women who look like me to kind of say, “What path did you take? How can you help me? Who helped you?” I think it’s important (Education / Writer, personal communication, February 25, 2018).

A lot of times, if I am going to a meeting with a male, I tend to bring a male colleague with me. I’ve noticed that in meetings, conversations steer, or not necessarily steer, but -- there’s always, like, a compliment on my appearance, or my outfit, or anything that has to do with -- nothing that has to do with work. I love [former boss] and I consider him a mentor to this day. But, he would tell me that he would put me in certain rooms because I was attractive. And, I was pretty much like an attention-getter. People would -- men would gravitate towards me and that would sort of spark the conversation... I don’t feel like it was a degradation on my ability specifically from [former boss] because we had very honest conversations like that... What I can say is, [former boss] was very protective of his staff, which just so happened to be female, so he would never, like, push us into the lion’s den. I mean, he would always be with us, but he would, you know, he was honest and he would say, you know, “That’s the way that things go.” And, coming from the entertainment industry, I completely understood how that worked, I’ve seen it... But, I was never forced to go to these events, but he [former boss] would ask me to go to, sort of, work the room, I would say. And then, when I would open my mouth to speak they would say, “Oh, and she’s smart too.” So, I can see how from the outside looking in, it may seem a certain kind of way, but I never took it like that (Communications / Specialist, personal communication, February 27, 2018).

Regarding the comment made by Communications / Specialist: considering the contemporary climate of heightened awareness, sensitivity, and rebuke of gender bias and sexually exploitive behavior (Gonzalez, Respers-France, & Melas, 2018; Santiago & Criss, 2017), the previous comment is of particular concern because it was made by the youngest respondent in this study, and it demonstrates a naiveté and vulnerability that could be counseled with sponsorship by a worldly and established Black woman professional.

In contrast, two comments from other respondents show the benefits of having an experienced sponsor who can provide the assistance, guidance, advice, and role modeling that are necessary for contending with antagonism:

So, I try to model for them how you conduct yourself in these environments, 'cause everybody's not gonna like you. But, how do you make sure that you do what the corporation wants you to do but you also make sure that you advance your agenda (Health Care / Executive, personal communication, February 9, 2018.)

[Advising other women] Everybody's not going to like you, I think we learned that in the schoolyard. Everybody's not your friend. And, if anything, learn to take your W's with your L's. You know what I'm saying? Like, take them the same way. And they [inexperienced women professionals] don't. 'Cause if you start believing your press? You're really getting ready to get jacked up! (*Laughs, raises eyebrows for humorous emphasis*) Look... (*Laughs again*) (Law Enforcement / Executive, personal communication, October 31, 2017).

One respondent had a rather unique view about why some Black women are placed in positions where they are the only ones:

They put you there because they are setting you up to be the one and only because you are responding to an issue in that moment (Arts & Culture / Executive, personal communication, February 10, 2018).

Another respondent spoke of the higher purpose of being the only Black woman in certain settings:

I am always mindful of being Black in my professional settings. So I am here in a major company that is part of a major corporation, and I am mindful of who I am, And, how important it is for me to be able to share with colleagues a perspective that may be different from theirs... And, I think that's part of my role... And, to do that in a way that's respectful, but clear and direct. And, to try to do it in a way that it, if possible, can help people along in their own journey of understanding people who are different from who they are (Corporate Relations / Executive, February 14, 2018).

As a result of often being the only Black woman in the places of work, the Black women whom I interviewed expressed their frustration in having to “figure it out for

myself' (Communications / Specialist, personal communication, February 27, 2018) in terms of teaching themselves how to deal with racial biases and gender discrimination and navigate within the organizations and professions in which they worked (Barnes, 1989). Although there is literature that women can use as resources to assist them in maneuvering within the workplace and planning their careers (Clarke & Garrett, 2011; Hewlett, 2013), none of the respondents mentioned that they have used such resources.

*Theme #2: The Angry Black Woman*

The Black women in my study spoke candidly about this pernicious perception that has plagued their professional progression and their leadership ambitions. The Law Enforcement / Executive (personal communication, October 31, 2017) stated:

I try not to be the angry Black woman because that's just so typical, but that's what they look for. That's what they look for. They look for you to have that fight, that attitude, that bark, that bite, your neck to be moving. I paid a lot of money to go to school to learn how to communicate in the English language to not have to use profanity for you to understand my point. Now, can I? (*Laughs*) It's my God-given right. But I try, especially in this professional setting. Because one thing's for certain: that one time that you allow yourself to be taken off your square is the only one time they're going to remember you. That's all they're going to remember about you. That's it. So, you can't give it to them... What I had the opportunity to do was to see it displayed in someone else, and then I recognized, that's not going to get me anywhere (Law Enforcement / Executive, personal communication, October 31, 2017).

Another respondent alluded to the angry black woman stereotype as being a barrier to establishing an interpersonal connection with a White male professor:

I had a white male professor, and I really don't think he, like, culturally, had friends that didn't look like him, and didn't work from the same socio-economic group as him, and so I got pigeon-holed [as], like, the angry black girl instead of him like getting to know me. I got overlooked for a lot of, like, internships and things (Education / Writer, personal communication, February 25, 2018).



The respondents who mentioned the angry Black woman referred to it within the context of it being a harmful stereotype that they took great pains to avoid being labeled (Ashley, 2014). This trope has been ascribed to Black women often within the context of comparing them to their White female counterparts as a means of “othering” Black women (Jones & Norwood, 2017). This comparison is particularly challenging for Black women in the workplace where the expectation for conduct that is perceived as aggressive is reserved for men (Lee & Brotheridge, 2011), and what may seem to be expressions of anger by Black women are often reactions to micro-aggressions and expressions of frustration with feeling powerless and isolated (Ashley, 2014; Jones & Norwood, 2017). These differences in communication styles, rooted in cultural differences, can present unique interpersonal communication challenges for Black women in the workplace.

### *Theme #3: The Nurturer or Mother Figure*

The stereotype of Black women as maternal figures has its roots in slavery when Black women were exploited as domestic caretakers for the White captors of enslaved Black people (Abdullah, 1998). In modern society, entertainment and the media (i.e., television, film, print, electronic, social) are primary perpetrators of stereotypes (Tyree, 2011), and one respondent spoke to this point in her interview:

Societal views are informed to a large degree by the media and pop culture. And those images are, many times, limited. They're not balanced. The images of Black women in television and pop culture are Nell Carter the caretaker, Florida Evans in *Good Times*; the matriarch who's strong. And, these aren't negative traits, but they're limiting. So, in the workplace, I am not Nell Carter, and I am not Florida Evans. I am not the caretaker of White people, and particularly not White men. But that's how I am seen, and that's how Black women are seen (Higher Education / Senior Advisor, personal communication, November 20, 2017).

Perpetuated societal stereotypes were evident in an account in which a respondent recalled an encounter with a White male superior who blatantly told her what his expectations were about the role he wanted her to portray in the workplace:

In some instances I was expected to play the mother. I was a vice president and an older White man was the president. And he actually said, “We’re a team, I’m going to be the dad, and you’re going to be the mom.” In other words, I was supposed to nurture, and he was to lead. And, I reacted very strongly to that and said, “No, this is not what I signed up for. This is not how I function.” But, there was the presumption that it was even an appropriate thing to say to me (Arts & Culture / Executive, personal communication, February 10, 2018).

To counter the aggressive environment of her workplace, the Law Enforcement / Executive spoke of using Mammy-isms (i.e., nurturing, mother figure behaviors) and included an example of an act of personal sacrifice to emphasize her point:

So, right now I have a colleague who I’m mentoring, she’s trying to be promoted. So, I am like, almost Mother Teresa, you know. I give out hugs, I give out inspiration. You know, I give my last quarter if that’s what you need (Law Enforcement / Executive, personal communication, October 31, 2017).

The dearth of Black women leaders makes finding a sponsor challenging, which has led some women to seek role models who are outside of their direct, personal circle of associates. It is interesting to note that two respondents mentioned Michelle Obama as an exemplary Black woman professional who debunked both the angry black woman and the nurturer or mother figure stereotypes:

I can’t help but to think of Michelle Obama. She’s passionate, she’s an angry Black woman. We are not all angry Black women, we’re just passionate about what we do, okay? (Health Care / Executive, personal communication, February 9, 2018).

Whatever critique you have of the Obama administration, the thing that Michelle Obama did best is to provide a more balanced image of black women as women who can be professionals, who aren't always the people taking care of you, and fixing things, and the mammy person (Higher Education / Senior Advisor, personal communication, November 20, 2017).

Abdullah (1998) postulated that playing the role of Mammy (i.e., nurturer or mother figure) is a disorder that Black women use as coping strategy when White people appear to be threatened, thus depriving Black women of “the true nature of her oneness with God, world view, cultural identification and self-appreciation” (pp. 196-197). According to Wilkins et al., the tendency to use this passive maternal stereotype as a defense tactic to maneuver in a society dominated by White social norms is evidence of the internalization of the historical trauma of enslavement (Wilkins et al., 2013).

*Theme #4: The Differences Between Black Women and White Women*

The differences between the way Black women and White women perceive themselves and each other, interact with one another, and experience discrimination emerged as themes in this study in the respondents' views and recollection of encounters.

*Historical societal perceptions of Black women.*

The discrimination that Black women face is unique in that it is compounded by the intersectionality of their racial and gender identities and reflects their history, sociocultural experience, and societal position (Hall, Everett, & Hamilton-Mason, 2012). In an historical context, the dynamic between Black women and White women dates back at least as far as the period when Black people were enslaved in the United States, as seen in this passage by Maria W. Stewart (1831) who was an active proponent for self-determination among Black people during the period of slavery in the United States:

O, ye fairer sisters, whose hands are never soiled, whose nerves and muscles are never strained, go learn by experience! Had we had the opportunity that you have had, to improve our moral and mental faculties, what would have hindered our intellects from being as bright, and our manners from being as dignified as yours? Had it been our lot to have been nursed in the lap of affluence and ease, and to have basked beneath the smiles and sunshine of fortune, should we not have naturally supposed that we were never made to toil?

As a result of the historical disenfranchisement of Black women in general society and in the workplace specifically, Black women have had to rely on the White women who, while not having realized full equity, have still attained leadership positions in numbers greater than those of Black women. The comments made by the Black women who participated in my study evidence their reliance on their White counterparts as a result of the lack of Black women practitioners in certain professions from which they were excluded. The Corporate Relations / Executive (personal communication, February 14, 2018) stated that one of the leaders who was very influential to her career was a White woman, and the Arts & Culture / Executive (personal communication, February 10, 2018) mentioned that she had to rely on White women for professional assistance and guidance because of the prevalence of White women in her field and the lack of Black women in positions of influence.

*The differences in identity and privilege between Black and White women.*

Gender discrimination is a cause of chronic stress for Black women in the workplace and the workplace stress that Black women experience is different from the stress experienced by White women, White men, and Black men (Hall, Everett, & Hamilton-Mason, 2012). The differences in the way Black women and White women experience discrimination alter the similarities they share as women, and the sum of their gender commonalities diverge when race is added to the equation. Although White

women face gender discrimination in the workplace, they have the racial advantage of being White and benefitting from the associated privileges that relieves White women of the burden of experiencing the racial discrimination and stereotyping that Black women face (Accapadi, 2007). Just as in general society, privileged racial and gender perceptions have afforded White women certain advantages in the workplace that have been historically denied to Black women (Accapadi, 2007; Brown, Givens, & Monahan, 2005). Diametrically opposed gender stereotypes of Black women as being loud, brash, and aggressive and White women as being quiet, fragile, and passive add more strain to an already tenuous dynamic between Black women and White women (Wilson & Russell-Cole, 1996; Landrine, 1985).

One respondent gave voice to the uncomfortable truths about the inequity of how Black women are treated in comparison to White women:

If it was someone else [White] doing the same thing [job], what I've come to find out... I have to work harder, I have to work above and beyond to get the same type of recognition as my White female counterparts. And it's sad, but it's true. And no one likes to talk about it, especially in the same room with their White counterparts. But it's true, like, let's be real (Education / Writer, personal communication, February 25, 2018).

*The solidarity of womanhood myth.*

There is an assumption that having a shared in-group affinity (i.e., womanhood) engenders an automatic solidarity between Black women and White women, however, as noted by Wilson and Russell-Cole (1996), racial identity and racial privilege are the most significant differentiating factors in the relationships between the two groups as echoed by two respondents:

White women are always interesting in that they have their agenda and we [Black women] have ours. They [White women] want you to think that we are all women together, and there are some commonalities -- but we're not

[the same], c'mon, let's keep it real. But, you know, I don't discount working with them, alright... Because I think everybody has their lane whatever that might be, okay? And their – the things they want to do, are often very different from the things that we want to do, okay? But, I've learned to – I'm sort of the convener, I know how to get us all together at the table and – can we talk? Alright? And be very honest, “That may be your position, which is fine, I respect that, but this is my position over here.” And, you know, I'm clear with that. But, I think, again, the things that we want to do are different, but we're women, so that's one thing we've got in common. Our struggle is different from their struggle. They weren't in slavery, I mean that's real (Health Care / Executive, personal communication, February 9, 2018).

And, I'll be very direct, White women have a very different experience from Black women, especially today, and I always point that out to them when they come to me, “Join this women's group, join that women's group.” Yes, I'll join it. But understand, your experience is not mine (Marketing / Consultant, personal communication, November 13, 2017).

Black women do not have the luxury of considering their racial and gender identities as mutually exclusive when the discrimination towards their identities is compounded and intersectional and requires them to simultaneously acknowledge and defend both (Crenshaw, 1989). It is the intersection of racial privilege and biased gender perceptions that widens the chasm between Black women and White women, particularly when White women leverage their privileges to their benefit and the detriment of Black women (Accapadi, 2007). For example, one respondent recalled a specific encounter with a White female supervisor who leveraged her racial privilege and stereotypical gender behaviors to retain her job despite poor work performance:

I didn't like my boss's working method, it just didn't work. She was horrible at time management and project management. And prior to me speaking to a superior about it, I spoke directly with her about it. Things continued to happen to the point where the station was losing clients, because she was running campaigns late. After about a year of me trying to work with her and figure out solutions to make processes and procedures flow better, I finally went to her boss. She had already lost assistants prior to me, so this is not anything new, it's just that I was the only person who ever brought it to his attention. And, I was basically told

to just deal with her until I had proof. So, we had a meeting again and instead of just bringing her to the meeting it was just myself with the other managers and account executives. But they never directly addressed her because she was super emotional, [she said] she felt like she was being attacked (Communications / Specialist, personal communication, February 27, 2018).

The behavior of the White woman in the narrative by the Communications Specialist is very similar to the defense mechanisms and emotional manipulative strategies Accapadi (2007) described in a case study detailing an instance when a White woman, who was a college student affairs administrator, responded to critique about her department's performance by personalizing the criticism, becoming emotional, crying, and saying that she felt attacked all of which deflected the attention from criticism about the performance of her department and instead focused on the consolation of her distress (Accapadi, 2007, pp. 210-211).

As elucidated by Accapadi, White women have an advantage over Black women in that White women have dual identities of which one identity is privileged or "one-up" (i.e., their Whiteness), and the other identity is subordinate or "one-down" (i.e., their womanhood) (Accapadi, 2007), in contrast to Black women whose racial and gender identities are both perceived to be subordinate and are oppressed in society. Accapadi explains the polarity of the privilege and oppression White women's identities in contrast to the subordinate racial and gender identities of Women of Color with powerful clarity in the following passage:

The challenge and responsibility of any person who has a "one up/one down" identity, with one identity that is privileged and another that is oppressed, is to recognize when their privileged identity is the operating norm... White women, having "one up/one down" identities as White and as women, must recognize the power that comes with their Whiteness.

Recognizing privilege means acknowledging that our societal norms allow White women to toggle their identities, meaning they can choose to be a woman and choose to be White. Combining these two social identities, White women can be both helpless without the helplessness being a reflection of all White people and powerful by occupying a position of power as any White person. Women of Color do not have the option of toggling their identities in this manner. When a woman of color acts, her actions at some level reflect upon her racial community, and she cannot centrifuge her racial identity from her womanhood (Accapadi, 2007, p. 210).

The emotionality and helplessness that the White women displayed in both the Communications / Specialist's account and in Accapadi's case study were instances of White women simultaneously leveraging their "one up" privileged identities as White people and maximizing the advantage of the perceived fragility of their "one down" identities as women, and it is this complex feat of identity manipulation, which Black women cannot employ, that further demonstrates the differences between the behaviors of and perceptions about Black women and White women.

The Communications / Specialist also respondent spoke about a comment that was said to her by the same aforementioned White female supervisor that alluded to the silencing and invisibility of Black women as discussed by Jones and Norwood (2017), as well as the "toggling" of identity that Accapadi (2007) referenced:

She [a White female supervisor] would tell me in meetings, "You're doing a good job, but you just don't really know your place." That was her favorite thing to say to me. "Sometimes it's better to be seen and not heard." (*Reacting to the interviewer's stunned facial expression and nodding affirmatively*): Oh yes! (*Laughs*) (Communications / Specialist, personal communication, February 27, 2018).

In the assertion of her "one up" identity over the Black Communications / Specialist, the White woman supervisor leveraged the privilege of her Whiteness (i.e., "toggling" her "one up" identity) to subordinate ("you just don't really know your place")



and silence (“sometimes it’s better to be seen and not heard”) the Black Communications / Specialist. It is this power strategy of identity toggling (Accapadi, 2007) that White women have the advantage of utilizing at will and which Black women cannot that enables White women to marginalize Black women, and the unpredictability with which White women weaponize their White privilege and feminine wiles against Black women engenders mistrust, erodes the strength of a shared womanhood, and betrays the solidarity of womanhood between Black women and White women.

*The case for Black women as sponsors.*

The literature and the findings of this study show that there are limitations to the effectiveness of unallied representation, and suggests that there are advantages to the descriptive representation of historically marginalized groups by members of the same marginalized groups (Dovi, 2002). Descriptive representation is particularly important with regards to sponsorships among Black women due to the high levels of comfort, empathy, and trust that are required in successful sponsorships and which Black women often share among each other. In contrast to the factors that dissociate Black women from White women, some of the respondents expressed a feeling of having a shared experience and commonality with other Black women, as seen in these comments:

I think that because I’m a Black female journalist, I think that sometimes if I’m talking to [another Black female], I think that they’re more willing to open up to me, and divulge more information, expose themselves a little more because there’s a certain comfort level of speaking to another woman whom you identify with (Journalism/ Editor, personal communication, August 20, 2017).

I don’t think [race and gender] have had any effect that has been negative [in interactions with Black women]. I think more so, it has caused me to become more aware that we [Black women] have a lot in common even though we may have had different experiences. And it has caused me to

gravitate toward these women because of that commonality (Higher Education / Assistant Vice President, personal communication, March 25, 2018.)

For me, whatever job that I've had, internship, education, even just being in school, I've always looked to find someone who looked like me. A Black woman either in my field and kind of on the journey that I'm on, or someone who was already doing what I'm doing. Because I think that there's a uniqueness to, whether people want to see it or not, there is a different path that a Black woman has to take on the professional ladder than a White man most definitely, or a White woman (Education / Writer, personal communication, February 25, 2018).

The theme of the differences between Black women and White women emerged unprovoked and organically in the narratives of the Black women's lived experiences. The Black women professionals in my study expressed their understanding that the societal influences, gender conventions, and racial constructs that affect them in the workplace do not affect White women in the same manner, and that is their true and valid reality as supported by literature and their lived experiences. Examining the challenges of the relationships between Black women and White women professionals is not a suggestion of the impossibility of sponsorships between Black women and White women; in fact, some of the Black women in my study noted that their professional advancement was due in part to sponsorships with their White women colleagues. Rather, the intention behind the discussion of this theme is to report the findings as conveyed and bring awareness to the challenges in the relationships between Black women and White women in order to recognize and remedy them by incorporating behavioral guidelines and interpersonal interaction strategies and supporting sponsorships among Black women professionals in organizational practice.

The literature and the findings of my study reveal that while Black women and White women alike face gender discrimination in the workplace, the additional factors of White women's dissociation from the concerns and experiences of Black women and the racial discrimination imposed against Black women compound the complexity of the interactions between Black women and White women and adversely affect the workplace environment and progression of Black women professionals. Ergo, the respondents' comments about the dissociation they experience from White women professionals in contrast to their comfort with the cultural commonalities and experiences they share with other Black women professionals are evidence of the need for more Black women leaders to sponsor other Black women.

#### The Effects of Law and Policy on Sponsorship Among Black Women

The Civil Rights Act of 1964 and Executive Order 10925 provided the basis for the development of the protocol section that examined whether laws and policies (e.g., civil rights, affirmative action, diversity and inclusion policies) affected the leadership practices of Black women. Adherence to the proper implementation of laws and policies are of primary concern regarding talent acquisition and management. It is understood that Black women professionals must take care to ensure that their leadership practices, with regard to the affirmative action policies and diversity initiatives that they implement, are in accordance with the laws of the United States with the purpose of creating the "critical mass" of diversity as described by the United States Supreme Court (*Grutter v. Bollinger*, 2003).

I included this section to examine whether laws (e.g., The Civil Rights Act of 1964, Title IX) and policies (e.g., affirmative action) are factors in how the women

practiced sponsorship about their leadership responsibilities such as talent acquisition and promotions.

Table 4.2 shows the respondents' answers to questions in Section II - Law and Policy about whether laws and policies directly affect the way they practice sponsorship.

Table 4.2

*The Effect of Laws and Policies on Sponsorship Practices*

| Group                   | Profession / Position                       | The Effect of Laws and Policies on Sponsorship Practices |
|-------------------------|---|--|
| I. Burgeoning Leaders   | Communications / Specialist                 | • None   |
|                         | Education / Writer                          | • None   |
| II. Established Leaders | Journalism / Editor                         | • None   |
|                         | Law Enforcement / Executive                 | • Consideration  |
|                         | Higher Education / Senior Advisor           | • Consideration  |
|                         | Higher Education / Assistant Vice President | • Consideration  |
|                         | Corporate Relations / Executive             | • Consideration  |
|                         | Health Care / Executive                     | • None   |
|                         | Arts & Culture / Executive                  | • None   |
|                         | Health Care / Senior Vice President         | • None   |
|                         | III. Transitioned Leaders                   | Higher Education / Consultant                            |
| Marketing / Consultant  |   | • None   |

For the women in Group I who do not have the power to hire or fire and are not charged with the responsibility of managing other people, the implementation of laws and policies was not in their purview, however, they are subjected to the effects of laws and policies. The Black women who held leadership roles and were established in their leadership position (i.e., Group II and Group III) stated that they adhere to the laws and policies that they are required to follow in their position and were not restricted from using their influence to sponsor other potential Black women leaders. The Black women in the study understood the significance of sponsorship as a strategic practice that can affect the progress of their careers, and their engagement in sponsorship with Black

women colleagues was based primarily on professional abilities and performance aptitudes and not exclusively on racial or gender affiliation.

The women in the study were informed about affirmative action and its significance regarding professional conduct and interpersonal interactions, and its influence in regulating workplace practices such as hiring, promoting, evaluating, and disciplining employees. However, according to one respondent whose sentiments echoed most of the respondents, affirmative action and diversity and inclusion and policies no longer hold the significance that they once held:

Back in the day, that [affirmative action] was a great tool, but you know, that tool no longer exists now. If anything you've seen how the courts have stripped it -- and colleges and institutions (Marketing / Consultant, personal communication, November 13, 2017).

Of the three categories of factors that were examined for their effects on the perspectives and practices of the Black woman professionals interviewed for this study (i.e., intersectionality and positionality, laws and policies, and ethical considerations), laws and policies were the least influential factor. Inquiries about the effects of affirmative action and diversity policies on the sponsorship practices of the Black women in this study did not yield substantial or robust data, and the responses of the interviewees showed that law and policies did not present any limitations that inhibited Black women in their sponsorship practices. The consensus of the women in the study was that they were aware that affirmative action laws are legal regulations and diversity, inclusion, and equity policies are organizational guidelines and they operate within the parameters of each when practicing sponsorship with other Black women.

## The Effects of Ethical Considerations on Sponsorship Among Black Women

The following themes emerged from the questions about the ethical considerations of the Black women professionals in my study:

### *Themes: Ethical Considerations*

- Theme #1: Underestimation of professional ability
- Theme #2: Antagonism among Black women
- Theme #3: Salary disparity
- Theme #4: Exclusion from leadership
- Theme #5: Comparisons to White counterparts

Table 4.3 shows the respondents who voiced the themes that emerged from the questions about ethical considerations regarding sponsorship.

Table 4.3

### *Ethical Considerations Themes*

| Themes  | Profession / Industry / Position   |
|---|--|
| 1. Underestimation of professional ability<br>Subthemes:<br>- Intersectionality of race and gender identities<br>- Using avoidance as a defense<br>- Racial and gender stereotypes<br>• Ethic of Care | <u>Group I</u><br>• Communications / Specialist<br>• Education / Writer<br><u>Group II</u><br>• Health Care / Executive<br>• Arts & Culture / Executive<br>• Law Enforcement / Executive<br><u>Group III</u><br>• Marketing / Consultant |
| 3. Antagonism among Black women<br>Subthemes:<br>- Crabs in a Barrel/Basket<br>• Ethic of Care  | <u>Group II</u><br>• Law Enforcement / Executive<br>• Health Care / Executive<br>• Health Care / Senior Vice President   |
| 4. Salary disparity<br>Subthemes:<br>- Comparison to White counterparts<br>• Ethic of Critique  | <u>Group II</u><br>• Journalism / Editor<br>• Higher Education / Senior Advisor<br>• Higher Education / Assistant Vice President   |
| 4. Exclusion from leadership<br>Subthemes:<br>- Diminished responsibility<br>- Personal Agency<br>• Ethic of Care   | <u>Group I</u><br>• Communications / Specialist<br><u>Group II</u><br>• Higher Education / Assistant Vice President  |
| 5. Comparisons to White counterparts:<br>Subthemes:<br>- Being more educated<br>- Earning a lower salary<br>- Holding a lower position<br>- Being treated poorly<br>• Ethic of Critique               | <u>Group II</u><br>• Higher Education / Assistant Vice President<br><u>Group III</u><br>• Marketing / Consultant   |

*Theme #1: Underestimation of Professional Ability*

Black women experience a unique type of intersectional discrimination due to their dual identities as Black people and as women (Crenshaw, 1989). When asked whether her interactions with journalists who are not Black women are different than her interactions with Black women journalists, the Journalism / Editor respondent expressed internalized insecurities related to the underestimation of professional ability based on racial stereotypes about the inferiority of Black people (Wilkins et al., 2013):

It is different. I would say that it is different. Particularly because I work for a Black newspaper, I don't know how they [White journalists] perceive a Black newspaper in the hierarchy of news and journalism. I don't know if they [White journalists] look down on it, like, "Oh, well you're a community journalist, you only report on these things." Or, if they see me as an equal. That's something that has always been in the back of my mind (Journalism / Editor, personal communication, 2018).

While the aforementioned comment by one Black woman professional alluded to underestimations of ability based on race, another Black woman spoke about her experience with underestimations of ability based on her gender:

I remember one instance when one of the power players decided that he was going to instruct me on how to read a schematic drawing. I came out of a [prestigious university] Master's program of historic preservation and planning which is in the school of architecture and design... Yet you're going to tell me how to read schematic designs? (Arts & Culture / Executive, personal communication, February 9, 2018).

The manner in which the respondent addressed the underestimation of her abilities revealed how women cope with gender bias in the workplace by outwardly seeming to ignore the micro-aggressions (i.e., slights), while internalizing the injury of the insults (Hall, Everett, & Hamilton-Mason, 2012). Two respondents expressed similar sentiments about dealing with micro-aggressions:

And, you know what I did? I did not protest. I didn't make a big deal out of it because that was one instance where I said that would be a useless exercise. So I'm going to let him go through his 15-minute presentation, I'll let him do it, and then I'll go about my business. But that taught me that as a woman, I was thought of in a certain way (Arts & Culture / Executive, personal communication, February 9, 2018).

You've got to pick your battles. Am I going to fight this today, or am I going to do this later and still get it done? (Health Care / Executive, personal communication, February 9, 2018).

One respondent's comment was particularly poignant in that it describes how an instance of underestimation that occurred in her formative years of her professional development affected her:

I remember when... I won like a scholarship... he [a White male professor] was, like, surprised, like, "Oh wow!" And, I just was kinda like: if you would look at my work and not look at just me, I think you would see that I am more than just, like, the only Black girl in the program (Education / Writer, personal communication, February 25, 2018).

Related to the underestimation of ability are assumptions based on stereotypes about Black women as conveyed by one respondent:

When it came to just being a woman of color, I noticed that, it was sort of like I was pigeonholed. I would be invited to entertain clients at a New York Knicks game, but not invited to entertain clients [for] the New York Rangers team. And, that was actually in my job description that I was supposed to entertain clients for all New York sports teams, and I was never given that opportunity. So I would be invited to the networking section, but not to actually sit through the games. I remember one time my boss said, "I don't think that would be something you would be interested in", not even knowing if I knew anything about hockey or if I was interested. Even if I didn't know anything, that would've been a learning opportunity for me. But, instead of them doing so, they just made it up in their mind that that's not something that would necessarily fit what they thought I would be interested in (Communications / Specialist, personal communication, February 27, 2018).



Perceptions about the capabilities of women as leaders may discourage some women and cause them to limit their leadership ambitions (Eagly & Karau, 2002; Hewlett & Wingfield, 2015). Underestimation is particularly damaging to Black women, a group that is vulnerable to intersectional racial discrimination and gender bias that influence others' societal perceptions and workplace interactions towards them (Crenshaw, 1989).

*Theme #2: Antagonism Among Black Women*

Antagonism among Black women professionals emerged as a theme in the interviews. The Health Care / Senior Vice President respondent stated that she “avoided working with women for a long time” because she found women to be “catty”, i.e., antagonistic, and stated “give me a man any day” to express her preference in working with men in leadership rather than with women. In her description of the preferred qualities that men have in comparison to women, the Health Care / Senior Vice President respondent described men as being decisive, less emotional, more direct in their communication and women as often acting like “crabs in a basket” (Health Care / Senior Vice President, personal communication, 2018).

The Law Enforcement / Executive respondent also mentioned the phrase “crab in a basket” to describe Black women who compete with or degrade other Black women to advance themselves and made a very poignant comment to the first question that was asked at the beginning of her interview:

It's unfortunate that you would start on a sad note. So, in this particular profession that I'm in, people are very aggressive, it's a very aggressive profession by itself. So, you have women, and we have a decent amount of women on this job, but they tend to compete a lot, very competitive. Right now, I may have maybe one or two women on this job that I would be friendly with outside, out of work. But it's unfortunate, in my

perspective, I deal with the crab in a basket mentality (Law Enforcement / Executive, personal communication, 2018).

The situation that the Law Enforcement / Executive conveyed is especially unfortunate considering the dearth of Black women in executive leadership position in law enforcement. The respondent mentioned that there was a “decent amount of women on this job”, however, she still felt a sense of isolation and frustration due to her avoidance of the aggressive women with whom she worked. The same respondent also lamented the lack of soft skills (i.e., interpersonal skills) that lead to the creation of conflicts by women who do not know how to properly relate to others in the workplace:

But, you know what I do find, quite a few of our Black female [colleagues] – “petty Betty”. They will go to other people who they outweigh, “I heard you were talking about me.” I lie to you not. And it’s so embarrassing. You’re the [high ranking official overseeing a staff of hundreds of people] plus an entire community, and you’re taking time out of your day to bring in a [subordinate] who works the street because he was talking about you. Who cares? Why would you feel like you needed to address that? We have that kind of thing that goes on. I mean, are you serious? (Law Enforcement / Executive, personal communication, October 31, 2017).

While there is a need for more Black women in positions of leadership in law enforcement, the experiences like those of the Law Enforcement / Executive hinder the formation of relationships between Black women thus thwarting the development of sponsorships.

The following comment further illustrates how antagonism between Black women presents an unnecessary and detractive challenge to the professional progression of Black women and inflicts hurt upon others in violation of the Ethic of Care (Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2016):

I was at an event, and there was a woman one the other side of a booth next to mine and she was talking about [respondent's name]. And the things that she was saying weren't very complimentary, like, "I don't know who she think she is", "She thinks she's White", "She thinks she's all that", and this whole thing. So, I'm on the other side, they don't know I'm on the other side. So, I happened to stand up, and I said, "Do you know [respondent's name]?" Now mind you, I'm in her face. She said, "No, but I've just heard..." I said "Okay, I'm [respondent's name]." And with that, I sat back down (Health Care / Executive, personal communication, February 9, 2018).

After conveying her experience with other Black women who disparaged her, the same respondent stated that she employed the strategy of developing her own support system of trusted confidants and advisors who have her best interests at heart:

So, what has happened from time to time with other Black women is they are not supportive, but what that says is you have to build your own network, and that's what I have. Those people that can get like this, up close and personal, and say, "Hey baby girl, that was not a good idea." People that can tell you the truth, but tell you the truth in love. Not to harm you, but to help you (Health Care / Executive, personal communication, February 9, 2018).

Another respondent mentioned her feelings about antagonism among Black women:

I find that I struggle when there's discord or a disconnect with other African-American women because I feel that there's a certain kindred spirit in our likeness and our ability to understand each other and relate to each other. So, when I see that discord, it's discouraging (Higher Education / Assistant Vice President, personal communication, March 25, 2018).

Some of the reasons for the antagonism that were expressed by the respondents could be addressed through mentorship (i.e., guidance) which prepares a protégé for sponsorship:

- Competitiveness due to the limited opportunities for advancement.
- Lack of management training.

- Poor interpersonal skills due to lack of familiarity with appropriate office/workplace conduct.

Among the three categories of women, antagonism was noted by women in Group Two, and not by women in Group One or Group Three, perhaps due to the women in Group One being more concerned with establishing their careers than maintaining their status. These sentiments about antagonism among Black women echo common gender stereotypes that have persistently plagued women in general and impeded their progress in the workplace (Heilman & Parks-Stamm, 2007). As this is a qualitative study and the women spoke about their lived experiences, it is difficult to refute the validity of their claims that are based on their own lives; however, it is possible to see how stereotypes are perpetuated by generalizing personal experiences and using them as the basis for one's actions and decision-making.

### *Theme #3: Salary Disparity*

The issue of salary disparity is of serious concern for Black women, many of whom earn significantly less than their Black male, White female, and White male counterparts in similar positions. The Journalism / Editor respondent in my study (personal communication, August 20, 2017) theorized that working women may not be able to retire at the average retirement age because, “they can't afford to because they earn less money over their lifetimes”, and, indeed, the facts support her theory.

According to a report for the Institute for Women's Policy Research women are the sole or co-breadwinner in half of America families with children; and women earn considerably less than men in nearly every single occupation for which there is sufficient earnings data for both men and women to calculate an earnings ratio (Hartmann, 2018).

In 2016, female, full-time, year-round workers made 80.5 cents for every dollar earned by men, which is a gender wage gap of 20% (Hartmann, 2018). Black women have even direr wage-earning potential in that they earn only 64 cents to every dollar earned by comparable White men (DuMonthier, Childers, & Milli, 2016). The reality of the lived experience of the wage gap was expressed by the Higher Education / Senior Advisor respondent:

So, if there is a White man making a decision about pay, he may favor someone who is familiar and pay them more with the assumption that they need it more. A man who has [the power to determine a salary for] a Black female, a single Black female with no biological children, may be a White male with a wife who does not work, who has three small children at home. The inclination for a White man, in my experience, has been to pay him [a male employee] more because the conclusion is he needs it more. So, while he [a male employee] may in fact need it more, the inequity in the pay shouldn't be justified by what is familiar to you [the person with salary decision power]. And this is a big problem, it's not a problem with just Black females, it's a problem with all females. So, if you're a White man who has raised your children, you have a great lifestyle for them, your wife has not worked or has had the freedom to work in a range of opportunities where she can make a little money, a lot of money, or no money, you see this White man who is reporting to you as yourself. He is familiar to you. And you draw a conclusion that he needs money more so than a single African-American woman who doesn't have the responsibility of a spouse, or children, particularly children who have to be educated. And so, you pay him more. That has been my experience more often than not (Higher Education / Senior Advisor, personal communication, November 20, 2017).

The comments by the Higher Education / Senior Advisor correlate to the statistical realities of Black women in the workplace. According to a report commissioned by the Black Women's Roundtable, more than 6 out of 10 Black women are in the workforce, however, the median annual earnings for Black women declined by 5% between 2004 and 2014, and Black women who worked full-time and year-round had median annual earnings that were 64.6% of that of white men in 2014 (DeWeever, 2015).

The theme of salary disparity and the comments by the Black women in this study connect to the literature regarding the effects of patriarchy on progression and equity in the workplace. As leadership is often seen as masculine and has been traditionally been exercised predominantly by White men, policies and practices in the workplace have been primarily developed by them for their interests and to their advantage (Gündemir et al., 2014; Koenig et al., 2011). The implementation of diversity and inclusion management practices and affirmative action policies such as wage equity for marginalized groups (i.e., minorities and women) compete with the employment security and power of the dominant group (i.e., White males) (Shteynberg, Leslie, Knight & Mayer, 2011; Shelton, 2013). Black women are in a particularly challenging position because they have to contend with compounded social stigmas imposed upon their discrete and intersectional racial and gender identities as minorities, as Black people, as women, and as Black women (Greenman & Xie, 2008). Black women have the challenge of demonstrating that contrary to the negative myths about Black people being obtuse and shiftless, they are intelligent and industrious; contrary to the negative myths about women, they are capable of performing as proficiently as their male colleagues at a minimum and surpassing them, in some instances; and contrary to the negative myths about Black women being overly aggressive and unable to comply with rules and standards, they are professional and able to excel within organizational cultures and structures. Despite these facts, Black women are being compensated with wages that are not commensurate with their education and abilities and are not equitable to the earnings of their White female and male colleagues, and their Black colleagues.

Perceptions about Black women are important with regard to salary disparity and its relation to sponsorship. In industries where White professionals predominate in positions of leadership, the opportunities for Black women to receive career advancement assistance (i.e., sponsorship) by White professionals (both men and women) requires White professionals to have positive perceptions about Black women that are contrary to the negative myths in order for Black women to be considered as meriting salaries that are equitable to men's, worthy of sponsorship, and qualified to succeed White professionals in positions of leadership. Taking these factors into consideration, it would behoove Black women, with their commonalities of culture and cause, to intentionally and avidly practice sponsorship among each other in addition to collaborating with established White professionals.

*Theme #4: Exclusion from Leadership*

A report conducted by the Center for Talent Innovation (2015) found that Black women were ready to take on leadership roles; however, they were not being presented with opportunities to realize their ambitions. One respondent recounted her observations about exclusion from leadership when she worked in the sports news industry:

Sports is a White male dominated world, period. Even female sports anchors, whether they're White or Black, they don't get any respect; they're given less airtime, they give them fluff stories. Even female sports newscasters, you'll see that they're given more entertainment, gossip sector of sports news versus reporting on stats or reporting on anything that has to do with a shift in teams or specific players, so I noticed that a lot in the workplace (Communications / Specialist, personal communication, February 27, 2018).

Leadership is often described in passive terms as something that is not intrinsic and is something to be given, which is true in hierarchical organizations (Nanton, 2015).

In contrast, one respondent spoke about her possession of confidence and personal agency as a leader that transcends her organizational position and stature, and about assuming her own power rather than waiting for it to be bestowed upon her by others, thereby, thwarting underestimation according to the standards of others imposed upon her:

It [gender] has affected me. I always for years presented myself in a very confident way. And, I have always felt a level of power. Just my own personal power. It has allowed me to understand sometimes when people have struggled to have me and people who look like me included in things, whether it's included in conversation, included in decision-making, or included in consideration for certain things. So, I am always aware of who I am in terms of my race, my background. And I'm always mindful of being a woman in the room, or in the setting because, oftentimes, I might be the only woman in the room or one of two or three. So, what I can tell you is that I've never felt less than, I've never felt as though I could not sit at the table. I've never felt that I needed to take second-place to a man being in a particular setting or place. I've just not had a mindset like that. I haven't had a mindset like that in a very long time, and it's been so long I can't remember what it was like before (Corporate Relations / Executive, personal communication, February 14, 2018).

The Corporate Relations / Executive's way of speaking about leadership was distinct from the other respondents' comments about the subject and was remarkably and unapologetically agentic (Livingston, Rosette, & Washington, 2012). The other Black women leaders spoke about their efforts to wield their influence from a subordinate position saddled with the biases ascribed to Black people and to women; whereas, the Corporate Relations / Executive spoke about being aware of perceptions about her based on her race and gender but operating within her own context of self-assuredness that eschewed societal mythos, which is worthy of note and emulation.



*Theme #5: Comparisons to White Counterparts*

The theme of comparisons to White counterparts was expressed from different perspectives by the Black women in his study. The following respondents expressed the pressure of being standard bearers for their entire intersectional racial and gender affinity group, i.e., Black women, and for their entire racial affinity group, i.e., Black people:

Here's the other part that's odd in that: it's incidental that I happen to be African-American, I can do the job, I've got the skills. So, if you didn't even know that I was African-American, when you look at her on paper, hey, boy, she's sharp! But I'm proud to be an African-American. So, let's not get that wrong, okay? I think we have to be clear as Black women who we are and more importantly, whose we are and what we represent. And know that it isn't just about us. 'Cause you know, it has not changed – we make a mistake, we mess it up for everybody else. So, we still carry that weight on our shoulders. We always have to do well -- that excellence is everything because mediocrity is nothing. We can't afford to be mediocre! C'mon, you know I'm right! We can't! Even if we wanted to! If I wanted to be lazy and shiftless, I can't! Because we don't get second chances (Health Care / Executive, personal communication, February 9, 2018).

The thing that is interesting about the way that Black people are treated is the bad behavior of Black people is attributed to the whole race. So you're constantly in the struggle to reverse that (Higher Education / Senior Advisor, personal communication, November 20, 2017).

According to Martin (1994):

White women have ample contact with White men and the potential for increased power by association with one of them. But they have limited their influence by internalizing an image of helplessness and allowing themselves to be "put on a pedestal." In contrast, due to racism, black women have experienced far less protection and a far greater element of fear based on white hostility, physical separation, and intimidation.

An illustration of this is seen in a respondent's account of the differences between how she was treated in comparison to her White female colleagues:

Even as far as discipline, there were a lot of issues that took place [during a change in leadership] and my boss was sort of on the chopping block at that time. And, the way that he dealt with me versus the way that he dealt with my White counterpart was a lot different. I would always be kind of,

like, snitched on. Like, he never had one-on-one meetings with me even though that was part of the agreement from when I signed on to work for him. We were supposed to have weekly team meetings and then weekly individual meetings with people within the team and with senior leadership, just to kind of check in to see how we were doing and figure out how to move forward... In all of our meetings, he never mentioned anything as far as work performances that he thought I could improve on, he would send me directly to HR. But he had those individual meetings, those individual conversations, with my White counterparts whether they were male or female. So, I didn't know what he thought would happen in those meetings, I don't know if he considered me to be combative, or if he was just afraid because he had never necessarily dealt [with a person of color]. The person that was in that position before me, was a white female and I had conversations with her about her experience, and she said he would, like, rip into her during their meetings even if she was doing negative but it would be more like, you know, "I'm doing this for you. I want you to be here. I'm coaching you. This is a learning experience for you." But, I never got that. He never did any of that. He never gave me any feedback whether it was negative or positive, he just sent me directly to HR (Communications / Specialist, personal communication, February 27, 2018).

The aforementioned comment illustrates an overlap of multiple themes, i.e., comparisons to white counterparts, angry Black woman, being the only Black woman and demonstrates how the intersectionality of race and gender is connected to the intersectionality of stereotypes about Black women which compound and exacerbate the challenges that Black women experience in the workplace.

### Concentric Racial and Gender Positionality of Identity

#### *Development of Concentric Positionality of Identity Theory*

Positionality Theory is based on the concept that people's behavior and experiences are relative to their position in a situation (Shapiro & Gross, 2008). My Concentric Theory is that the way that a person identifies with a group, i.e., their interest in the group (i.e., affinity) and their association and consideration of themselves as being a part of an in-group (i.e., affiliation) is significant to providing insight about how a

person behaves towards people from groups with which they identify and do not identify. Understanding how the respondents in my study prioritize their affinity and affiliation to Black women helped me understand whether, why, and how each respondent was engaged in sponsoring other Black women and helping them advance into positions of leadership.

In this study, I wanted to examine whether the Black women in my study would consider the underrepresentation of Black women in positions of organizational leadership to be a problem they could help to remediate if they had an affinity for and affiliation with Black women (i.e., identity), and they felt close to the problem (i.e., positionality). My reasoning was that Black women who had an affinity for and association with Black women and felt a close positionality to the problem of the underrepresentation of Black women in positions of leadership would most likely want to be sponsored by other Black women (i.e., subordinate perception; passive position), or be more likely to sponsor other Black women (i.e., leadership perspective; active position).

I developed and used my Concentric Positionality of Identity Theory to assist in my interpretation of the respondents' comments in relation to Sub-question #1 of my Central Research Question:

- Central Research Question: Do Black women leverage their leadership as sponsors within organizations to increase the number of Black women leaders?
  - Sub-question #1: Does the positionality of identity and the intersectionality of race and gender affect sponsorships among Black women?

The data collected for this study hinged on the women's perceptions about my research problem, i.e., the lack of Black women in positions of organizational leadership;

and whether the women perceived the lack of Black women in positions of organizational leadership as a problem. Therefore, in my protocol, I asked the respondents the following question to determine their perception of the research problem:

- Question #4 (Ethical Considerations): Do you consider the dearth of Black women in leadership positions to be a problem within your organization, in society (i.e., the workforce), for you (e.g., moral support, professional assistance and advancement, etc.)? If yes, why and in what ways? If no, why not?

Group affinity (i.e., interest in a group) and in-group affiliation (i.e., association with a group) are important regarding identity, and the premise on which I applied my Concentric Positionality of Identity Theory in this study was that the women's perception of my research problem would be reflected by their concentricity profile which would reveal their group affinities and in-group affiliations. Therefore, to understand the level of in-group affinity that the Black women in this study had with other Black women (i.e., Sub-question #1), I developed my concentric positionality of identity theory and created an instrument to determine the concentricity of the women's in-group affiliations. The concentricity diagram instrument is a way to visually illustrate the connection between the respondents and their affinity towards and affiliation with Black women. The concentricity diagram instrument listed four different and intersectional racial and gender in-groups (Figure 4.1) and each woman was asked to rank her affinity to each in-group according to priority order.

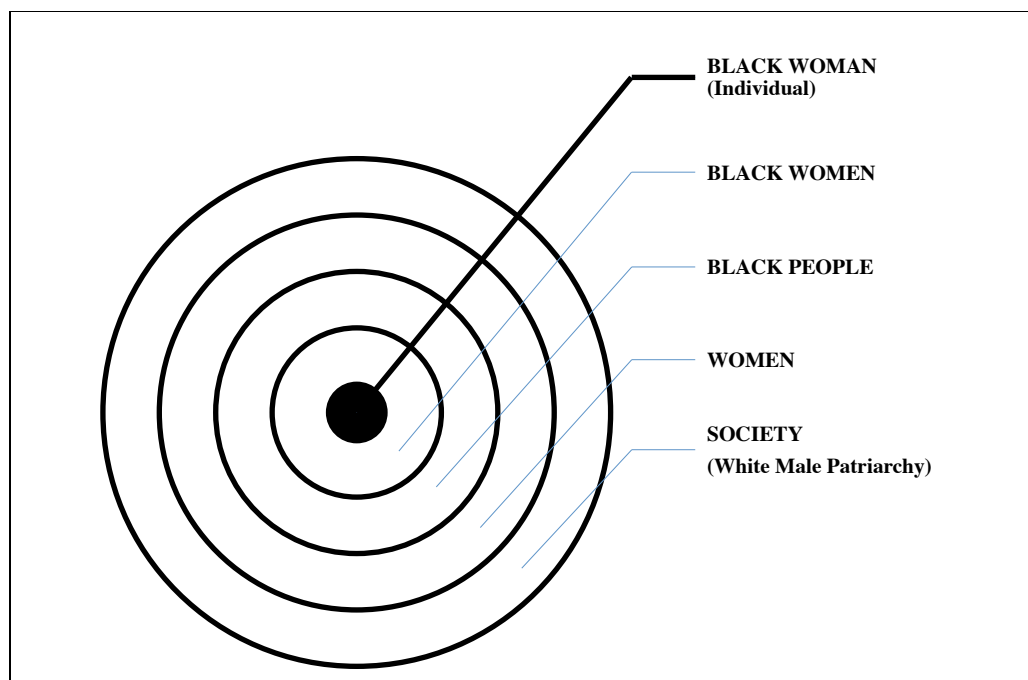


Figure 4.1: Concentric Racial and Gender Positionality of Identity Instrument for Black Women - Affiliations and Affinity Groups

Table 4.4 lists the affinity groups and the concentricity ranking scale that the women used to map their concentricity profile.

Table 4.4

*Concentricity Ranking Scale*

| Ranking | Affinity Groups<br><i>Black Women, Black People, Women, Society</i> |
|---------|---|
| 1       | First Affinity Group  |
| 2       | Second Affinity Group   |
| 3       | Third Affinity Group  |
| 4       | Fourth Affinity Group   |

Table 4.5 shows the concentricity rankings (i.e., profiles) of the Black women respondents in this study and their response to the Central Research Question.

Table 4.5

*Profiles of Concentric Racial and Gender Positionality of Identity*

| Group                     | Industry / Position                         | Concentricity Profile  | Response to Question #4 |
|---------------------------|---|--|-------------------------|
| I. Burgeoning Leaders     | Communications / Specialist                 | 1. <b>Black women</b><br>2. Black people<br>3. Women<br>4. Society | Yes                     |
|                           | Education / Writer                          | 1. <b>Black women</b><br>2. Black people<br>3. Women<br>4. Society | Yes                     |
| II. Established Leaders   | Journalism / Editor                         | 1. <b>Black women</b><br>2. Black people<br>3. Women<br>4. Society | Yes                     |
|                           | Law Enforcement / Executive                 | 1. <b>Black women</b><br>2. Black people<br>3. Women<br>4. Society | Yes                     |
|                           | Higher Education / Senior Advisor           | 1. Black people<br>2. <b>Black women</b><br>3. Women<br>4. Society | Yes                     |
|                           | Higher Education / Assistant Vice President | 1. <b>Black women</b><br>2. Black people<br>3. Women<br>4. Society | Yes                     |
|                           | Corporate Relations / Executive             | 1. <b>Black women</b><br>2. Black people<br>3. Women<br>4. Society | Yes                     |
|                           | Health Care / Executive                     | 1. <b>Black women</b><br>2. Black people<br>3. Women<br>4. Society | Yes                     |
|                           | Arts & Culture / Executive                  | 1. <b>Black women</b><br>2. Black people<br>3. Women<br>4. Society | Yes                     |
|                           | Health Care / Senior Vice President         | 1. Black people<br>2. <b>Black women</b><br>3. Women<br>4. Society | Yes                     |
| III. Transitioned Leaders | Higher Education / Consultant               | 1. Black people<br>2. <b>Black women</b><br>3. Women<br>4. Society | Yes                     |
|                           | Marketing / Consultant                      | 1. Black people<br>2. Society<br>3. <b>Black women</b><br>4. Women | Yes                     |

Although the women were in consensus that there is a dearth of Black women in positions of organizational leadership in general, I will note some qualifiers to the women's responses:

- Two respondents who worked for predominantly Black institutions that were led by Black women (Higher Education/Assistant Vice President, Arts & Culture / Executive) did not see the lack of Black women leaders as a problem in their organizations.
- One respondent who works for a Black male led organization did not think there was a lack of Black women at her organization.
- One respondent (Law Enforcement / Executive) did not see the lack of Black women leaders in her organization and cited a legal mandate that requires the workforce of her organization be proportionately reflective of the community that it serves.
- Two respondents (Corporate Relations / Executive, Health Care Executive) mentioned that they did not view the dearth of Black women leaders as a problem in their workplaces because of the emphasis on diversity and inclusion in their organizations.

*Implementation of the Concentric Racial and Gender Positionality of Identity Instrument*

For some of the respondents, I requested that they map their instrument before the interview to determine if I could predict comments that would align with the concentricity profile as I interviewed them. For others, I requested that they complete the form after the interview and then I reviewed their responses and identified the comments that corresponded to their concentricity profile. I anticipated that most of the respondents would have a priority order profile of: 1. Black women, 2. Black people, 3. Women, and 4. Society, and 8 out of the 12 respondents had that profile. Of the respondents that did not have that profile, two both worked in higher education and shared a profile of: 1. Black people 2., Black women, 3. Women, 4. Society and both spoke about fostering diversity and inclusion at their respective institutions. The Marketing / Consultant spoke

of being raised in foreign countries and being exposed to living in different cultures as a youth and having a more cosmopolitan worldview and her concentricity profile matched that part of her narrative. The Healthcare/Senior Vice President also prioritized Black women as her second affinity group, which was aligned with her interview comments.

### *Concentric Positionality of Identity Theory in Relation to Black Women*

Concentricity, as it relates to Black women, provided a context for understanding Black women's relationships among each other and in society, which assisted me in understanding their perceptions on their positionality to the problem of the underrepresentation of Black women in leadership. When I compared the women's concentricity rankings to their interview responses, I found that that the concentricity rankings often, but not always, reflected the verbal testimonies of the women's views on their affinity to the various in groups. Two examples of how the interview responses compared with the concentricity profiles can be seen below in Table 4.6:

Table 4.6

#### *Concentricity Profile and Interview Comparison*

| Respondent                          | Comment  | Concentricity Profile  |
|-------------------------------------|--|--|
| Health Care / Executive             | "I advocate for women, but <b>I also advocate especially for Black women.</b> Women have to advocate for women" (Health Care / Executive, personal communication, February 9, 2018).                   | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>1. Black women</b></li> <li>2. Black people</li> <li>3. Women</li> <li>4. Society</li> </ol> |
| Health Care / Senior Vice President | Described women as sometimes being "catty" and acting like "crabs in a barrel" and expressed her preference for male leadership (Health Care / Vice President, personal communication, April 6, 2018). | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Black people</li> <li><b>2. Black women</b></li> <li>3. Women</li> <li>4. Society</li> </ol> |



The application of my Concentric Positionality of Identity Theory and the mapping of the Concentric Racial and Gender Positionality of Identity Instrument were useful resources in examining the perspectives of the respondents, however, I found that although the concentricity profiles were not always completely predictive of the respondents' views about their in-group affinities as conveyed in their interviews, the profiles did provide additional insight about the respondents' views on their identity and their place in the world.

#### Experience and Practice of Sponsorship Among Black Women Professionals

Stewart (1831) believed that Black women could increase their chances of success if they transformed the paradigm by desisting waiting for and relying on altruism from allies of a White male-centered patriarchy and empowered each other in solidarity, i.e., sponsorship. The concept of sponsorship among Black women was an implied theme in the writings of Maria W. Stewart, such as in this passage from one of Stewart's essays:

I have asked several individuals of my sex, who transact business for themselves, if providing our girls were to give them the most satisfactory references, they would not be willing to grant them an equal opportunity with others? Their reply has been--for their own part, they had no objection; but as it was not the custom, were they to take them into their employ, they would be in danger of losing the public patronage. And such is the powerful force of prejudice (Stewart & Richardson, 1987).

One respondent's comment illustrated what sponsorship looks like in thought and practice when a sponsor lifts another person in order to lift themselves:

I'm going to do everything I can for those people who are marginalized and on the fringe and don't have and don't have an opportunity and I've been consistently doing that... You ask yourself, "What I want to be when I grow up? Where do I want to see myself? How do I lift as I climb?" As I'm climbing, I'm pulling other people with me. And I can tell you this:

they don't know [about] half of the people I brought into [company name], but it's okay (Health Care / Executive, personal communication, February 9, 2018).

According to the responses from the Black women whom I interviewed, the concept of generalized mentorship is well understood and practiced; however, the concept of sponsorship is not as clearly understood or practiced as often as mentorship. During the interviews, I had to explain the differences between mentorship and sponsorship to provide clarity about the differences between the two leadership strategies as evidenced in the comment by the respondent. The confusion between sponsorship from mentorship led me to ask the following questions to distinguish between the two practices and clarify whether the respondents' experiences with career assistance from Black women were sponsorship or mentorship:

- Have you ever been helped in your career by a Black woman professional?
  - Specific: within your organization?
  - General: during your career?
- How did the Black woman professional help you advance in your career?

One of my findings that I discovered during the interviews is that mentorship is very prevalent among the Black women professionals in my study. One respondent expressed her desire to help other Black women in her organization by stating, "I'm on some Ghandi stuff, be the change you want to see in the world" (Law Enforcement / Executive, personal communication, October 31, 2017). However, that respondent admitted that although she had mentored other women, she had not sponsored another woman as per Hewlett's (2013) definition of sponsorship used in this study, which is assisting in the promotion of someone to advance oneself. The Law Enforcement /

Executive respondent stated in her interview that she had not identified any Black women who she thought she could sponsor (personal communication, October 31, 2017).

*Sponsorship Among Black Women: Experience and Practice*

It is important to be clear about how sponsorship is experienced and how it is practiced from both the passive and active viewpoints, particularly since the respondents were at different points in their careers with Groups II and III having practiced sponsorship more than Group I. The terms “perception” and “perspective” have nuanced differences with perception describing an inward and receptive view, and perspective denoting an outward and giving view. Therefore, I included the following questions that elicited responses from these viewpoints in Section #3 - Ethical Considerations:

- Subordinate Perception (passive): Provided insight about how the women experienced sponsorship; i.e., how the women were sponsored.

Questions:

1. Who are some of the most effective leaders who have advanced your career?
  2. What did those leaders do to help you advance in your career?
  3. How do you feel about the number of Black women in positions of leadership in your organization? With regard to diversity, are there too few, enough or a proportionate amount, or too many Black women?
  4. Have you ever been helped in your career by a Black woman professional:
    - i. Specific: within your organization?
    - ii. General: during your career?
  5. How did the Black woman professional help you advance in your career?
- Leadership Perspective (active): Provided information about how the women practiced sponsoring others; i.e., how the women sponsored other women.

Questions:

1. Do you believe it is important to help other Black women advance into leadership positions? Why?
2. Is there opportunity for you to help advance Black women subordinates within your organization? Your profession?
3. Are you in a position to help other Black women advance in your organization? Do you have status or clout within your organization?
4. Have you ever sponsored another Black woman to help advance her to a position of leadership within your organization?
5. What leadership practices have you found to be most effective in helping other Black women advance to leadership positions within your organization?

A Subordinate Perception of sponsorship (i.e., being led by others) was expressed in the following comment:

So, every job that I've had, I've always gravitated to whoever was my Black female counterpart. [One Black female counterpart] noticed how I was being treated [in the workplace]... and she helped me with applying for jobs, she let me know that at that point in my career with everything that I was contributing, that I shouldn't continue to apply to assistantships, I should be looking for mid- positions, coordinator positions, or even assistant manager positions (Communications/Specialist, personal communication, February 27, 2018).

An example of the Leadership Perspective of sponsorship (i.e., leading others) can be seen in the following comment:

When you talk about sponsorship, I don't mean just informally mentoring. I'm talking about folks -- that their name is on your lips. So, again, through that whole process [of sponsoring a protégé], we worked together and when there was an opportunity for me to say, she's your person, that's the person, she's got the skills set. Bam! Bam! Bam! So, I became her sponsor, and still am (Health Care / Executive, personal communication, February 9, 2018).

The following data in Table 4.7 show the findings of my inquiries about the women's experiences with and practice of sponsorship among Black women.

Table 4.7

*Experience and Practice of Sponsorship Among Black Women*

| Group                     | Profession / Position                       | Experienced or Practiced Sponsorship Among Black Women |
|---------------------------|---|--|
| I. Burgeoning Leaders     | Communications / Specialist                 | Neither  |
|                           | Education / Writer                          | Neither  |
| II. Established Leaders   | Journalism / Editor                         | Neither  |
|                           | Law Enforcement / Executive                 | Neither  |
|                           | Higher Education / Senior Advisor           | Experienced and Practiced                              |
|                           | Higher Education / Assistant Vice President | Experienced and Practiced                              |
|                           | Corporate Relations / Executive             | Experienced and Practiced                              |
|                           | Health Care / Executive                     | Experienced and Practiced                              |
| III. Transitioned Leaders | Arts & Culture / Executive                  | Experienced and Practiced                              |
|                           | Health Care / Senior Vice President         | Experienced  |
|                           | Higher Education / Consultant               | Experienced and Practiced                              |
|                           | Marketing / Consultant                      | Experienced and Practiced                              |

For Black women leaders who sponsor other Black women, confidence in leadership and an understanding of the reasons for the need to increase the number of Black women leaders are particularly useful and necessary to address accusations of bias, preference, and impropriety regarding their sponsorship of Black women. In her comments about her practice of sponsorship, the Health Care / Executive described how she encourages other Black women to be confident and some of the ways that she supports their professional advancement:

I get excited when I see us [Black women] do well. When I see African-American women doing great stuff, I get excited. Usually I drop them a note and say, "Hey, you go for it", "You go girl!" It's never that, oh, "Who do you think you are?" Or, better yet, I'm not going to help you, or I'm not going to be a part of that." I don't have time for that. You know what, we don't have time for that. 'Cause there's still too few of us... So again, so that's why it's important that when you see in opportunity you, you pick up the phone, say, "There's a position that's available. You need to go look into it." Okay? Or, become the on-ramp (Health Care / Executive, personal communication, February 9, 2018).

None of the Black women in the study expressed a reluctance to sponsor other Black women and some of the established Black women leaders cited the necessity for diversity in representation, perspectives, and voices; the lack of Black women in their professions and workplaces; as well as their personal experiences of often being the only Black women in their organizations as the rationales for their advocacy of sponsorship among Black women.

*Sponsorship Experiences Among Black Women Professionals*

Table 4.8 shows which respondents indicated that they have not experienced or practiced sponsorship.

Table 4.8

*Experiences with Sponsorship*

|                                    |  |
|------------------------------------|--|
| I. Has not experienced sponsorship | <u>Group I</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Communications / Specialist</li> <li>• Education / Writer</li> </ul> <u>Group II</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Journalism / Editor</li> <li>• Law Enforcement / Executive</li> </ul>  |
| II. Has not practiced sponsorship  | <u>Group I</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Communications / Specialist</li> <li>• Education / Writer</li> </ul> <u>Group II</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Journalism / Editor</li> <li>• Law Enforcement / Executive</li> <li>• Health Care / Senior Vice President</li> </ul> |

The data showed that among the Black women in my study, sponsorship was not experienced by 4 of the 12 respondents. Almost half of the respondents stated that they had not sponsored another Black woman professional. Referring to the respondents by their industry position was intentional to show that the women's positions in their organization or profession did not necessarily correlate to level of influence that would be

expected. The findings show that although three of the women held influential leadership positions, they were not actively leveraging the influence of their positions by practicing sponsorship.

Of the six respondents who actively practice sponsorship, one respondent spoke of sponsoring other Black women as a duty to which she was bound:

Let me put it this way: as a result of the fact that I've been blessed and had the opportunity, then I feel, I feel a sense of obligation, or better yet, duty. It's not do I, but it's when do I do it. Okay? When do I make sure that I'm pulling my little sister up and through? (Health Care / Executive, personal communication, February 9, 2018).

I don't mean to be hokey on this, but I really am about if I can help somebody as that as along. That's at the heart of who [I am]... If I can help, I'm going to do that. Let me put it this way: I will not hinder. If anything, if it's stupid, I'll just that back, and say you know what, I can't be a part of this. Alright? But I won't hinder you (Health Care / Executive, personal communication, February 9, 2018).

The in-group affinity and "duty bound" mentality of Black women regarding sponsorship is a much stronger compulsion than practicing sponsorship in response to policies and to be in compliance with laws. As previously stated, sharing cultural affinities (i.e., Blackness and Black womanhood) and a having a common cause (i.e., the advancement of Black women into positions of leadership) is germane to Black women, and while White professional allies are necessary and helpful for the advancement of Black women, it is a deficit to the detriment of Black women when White professionals lack or disregard cultural understanding about the lived experiences of Black women professionals.

*Sponsors and Influencers*

Table 4.9 shows the sponsors and influencers who have helped them advance in their careers.

Table 4.9

*Sponsors and Professional Influencers*

| Group                     | Profession / Industry                       | Professional Influencers  |
|---------------------------|---|---|
| I. Burgeoning Leaders     | Communications / Specialist                 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• White male</li> <li>• <b>Black female</b></li> <li>• Black male</li> <li>• Black male</li> </ul> |
|                           | Education / Writer                          | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• White male</li> <li>• White male</li> <li>• <b>Black female</b></li> <li>• Black male</li> </ul> |
| II. Established Leaders   | Journalism / Editor                         | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Black male</li> </ul>  |
|                           | Law Enforcement / Executive                 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• White male</li> <li>• Black male</li> </ul>  |
|                           | Higher Education / Senior Advisor           | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Black female</b></li> <li>• Black male</li> <li>• White male</li> </ul>                       |
|                           | Higher Education / Assistant Vice President | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Black female</b></li> <li>• White male</li> <li>• Black male</li> </ul>                       |
|                           | Corporate Relations / Executive             | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Black female</b></li> <li>• Black male</li> <li>• White female</li> </ul>                     |
|                           | Health Care / Executive                     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Black female</b></li> <li>• White male</li> </ul>   |
|                           | Arts & Culture / Executive                  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Black male</li> <li>• <b>Black female</b></li> </ul>   |
|                           | Health Care / Senior Vice President         | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Black female</b></li> </ul>   |
| III. Transitioned Leaders | Higher Education / Consultant               | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Black female</b></li> <li>• Black male</li> </ul>   |
|                           | Marketing / Consultant                      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Black female</b></li> <li>• White female</li> <li>• Black male</li> </ul>                     |



According to the data in Table 4.9, only two respondents out of the twelve could not cite the influence of a Black female leader in their careers: Journalism / Editor and Law Enforcement / Executive. One of the reasons for this could be the dearth of Black women in each of these professions. According to the American Society of News Editors 2016 census, minorities comprised approximately 17% of employees at daily newspapers and 23% at online-only sites, and Black women represent only 2.5% of the overall journalism workforce (Maksl & Liu, 2016; York, 2017). The Bureau of Justice Statistics (2015) reported that Black officers accounted for 12% of local police officers in 2013, with the number of Black women comprising approximately 5% of the overall police force in the U.S.

With a lack of Black female leadership in certain professions, Black women have had to find other examples of sponsorship. One respondent mentioned how she observed sponsorship in action through her own father, a Black man, who inspired her and shaped her views on sponsorship and its practice:

I look at my dad, and he was very mindful of who else can do what I do. He was the first Black administrator at [a higher education institution], and there are people who are still at [a higher education institution] and a couple who are not, who said I was at [a higher education institution] because your dad made sure I was there. So, that for me models the behavior of, “Okay, I’ve got my foot in the door, it is my job to kick it open so some other people can come behind me, and I need to reach back and pull them over or through” (Arts & Culture / Executive, personal communication, February 10, 2018).

While sponsorship seems to be one effective tactic for fostering the advancement of Black women and it is being practiced among Black women, a question still lingers: why haven’t Black women professionals made more progress?

*Historical and Temporal Contexts of  
Sponsorship Among Black Women Professionals*

*Historical Context: Timeline*

The data from my research revealed an odd misalignment between the type of success that the Black women in my study should be experiencing and the realities that they experienced in the workplace. The responses of the women led me to question the possible reasons why there was misalignment between the predictive outcomes and their actual lived experiences. Taking into consideration the historical underpinning of the published works of Maria W. Stewart that I have used as part of the conceptual framework for my research, I referred to Maria Stewart who served as an historical lodestar for my discussion about the historical and temporal factors that affect the phenomenon of sponsorship among Black women professionals.

To understand the temporal factors that may affect sponsorship among Black women, I conducted an analysis of historic milestone events related to the professional progression of women in the workforce (National Women's History Project, 2018), and a chronologic analysis of the sequence in which the events happened within the context of the women's lives and in relation to their ages which can be seen in Table 4.10.

Table 4.10

*Historical and Temporal Timelines of Respondents*

| Respondent                                  | Age | Birth Year / (Historic Milestone)  | Number of Generations and (Years) from the End of Legal Enslavement in 1865 |
|---|-----|--|---|
| Communications / Specialist                 | 27  | <b>1991</b> (1993: Family and Medical Leave Act became law.)   | 4.2<br>(126 yrs.)   |
| Education / Writer                          | 31  | <b>1987</b> (1987: Johnson v. Santa Clara County - The U.S. Supreme Court rules it permissible to consider sex and race in employment decisions even when there is no proven history of discrimination but evidence of imbalance exists in the number of women or minorities holding the position in question.)  | 4<br>(122 yrs.)   |
| Health Care / Senior Vice President         | 46  | <b>1972</b> (1972: Title IX prohibits sex discrimination in all aspects of education programs that receive federal support.)   | 3.5<br>(107 yrs.)   |
| Journalism / Editor                         | 47  | <b>1970</b> (1971: <i>Phillips v. Martin Marietta Corporation</i> - The U.S. Supreme Court outlaws the practice of private employers refusing to hire women with pre-school children.)   | 3.5<br>(105 yrs.)   |
| Law Enforcement / Executive                 | 53  | <b>1965</b> (1965: <i>Weeks v. Southern Bell</i> - a major triumph in the fight against restrictive labor laws and company regulations on the hours and conditions of women's work, opened many previously male-only jobs to women.) (1965: Affirmative Action Executive Order 11246 was enacted to prohibit federal contractors from discriminating on the basis of race, color, religion, sex, or national origin in their hiring and employment practices.) | 3.3<br>(100 yrs.)   |
| Higher Education / Senior Advisor           | 55  | <b>1963</b> (1963: The Equal Pay Act promises equitable wages for the same work regardless of the race, color, religion, national origin, or sex of the worker.) (1964: U.S. Civil Rights Act of 1964 became law.)   | 3.2<br>(98 yrs.)  |
| Higher Education / Assistant Vice President | 56  | <b>1962</b> (1961: Executive Order 10925 ensured that applicants and employees are not discriminated against for their race, creed, color, or national origin.)  | 3.2<br>(97 yrs.)  |
| Arts & Culture / Executive                  | 58  | <b>1960</b> (1960: Ruby Bridges integrated an all-white elementary school in New Orleans, LA.)   | 3.1<br>(95 yrs.)  |
| Corporate Relations/ Executive              | 58  | <b>1960</b> (1961: Executive Order by John F. Kennedy promoted "affirmative action" to abolish racial biases in hiring on projects where federal funds were involved.)   | 3.1<br>(95 yrs.)  |
| Health Care / Executive                     | 67  | <b>1951</b> (1952: Autherine Juanita Lucy and Pollie Myers are accepted into the University of Alabama. Their acceptances were rescinded when it was discovered they were not white. It took three years to resolve in court.)   | 2.8<br>(86 yrs.)  |
| Marketing / Executive                       | 65  | <b>1953</b> (1955: Rosa Parks is arrested in Montgomery, AL, sparking the U.S. civil rights movement.)   | 2.9<br>(88 yrs.)  |
| Higher Education / Executive                | 67  | <b>1951</b> (1951: Linda Brown's father sues the Topeka, Kansas, school board This becomes the <i>Brown v. Board of Education</i> landmark civil rights case.)   | 2.8<br>(86 yrs.)  |

### *Historical Factors*

The data in Table 4.10 show that in relation to the end of legal enslavement, the women are not very far removed from the period of enslavement in the United States. Layered into the analysis are the milestone events that show the barriers that Black women have had to overcome over the last 153 years (five generations). Practice enhances proficiency, and according to the data and the literature, Black women have not been socially enfranchised long enough to create a critical mass of Black women in organizational leadership positions.

### *Temporal Factors*

As seen in Table 4.10, the Corporate Relations/Healthcare/Executive who remained in her position at age 67, which is past the average retirement age of 62 years, illustrates the reality of the statistics according to the U.S. Census Bureau which state that 43.0% of women in the workforce continue to work beyond the average retirement age of 62 years, with most of those women being between the ages of 65 years and 69 years (Holder & Clark, 2006). According to a report by Butrica, Smith, and Steuerle (2006) for the Urban Institute, people may work beyond retirement age for the following reasons:

- High cost of health insurance & decline in employer retiree health benefits.
- More years will be spent in retirement as life expectancy increases.
- Lower rates of traditional defined-benefit pension coverage.
- Desire to accumulate more Social Security or other retirement savings wealth.
- Improve emotional well-being and physical health by remaining active.
- Work promotes social integration and social support.

The Black women in my study who attained positions of executive leadership seemed to stay in those roles longer; thus, there are fewer leadership positions available for protégés to succeed into which creates less opportunity for progressive sponsorship to occur.

Chances for advancement are also hindered when women remain in positions at the middle-management level because they are being blocked from promotion to executive positions and are unable to vacate their position and sponsor another Black woman to succeed them. Effective sponsorship requires the sponsor to have opportunities to vertically advance in their organization or field so they can advocate for their protégés to be promoted to either the positions that they vacate or to other positions that will support the sponsor's professional progression (Hewlett, 2013).

However, there are advantages to career longevity, one of which is having authentic relationships with a network of other influential individuals who can facilitate a sponsor's support of their protégé, and one respondent mentioned the importance of having such capacity:

And you know what, I'm going to say this to you whether people like it or not, --it's about relationships. Okay? It is. And you know, if you've got the right relationships, you can pick up the phone and say, "Hey, I really need you to see this person for me."... You've got to start to identify your bench strength. And that's a big thing for me. Always making sure we've got bench strength. Just like the basketball game; some people sit on the bench like, gosh, when are they ever going to get off the bench? But you make sure that they're prepared, so when you get them off the bench, that they can play ball (Health Care / Executive, personal communication, February 9, 2018).

Due to the challenges that Black women face in their quest to reach leadership levels within organizations, and with so few Black women in positions of organizational leadership, there are often not enough Black women with influence and decision-making power within their organizations to develop sponsorships with other Black women. Considering the phenomena of glass ceilings, Black ceilings, glass cliffs, and other euphemisms for the fragile yet impenetrable barriers to professional advancement that

Black women experience, it is logical that mentorship is more prevalent than sponsorship; i.e., Black women cannot sponsor the advancement of other Black women and move forward in their career if they are not placed in leadership positions. And, for Black women who do attain leadership positions, sponsorship will be limited if the opportunities for higher and more influential leadership positions are limited and there is nowhere else for the women to go beyond a static status of middle-management.

### Summary of Findings

The findings show that Black women face a myriad of challenges in the workplace, i.e., isolation, micro-aggressions, intersectional racial and gender discrimination, and stereotypes. However, the women in the study expressed undaunted determinism in the face of the trials and none of the challenges has precluded the women's professional ambitions or their desire to practice sponsorship among each other. Although the women were in consensus that there is a dearth of Black women in positions of organizational leadership and evidence of their awareness about what sponsorship is, experience with sponsorship, and comprehension about how sponsorship is practiced was seen in the respondents' comments, mentorship still remains more prevalently practiced than sponsorship among the participants of my study. Mentorship, while an effective means of grooming candidates for leadership positions, is limited in that it is not the reciprocal, succession building strategy that is sponsorship. The discussion in chapter five will explore possible reasons why sponsorship among Black women is not more frequently practiced.

## CHAPTER 5

### DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

#### Discussion

But how very few are there among them that bestow one thought upon the benighted sons and daughters of Africa, who have enriched the soils of America with their tears and blood: few to promote their cause, none to encourage their talents. Under these circumstances, do not let our hearts be any longer discouraged; it is no use to murmur nor to repine; but let us promote ourselves and improve our own talents (Stewart, 1831).

As the data from the interviews conducted for this study show, Black women are, indeed, practicing sponsorship among each other in a variety of ways, which affirmatively answers my central research question. However, the narratives of the Black women in my study also revealed the challenges and barriers they face regarding their practice of sponsorship and the attainment of leadership positions. The comments of the Black women professionals in my study expressed their awareness that the workplace was not a place devoid of societal influences, conventions, and constructs that hinder their progress, however, their White female and counterparts as well as their Black male counterparts do not share the same cognition about Black women's experiences in the workplace.

According to Dyer (1997), "White people set standards of humanity by which they are bound to succeed and others bound to fail", and those standards of humanity were not designed to accommodate the intersectional racial and gender identities of Black women. Although Black women professionals have advanced in their careers through sponsorships with those who have traditionally been in positions of leadership and power

(i.e., White men and White women), the pace of professional advancement into organizational leadership positions for Black women has been glacial considering the number of educated, ambitious, qualified, and capable Black women who are ready to lead (Hewlett & Wingfield, 2015). Subsequently, the challenges that the Black women in my study experienced, as shown by the data, are evidence that there is a need to implement more effective strategies to address the racial bias and gender discrimination that hinder the progression of Black women in the workplace and improve workplace conditions for them.

As history has shown, the literature and research proves, my study confirms, and current situations demonstrate, Black women will continue to be stymied in their professional advancement if they rely solely on others to have major revelations and empathy about the challenges they face in the workplace and they do not practice sponsorship among each other with more intentionality. Although sponsorship is not the sole panacea to remediate the underrepresentation of Black women in positions of organizational leadership, it is an effective means of advancing Black women professionals when it is practiced with authenticity and positive intention as seen by the respondents' experiences.

#### Limitations

The ways that Black women leverage their positions of leadership as sponsors of other Black women have not been researched extensively; subsequently, the amount of comprehensive studies on the phenomenon is minimal. Therefore, this study was limited to an examination of the phenomenon of sponsorship among Black women professionals. This study reveals the complexities of the lived experiences of a select group of Black



women from one geographic area; thus, the intention of this study was not to presume that the individual experiences of the women in the study are generalizable and applicable to all Black women. Rather, this study gathered data from a variety of Black women professionals, presented their experiences as individual case study examples, and analyzed the phenomena within applicable theoretical frameworks. The objective of this study was not to infer that the narratives can be generalized for all Black women or women in general, nor were the narratives intended to be a comprehensive representation of Black women from all professions, industries, positions, and experiences. Rather, the intention of the study was to examine sponsorship by using the experiences of this select group of women as case study examples from which more broad implications could be derived according to their relativity to the reader.

My study was not designed or intended to shift the onus of remediating systemic inequities onto Black women; rather it was intended to examine how Black women professionals are discerning and leveraging the influence of their positions to affect progress toward equity and the facilitation of opportunities for Black women professionals. The collection, analysis, and interpretation of the data about the various Black women leaders in this qualitative study provides information about their experiences with the intersectionality of identity, the law and policy, and ethics with regard to the practices of leadership and sponsorship. This study does not promote that any of the women in the study are archetypal; however, this study illuminated some of the issues that Black women professionals face and provided examples about how some Black women address those issues; i.e., the experiences of some Black women

professionals was examined, however, the study does not examine the phenomena of all Black women professionals.

### Recommendations for Future Research

Based on the findings of this study, the following are recommendations for future research about sponsorship among Black women:

- Conduct a study that observes and records the dynamics of the relationships and direct interactions between sponsors and protégés to derive examples of best practices of sponsorship.
- Implement a longitudinal case study that tracks the career progression between a sponsor and a protégé within an organization over a period of time.
- Conduct a study of Black women professionals from different geographic areas to examine whether sponsorship among Black women is practiced differently in different places.
- Conduct a more thorough study of Concentric Theory among Black women to test whether it can be used a predictive tool for determining positionality of identity and in-group affinities.
- Conduct a study with more respondents to study intergenerational sponsorships among Black women professionals.

### Implications

This research demonstrates how Black women share certain experiences despite the differences in their professions, industries, positions, ages, and socioeconomic status. The findings of this study provide insight into how Black women are influenced by various internal and external forces that effect how they move through and view the

world, as well as how they experience and practice sponsorship. The lived experiences in the narratives provide insights into the lives and experiences of Black women that can be used as firsthand accounts and references for understanding Black women and the challenges they face in their pursuit of organizational leadership roles. Understanding the specific factors that have impeded the progress of Black women in the workplace is important to understanding the factors that have attributed to the success of Black women leaders. Understanding the causes of the challenges that Black women face in the workplace as well as some of the causes and the can assist employers in implementing best practices to develop their talent acquisition strategies and leadership programs; i.e., knowing better helps people do better.

The narratives in this qualitative study explored the ways in which the intersectionality of identity, laws and policies, and ethics impact the lives of Black women leaders and how their experiences affect the way in which they actuate their influence with sponsorship to empower other aspiring Black women leaders. The 2016 Executive Leadership Council study, “Black Women Executives Research Initiative Revisited” (Carlton, 2016), identified sponsorship as being integral to professional advancement. My study revealed that while Black women are more familiar with practicing mentorship, the implementation of sponsorship as a diversity, leadership, professional advancement, and succession strategy is not practiced as frequently as mentorship which is an implication that more effort should be given to familiarizing Black women with sponsorship and its benefits to their career progression. It is my hope that this research will lead to the creation of organizational policies and leadership

development programs that are conducive to fostering the advancement of Black women professionals.

### Conclusion

The persistent dearth of Black women in organizational leadership positions suggests that laws, policies, and programs have not completely abolished the problem, and other strategies of active empowerment should be examined. Based on the data that I have collected, I submit that sponsorship is a viable strategy to employ for the empowerment and progression of Black women professionals, a sentiment that was echoed by one of the respondents:

We have to. You know, that's a no-brainer. And shame on us if we don't. 'Cause, you know what, we're going to get old one day. And, I keep saying that to people, I say, we won't always be here. So, we have to make sure that we create a path for other women to come behind us, or even, not behind us, side-by-side, and with us... And, minimize the ones that fall through the cracks (Health Care / Executive, personal communication, February 9, 2018).

As more Black women professionals ascend to positions of leadership, opportunities have increased for Black women leaders to uplift and empower other Black women through sponsorship, and as the dilatory pace of progress has shown, it is imperative for them to do so.

I chose to title my paper "Activating the Power Within" because Black women have the power within themselves to empower each other and help other Black women rise, and organizations and companies also have the capacity within to create workplace conditions, organizational systems, policies, and programs that will foster the professional advancement of Black women and remediate their underrepresentation positions of organizational leadership.

In tribute to Maria W. Stewart for her intrepid activism to advance the progress of Black women, I believe that it is important to honor her prescience and implorations from more than 185 years ago and fill the gaps in the literature about sponsorship among Black women by examining the ways that Black women can leverage their leadership as sponsors within organizations to increase the number of Black women leaders.

Maria W. Stewart had the first published words on the subjects of self-empowerment and sponsorship among Black women, and I would like her to have the last words in this study:

I am of a strong opinion that the day on which we unite, heart and soul, and turn our attention to knowledge and improvement, that day the hissing and reproach among the nations of the earth against us will cease. And even those who now point at us with the finger of scorn, will aid and befriend us. It is of no use for us to sit with our hands folded, hanging our heads like bulrushes, lamenting our wretched condition; but let us make a mighty effort, and arise; and if no one will promote or respect us, let us promote and respect ourselves (Stewart, 1831).

Arise!

Promote and respect ourselves!

Such beautiful and powerful words.

Amen, Sister Maria!

Amen.

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## APPENDICES

## APPENDIX A

## CONSENT FORM FOR RESEARCH

**Activating the Power Within:  
Sponsorship Among Black Women Professionals**

**Researcher:** Keeya Branson-Davis  
**Institution:** Temple University College of Education  
**Department:** Policy, Organizational & Leadership Studies  
**Program:** Educational Administration & Leadership

You are being invited to participate in this research because you have been identified as being among a select group of Black women professionals who have had experiences with various types of organizational leadership roles. The research for this interview will consist of questions that will inquire about your organization, your individual experiences as a professional and the types of organizational leadership roles that you have experienced, and your personal views on sponsorship and leadership.

Your participation is voluntary and you can opt not to take part. You can also agree to take part and change your mind after the interview and your decision will not be held against you. You can ask all the questions you want before you decide to participate in this research.

The researcher requests that you submit your notice to withdrawal from the study in writing by email or by posted mail no less than one week before the scheduled interview and no more than one week after the interview has been conducted.

If you have questions, concerns, or complaints, contact the researcher at the following contact telephone numbers or addresses:

Mailing Address: 2500 Meredith Street, Philadelphia, PA 19130  
Office phone: (215) 236-1916  
Cell: (267) 690-7677  
Email: TUE70681@temple.edu

This research has been reviewed and approved by an Institutional Review Board. You may talk to them at (215) 707-3390 or e-mail them at: [irb@temple.edu](mailto:irb@temple.edu) for any of the following:

- Your questions, concerns, or complaints that are not being answered by the researcher.
- You cannot reach the researcher.
- You want to talk to someone besides the researcher.
- You have questions about your rights as a research subject.
- You want to get information or provide input about this research.

### ***Purpose of the Research***

This study is an examination of how Black women leverage the influence of their leadership by sponsoring other Black women to remediate the chronic problem of the underrepresentation of Black women in positions of organizational leadership. This qualitative, multi-case, exploratory study about Black women who are professionals and leaders in C-Suite executive positions provides an opportunity for them to share their lived experiences and provide insight about effective leadership development strategies and best practices in sponsorship for Black women. The firsthand insights of the Black women in this study will provide data about the effects that race, gender, law, policy, and ethics have on efforts to increase the number of Black women leaders through sponsorship. The information that you provide is important to this study and will assist in contributing to the field of leadership studies.

The duration of the interview for this research should last approximately 45 - 60 minutes.

You will be asked a series of questions pertaining to the following:

- Professional: Your experiences with leadership roles and sponsorship as a protégé and as a sponsor.
- Identity: Your identity and self-perceptions as a Black person, a woman, a Black woman, a professional, a protégé, a sponsor, and as a leader.
- Sponsorship/Leadership: Your experiences as a professional, a protégé, a sponsor, and as a leader.

The audio of the interview responses for in-person interviews will be recorded on a password-protected iPad device that is owned and operated exclusively by the researcher. The researcher will write a detailed transcript of the full audio interview. Written notes will also be taken during the interview. If an in-person meeting is not possible, the interviews will be conducted by a real-time online video call via a secure internet connection or by telephone and the audio will be recorded on a password-protected iPad device that is owned and operated exclusively by the researcher.

Qualitative data analysis will be conducted on a personal, password-protected computer at the home of the student investigator, or on a computer at the Temple University Technology Center using an encrypted access code and secure internet connection to ensure the confidentiality of the data.

The audio recording of the interview, the transcription, and the written notes will be protected by the researcher and stored in a secure location to maintain and protect the confidentiality of your identity and responses. The audio recordings will be deleted upon the completion of the research project (i.e., final approval by the research committee).

You may be asked to participate in a follow-up interview that will be conducted in-person, on-line video, or by telephone if your responses from the initial interview need to be clarified. You may also be asked to review portions of the written transcript of your interview responses to confirm the accuracy of the transcription.

To the extent allowed by law, the researcher will limit the viewing of your personal information collected for this research to the people who have to review it. The researcher cannot promise complete secrecy. The IRB, Temple University, and other representatives of these organizations may inspect and copy your information. All of the information that you provide will be kept private and confidential.

The researcher will protect the confidentiality of your identity by using a pseudonym in the final printed version of the research.

*This research for this study does not require you to sign a consent form and you may keep this form as a reference.*

## **APPENDIX B**

### **PROTOCOL**

**Examine how the perspectives and practices of each Black woman professional in my study are informed by their personal experiences, defined by their racial and gender identities, guided by laws and policies, and influenced by their ethical considerations.**

#### **Section I. - Intersectionality of the racial and gender identities of Black women professionals**

1. How have race and gender affected your interactions with other Black women professionals?
2. What are some of the ways that race has affected you as a Black woman professional?
3. What are some of the ways that gender has affected you as a Black woman professional?
4. What are some of the ways that societal views about Black women affected you as a Black woman professional?
5. What are some of the effects that your race has had on:
  - Your leadership practices?
  - Sponsorship relationships?
6. What are some of the effects that your gender has had on:
  - Your leadership practices?
  - Sponsorship relationships?
7. Has someone other than a Black woman helped you in your career?
8. Are there any differences in your professional interactions with colleagues who are not Black females? Can you contrast the experiences? Positives? Negatives?

#### **Section II. - Law and Policy**

1. How do laws (i.e., the Civil Rights Act of 1964) and policies (i.e., Affirmative Action) affect the way you help facilitate the professional advancement of other Black women?
2. How do you operate within the parameters of laws and policies in order to facilitate the professional advancement of other Black women?

3. What are some of the, policies (e.g., affirmative action, diversity, and inclusion) or ethical programs that have been conducive to fostering the development of Black women professionals within your organization? *Assessing the effectiveness of policies.*

### **Section III - Ethical Considerations: Leadership and Sponsorship**

1. Who are some of the most effective leaders who have advanced your career?
2. What did those leaders do to help you advance in your career?
3. How do you feel about the number of Black women in positions of leadership in your organization? With regard to diversity, are there too few, enough or a proportionate amount, or too many Black women?
4. Do you consider the dearth of Black women in leadership positions to be a problem within your organization, in society (i.e., the workforce), for you – (e.g., moral support, professional assistance and advancement, etc.)? If yes, why and in what ways? If no, why not?
5. Have you ever been helped in your career by a Black woman professional:
  - a. Specific: within your organization?
  - b. General: during your career?
6. How did the Black woman professional help you advance in your career?
7. Do you believe it is important to help other Black women advance to leadership positions? Why?
8. Is there opportunity for you to help advance Black women subordinates within your organization? Your profession?
9. Are you in a position to help other Black women advance in your organization? Do you have status or clout within your organization?
10. Have you ever sponsored another Black woman to help advance her to a position of leadership within your organization?
11. What leadership practices have you found to be the most effective in helping other Black women advance to leadership positions within your organization?



## APPENDIX C

### CONCENTRIC POSITIONALITY OF IDENTITY INSTRUMENT

Concentricity, as it relates to Black women, provides a context for understanding the factors that contribute to their underrepresentation in leadership, Black women's relationships among each other and in society, and the ways that Black women practice leadership and sponsorship.

#### Concentric Positionality of Identity Instrument: Affiliations and Affinity Groups

Identity Prioritization: Please rank each affinity group 1 through 4 according to your personal affiliation to each group.

#### Ranking:

1= First Affinity Group

2 = Second Affinity Group

3 = Third Affinity Group

4 = Fourth Affinity Group

