

**JOURNEY TO THE TOP: MARGINALIZED INTERSECTED
IDENTITY EFFECTS ON AFRICAN AMERICAN
WOMEN'S CAREER ADVANCEMENT**

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ABSTRACT

The study aimed to provide organizations with the information needed to develop and incorporate strategies and policies that would increase opportunities for advancement among African American women to the benefit of organizational performance and bottom lines while providing guidance to seeking top-level career advancement in higher education. Study 1 adopted a qualitative approach, with interviews of 13 African American female leaders. Seven themes resulted: perceived characteristics needed by Black women for success in securing a leadership role; experiences of the barriers from the intersectionality of gender and race; sources of motivation and inspiration; leaders, women, colleagues, and other professionals who understand the struggles; motivational influences of goal progress; motivational influences of outcome expectations; and motivational influences of social support network. To build on Study 1, Study 2 aimed to understand the factors influencing perceived career success for 91 recently graduated African American female professionals. Five research questions asked about the explanatory power of motivation and inspiration, social support at work, perceived discrimination, resilience, and self-efficacy. Two research questions used stepwise multiple linear regression to examine the social support, perceived discrimination, and the influence of these variables on career motivation, self-efficacy, and resilience.

The findings of Study 1 revealed the support and factors that helped the participants overcome hindrances. These factors formed Study 2, indicating that each independent variable helped explain career success for recently graduated African American female professionals. The findings showed barriers and facilitators for African

American women at both ends of the leadership pipeline: those who achieved leadership positions and those just beginning their careers.

DEDICATION

This research is dedicated to the women who raised me. To my shero (Mom), my grandmothers, aunts, bonus moms, sisters, cousins, friends, co-workers & mentors, you all inspire me every day. Your courage, wisdom, strength, beauty, intelligence, compassion, grace, and care encourage me to be better, do better and reflect the amazing humanity you are.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The overall aim of this study was to provide organizations with the information needed to develop and incorporate strategies and policies to increase opportunities for advancement among African American women to the benefit of overall organizational performance and bottom lines while guiding African American women seeking top-level career advancement in higher education (HE). African American women remain marginalized as an underrepresented group in the leadership of U.S. organizations (Alvarez-Cleveland, 2017; Hartman, 2018; Pace, 2018). Livingston (2015) stated that approximately 4% of Fortune 500 executive leaders are women, and less than 3% are African American. Only 1.2% of Fortune 500 executives are African American women (Catalyst, 2017). Research results have shown that African American women experience more challenges securing corporate America and HE leadership roles than White women and African American males (Greene, 2019). Furthermore, when African American women secure leadership positions, they face additional challenges related to criticisms of legitimacy and credibility. Some more challenges exist with maintaining leader-follower relationships and navigating the leadership role in a work environment characterized by racial and gender stereotypes (Sabharwal, 2015).

In spite of some advancements related to the *glass ceiling*, a structural, institutional barrier to female and minority corporate advancement, it remains a significant concern for women in the workplace (van Veelen & Derks, 2022). At the same time, African American women continue to obtain less career support from their organizations and coworkers. They are overlooked in career advancement opportunities

and excluded from routine and exceptional networking occurrences (Pace, 2018). Moreover, African American women in pursuit of top-level positions continually fail to reach the highest level of career aspiration, creating further barriers and letdowns that contribute to a *glass cliff* (MacNeil & Ghosh, 2017; Sabharwal, 2015). Ryan and Haslam (2007) defined a glass cliff as a “situation in which women or members of a minority group face challenging circumstances where there is a high risk of failure in attaining leadership positions” (p. 549). Despite the growing number of companies implementing diversity policies, African American women find the policies inadequate. They offer little benefit to advance to senior roles, leaving them with pessimistic feelings toward pursuing leadership positions (Catalyst, 2017).

The unique challenges associated with the intersectionality of race and gender may be factors that influence the career paths, appointments, and efficacy of African American women in leadership positions (Oikelome, 2017; Rosette et al., 2016) and outcome expectations of aspiring leaders (Holder et al., 2015). This situation may create a need to develop organizational strategies and diversity policies that foster an inclusive work environment (Hague & Okpala, 2017; Livingston, 2015). Individuals from other ethnic and racial groups, such as women of European descent (Cook & Glass, 2015), may not fully understand African American women’s experiences with trying to navigate the pipeline to leadership in organizations that do not favor their advancement (Holder et al., 2015). Furthermore, Beckwith et al. (2016) and Greene (2019) showed that African American women still experience barriers to entering leadership positions in U.S. organizations. The stereotypes associated with gender and race continue to influence the efficacy of African American women’s leadership negatively. Nevertheless, companies

have failed to incorporate inclusion strategies and promote African American women to senior positions (Alvarez-Cleveland, 2017; Pace, 2018). Both the barriers and supports in the leadership pipeline (Thompson, 2016) and the outcome expectations of aspiring leaders (Holder et al., 2015; Rahman et al., 2016) need to be explored. The goal should be to attain a comprehensive description of African American women's experiences that can be used to develop leadership diversity, equity, and inclusion strategies.

The general problem was that African American women were underrepresented as leaders in U.S. organizations. Furthermore, most companies have failed to incorporate inclusion strategies and promote African American women to senior positions (Alvarez-Cleveland, 2017; Hartman, 2018; Pace, 2018). Also, research on this topic has been underrepresented in the literature. Most of the empirical research on the underrepresentation of African American women leaders was conducted in HE settings (Collier, 2018; Davis & Maldonado, 2015; Hague & Okpala, 2017; Jean-Marie & Tickles, 2018). Few studies have explored the challenges and supports that African American women experience during their pathway to leadership in an organizational context, and few have used the lens of social cognitive career theory (Greene, 2019; Holder et al., 2015; Livingston, 2015; Thompson, 2016). Few have examined the impact of outcome expectations for aspiring leaders (Holder et al., 2015; Rahman et al., 2016) to attain a comprehensive description of African American women's experiences. More must be uncovered about African American women who successfully secured senior leadership positions in the workplace. Such studies may help others gain a better understanding of the barriers and supports while understanding better and possibly

facilitating increasing their diversity at senior leadership levels (Greene, 2019; Pace, 2018; Thompson, 2016).

Based on these gaps identified in the literature, not enough is known about African American women's experiences or expectations in their quest for leadership. The results of this information gap are that African American women are hampered in their ability to make well-informed decisions to advance their careers. Moreover, institutions are unaware of the necessary steps to optimize diversity, equity, and inclusion planning. Industry-wide organizations would benefit from creating a diverse leadership pipeline because, according to Pace (2018), organizations with leadership diversity have a 33% greater chance of outperforming their competition.

Study 1 adopted a qualitative approach. Interviews were of African American female leaders regarding their current experiences, barriers, and supports on their pathways to leadership and the influence of outcome career aspirations and expectations on career goals and actions. Seven themes resulted: (a) perceived characteristics needed by Black women for success in securing a leadership role; (b) experiences of the barriers from the intersectionality of gender and race; (c) sources of motivation and inspiration; (d) leaders, women, colleagues, and other professionals who understand the struggles; (e) motivational influences of goal progress; (f) motivational influences of outcome expectations; and (g) motivational influences of social support network. To build on Study 1, an additional quantitative study was undertaken to understand the factors influencing perceived career success for recently graduated African American female professionals. Five research questions asked about the explanatory power of motivation and inspiration, social support at work, perceived discrimination, resilience, and self-

efficacy. Two additional research questions used stepwise multiple linear regression to examine the combined influences of social support and perceived discrimination (H6) and the influence of these variables along with career motivation, self-efficacy, and resilience (H7).

Overall, the findings of Study 1 revealed the supports and factors that helped the participants overcome the barriers and factors that hindered them. These factors formed the basis for Study 2. The factors indicated that each independent variable helped explain career success for recently graduated African American female professionals. The findings illuminated barriers and facilitators for African American women at both ends of the leadership pipeline: those who achieved leadership positions and those just beginning their careers.

The chapters of the dissertation describe the focus and research basis for these inquiries before discussing the method and results of the two studies and their implications for policy and practice. Chapter 1 provides an overview of the research from which the studies emerge. Chapter 2 examines this literature in greater detail, leading to the research gaps motivating the studies. Chapter 3 describes the theoretical underpinnings and methods of Study 1. Chapter 4 discusses the findings from Study 1 and discusses the results relative to literature and theory, finishing with a transition to Study 2. Chapter 5 describes methods for Study 2, discusses the findings of Study 2, followed by interpretation, discussion, implications and offers final conclusions.

CHAPTER 2

UNDERSTANDING THE EXPERIENCES OF AFRICAN AMERICAN WOMEN LEADERS

Barriers

African American women experience more barriers to attaining leadership positions than other racial and ethnic groups (Alvarez-Cleveland, 2017; Barron, 2019; Rahman et al., 2016). Specifically, the intersectionality of gender and race creates additional obstacles that impact African American women's advancement into leadership positions (Beckwith et al., 2016; Murray, 2016; Rahman et al., 2016). Beckwith et al. (2016) contended that the obstacles associated with the intersectionality of gender and race influence stereotypical perceptions of African American women in the workplace and inhibit their perseverance to succeed in their careers. The following review consists of literature related to the experiences of African American women in leadership.

Barron (2019) used a qualitative research methodology and phenomenology design to explore the lived experiences of 12 African American women. The researcher decided to advance into senior leadership positions and to discover the strategies used to make their decisions. Like the present study, Barron used social cognitive career theory (SCCT) as the guiding framework to uncover the how and what of career-related goals and actions. In addition to exploring African American women's decision strategies, Barron aimed to determine how SCCT influenced those strategies. Furthermore, the author used a purposive, snowball sampling technique, semi-structured interviews, field notes, and thematic analysis (Barron, 2019). The analysis revealed several themes that influenced the career decision-making process of African American women, including

family, leadership, education, faith, and authenticity (Barron, 2019). Barron (2019) further suggested several avenues in which organizations could apply these findings toward “improvement opportunities for their recruitment, talent management, diversity and inclusion policies and programs, and succession planning strategies, inclusive of internal and college recruitment, involvement in community youth initiatives, and strategic alignment of high-level, internal organizational stakeholders” (p. 146).

Like Barron (2019), Alvarez-Cleveland (2017) explored the lived experiences of African American women executives as they navigated the leadership pipeline. Like the current study, Alvarez-Cleveland used Black feminist theory (BFT) as a guiding framework and added social capital theory as a complementary framework. The author used a qualitative research method, phenomenology design, semi-structured interviews, and a sample of seven African American female leaders in the New York metropolitan area (Alvarez-Cleveland, 2017). The study results showed that African American women’s advancement to leadership positions was influenced by past academic achievement, positive support and feedback, professional development opportunities, mentorship or sponsorship, cultural associations, and interests (Alvarez-Cleveland, 2017).

McMillion (2017) also used a phenomenological research design to explore the lived experiences of African American women in leadership positions to discover how gender and race influence their career pathways. The author aimed to uncover the perceived barriers, factors that influenced career decision making, and personal successes of six African American women leaders in HE through the lens of BFT and using in-depth interviews and thematic analysis (McMillion, 2017). The analysis results revealed several themes related to participants’ leadership journeys. The barriers-related themes

included isolation, distrust, tokenism, race, male hegemony, and gender (McMillion, 2017). The themes related to the factors that influenced career decision-making included perceived resilience, ability to overcome stereotypes, and upbringing (McMillion, 2017). Finally, the themes related to participants' success included positive expectations, coping with conflicting factors, and doing things the accepted way (McMillion, 2017).

The central basis for African American women's barriers to leadership is their experiences of stereotypes, biases, and intersectionality of gender and race (Chin, 2013; Rosette et al., 2016). Research results have shown that African American women experience more challenges securing American corporate and HE leadership roles than White women and African American males (Greene, 2019). In Rosette et al.'s (2016) study, the authors established that African American women experience unique stereotypes that no other group shared. For example, African American women are stereotyped as dominant, angry, and incompetent (Rosette et al., 2016). Chin (2013) also asserted that African American women in leadership positions are viewed as wrathful when they display assertiveness. Through the lens of SCCT, African American women's interest and performance in leadership can be damaged when perceived as incompetent because competence is a vital characteristic of leaders (Carton & Rosette, 2011; Eagly & Heilman, 2016). The literature has also revealed that unspoken bias precedes unfavorable consequences for African American women along their pathway to leadership (Avery et al., 2015).

Holder et al. (2015) explored the racial barriers to advancement in the workplace, specifically for corporate senior-level positions, and the coping strategies used among African American women in the United States. The authors used a qualitative method,

phenomenology design, semi-structured interviews, and a sample of 10 African American female leaders to research racism at work (Holder et al., 2015). The results of the study revealed several themes related to racial microaggression that influenced leadership attainment, including African American women stereotypes, environmental conditions, invisibility, presumed universality of the African American experience, and exclusion (Holder et al., 2015). Furthermore, the results revealed several coping strategies that African American women employed during their pathway to leadership, including self-care, spirituality, support systems, religion, mentorship, armoring, and sponsorship (Holder et al., 2015).

Greene (2019) used a transcendental phenomenological design to investigate 10 African American women's lived experiences related to the influence of race and gender intersectionality on attaining a leadership position in Fortune 500 organizations in corporate America. To guide this study, the author used critical race theory, racial microaggression theory, intersectionality theory, and BFT (Greene, 2019). Semi-structured interviews were used to collect data, and themes were constructed using the modified van Kaam technique (Greene, 2019). The study's results revealed several themes related to the barriers experienced among African American women leaders, including workplace stereotypes, lack of mentorship opportunities led by other African American women, gender, and race (Greene, 2019).

Like the present study, Mitchell (2019) used SCCT to guide the exploration of African American women's lived experiences of leadership development and attainment. However, the author explored these experiences in the specific context of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (Mitchell, 2019). Specifically, the author

aimed to uncover how the intersectionality of race and gender influenced leadership experiences among African American women using a qualitative method, phenomenology design, semi-structured interviews, a sample of 13 participants, and the modified van Kaam method of analysis (Mitchell, 2019). The results of the study revealed several themes related to the barriers African American women experience in their advancement to leadership positions, including geographical restrictions, familial responsibilities, being denied opportunities, lack of available leadership positions, deficient feedback, implicit bias, the presence of a “glass ceiling,” and stereotypes (Mitchell, 2019). The results of this study were similar to those in Alvarez-Cleveland’s (2017) study. The findings indicated that the barriers to African American women’s pursuit of leadership were receiving negative feedback, reduced compensation compared to that of White or male colleagues, socioeconomic status, and ill perceptions of their leadership capabilities.

Strategies for Success

Many researchers have focused on African American women's strategies in attaining leadership positions and maintaining their effectiveness as leaders. The research results of such studies revealed that sponsorship, mentorship, and networking positively influence African American women’s ability to succeed in their pathway to leadership (Benschop et al., 2015; Downs et al., 2015; Gamble & Turner, 2015; Hague & Okpala, 2017). For example, networking and mentorship prospects helped African American women break down barriers associated with the glass ceiling (Gamble & Turner, 2015). Likewise, Beckwith et al. (2016) found that sponsorship and mentorship promoted leadership effectiveness among African American women and helped them overcome the

challenges related to the intersection of gender and race that they experienced in their leadership role.

Cain (2015) used a qualitative method and phenomenology design to explore the lived experiences of leadership success among 20 African American women leaders in the Southeastern United States. The author employed a snowball sampling technique to recruit African American women leaders who would participate in semi-structured interviews that were recorded, transcribed, and thematically analyzed (Cain, 2015). Furthermore, the author used general systems theory as the guiding framework for the study (Cain, 2015). Several themes related to the strategies that African American women employed to ensure success emerged from the data analysis, including withstanding a hostile work environment, overcoming stereotypes, and defeating racial and gender discrimination (Cain, 2015). The author hoped the study results would inform organizational leaders about workplace equality and diversity (Cain, 2015).

Like the other studies presented in this literature review, Hailey (2018) used a phenomenological research design to explore the lived experiences of overcoming obstacles to leadership among African American women. The author used in-depth, semi-structured interviews, a sample of 10 African American women in leadership positions, thematic analysis, and intersectionality theory as the guiding framework (Hailey, 2018). The African American women in this study reported strategies that helped them succeed in their leadership positions, including developing control, establishing a community, remaining confident, embracing change, and respecting their identities as Black women (Hailey, 2018).

Liggins-Moore (2016) took a different approach to exploring African American women's strategies for leadership success by using an exploratory design rather than a phenomenological one. The study's aim was to understand better the factors that positively influenced their pathway to leadership (Liggins-Moore, 2016). To carry out this research, Liggins-Moore (2016) obtained a sample of 43 African American women who had been in a leadership position for at least two years, worked in Los Angeles, and had more than five employees reporting directly to them. The authors conducted semi-structured interviews and used Moustakas' coding and theme development procedures. According to the results, all participating African American women leaders reported mentorship, spirituality, and assertiveness positively influencing their leadership goals (Liggins-Moore, 2016). Spirituality was most important in combating controversy in the workplace (Liggins-Moore, 2016). All participants experienced mentorship at some point in their leadership journey and felt strongly that their mentors helped them overcome several barriers (Liggins-Moore, 2016). The participants reported that being assertive resulted in positive outcomes for them; however, they acknowledged that the use of reflective assertiveness was complicated in that they had to establish a balance in using an assertive tone but not coming across as the stereotypical angry Black woman (Liggins-Moore, 2016). Another less prevalent theme from this study was that for Black women leaders to be perceived as competent by their co-workers, a balance must be struck between authority and reflection (Liggins-Moore, 2016).

The results of these studies point to the possibility of achieving positive social change by making organizational leaders aware of racial and gender inequalities in workplace policies, procedures, recruitment and advancement strategies, learning

opportunities, and compensation (Barron, 2019; Beckwith et al., 2016; Gamble & Turner, 2015; Hailey, 2018; Rosette et al., 2016). Raising such awareness would aim to promote diverse, inclusive workplace environments and equitable opportunities for African American women to secure leadership positions (Hague & Okpala, 2017; Livingston, 2015).

Furthermore, making discrimination, stereotypes, and implicit bias in organizations visible will provide future opportunities for researchers to explore potential organization-wide solutions to the issues that African American women face (Pace, 2018; Thompson, 2016). Finally, discovering and presenting the strategies that African American women have used to navigate their pathway to leadership successfully may help aspiring African American women leaders apply more effective strategies as they make their career decisions (Greene, 2019; Liggins-Moore, 2016). A summary of barriers and success strategies appears in Table 1.

Table 1

Summary of Barriers and Success Strategies

Barriers	Success strategies
Intersection of race and gender	Resilience
Stereotypes	Overcoming stereotypes
Tokenism	Maintaining positive expectations
Invisibility	Self-care
Challenging work environment	Armoring
Lack of mentorship opportunities	Mentoring and sponsorship
Lack of leadership positions	Establishing a community
Distrust	Embracing change
Isolation	Careful assertiveness
Familial responsibilities	Spirituality

This study further explored the barriers faced by African American women and their strategies for success using the theoretical lenses of BFT (Collins, 1990) and SCCT (Lent et al., 1994). BFT offered an understanding of the potential barriers to leadership

through the lens of the intersectionality of gender and race. SCCT helped explain the multifaceted associations between contextual, individual, and sociocognitive variables related to education and career aspirations. The following sections outline the theoretical contributions of these lenses to the current research.

CHAPTER 3

THEORETICAL CONTRIBUTIONS TO EXPLORATORY STUDY 1

Black Feminist Theory

As a theory articulating the unique position of Black women in society, “Black feminist theory creates a space to articulate interlocking forms of oppression and gives voice to Black women’s fight for justice” (Collins, 2009, p. 26). Black Feminist Theory (BFT) emphasizes the intersectionality of gender and race for African American women and their many oppressions according to a central concept, which is that African American women’s experiences of oppression differ from those experienced by women from other groups (Collins, 1990). The central intentions of BFT are to (a) articulate African American women’s reality, ways of knowing, and the meanings they attach to their experience; (b) accept African American women’s responses to challenges shared as a group; (c) recognize the connection between African American women’s thoughts and actions; and (d) strive to uphold a self-defined viewpoint despite the possibility of suppression by dominant groups (Collins, 2009).

According to BFT, the experience of being African American affects the experience of being a woman, and the experience of being a woman affects the experience of being an African American (Davis & Maldonado, 2015). As such, it is essential to understand the intersection of more than one marginalized identity. Researchers can use BFT to highlight the frustrations and challenges associated with battling the intersection of oppression and illustrate the methods of domination and pipeline barriers that influence African American women’s pathway to leadership (Few-Demo, 2014). At the same time and perhaps more importantly, BFT functions to

illuminate the decisions, actions, and perspectives of individuals who occupy a double-marginalized identity. As hooks (1984) described,

Living as we did—on the edge—we developed a particular way of seeing reality. We looked both from the outside in and the inside out. We focused our attention on the center as well as the margin. We understood both. (p. xviii)

In this way, hooks (1984) suggested that the unique experience of being *both* African American *and* female results in a different perspective on that experience than being *either* African *or* female. Just as the environment acts upon individuals, so too does it play a role in the learning experiences and resulting outcome expectations, interests, goals, and actions of those individuals.

BFT was an appropriate framework for this research because it acknowledged that sexism, racism, and class oppression were all intrinsically connected. Furthermore, BFT was used as a lens to investigate African American women's experiences. The goal was to understand how the intersection of gender and race affected their career advancement.

Social Cognitive Career Theory

SCCT was developed as a theoretical model investigating the multifaceted associations between contextual, individual, and sociocognitive variables related to education and career aspirations (Lent et al., 1994). Moreover, this model helps illustrate how people develop interests, make decisions, and achieve goals related to education and career (Lent et al., 1994). Finally, SCCT indicates that central contextual factors, such as perceived obstacles and support, impact individual career aspirations and decisions (Lent et al., 1994).

SCCT highlights the influence of background contextual factors and individual contributions on career-related self-efficacy perceptions and outcome expectations (Lent

et al., 1994). Self-efficacy is a person's self-assessed ability to achieve a goal (Bandura, 1986). Furthermore, this theory suggests that "self-efficacy beliefs and outcome expectations contribute to a person's career interests, and career interests impact career choice goals, choice actions, and accomplishments" (Lent et al., 2002, p. 256). According to Lent et al. (2002), "Outcome expectations are personal beliefs about the imagined consequences of completing a specific task" (p. 262). These expectations stem from personal experiences, observing others' negative or positive experiences, and hearing others communicate their experiences (Lent et al., 1994). Researchers have demonstrated that sexism and racism can negatively affect women's aspirations and efforts to obtain a leadership position (Davies et al., 2005; Hoyt & Blascovich, 2007). SCCT relates to the literature on African American women's career advancement through its ability to project the influence of contextual and internal factors (i.e., the intersectionality of race and gender).

SCCT (Lent et al., 1994) is an expansion of Bandura's (1986) social cognitive theory (SCT). The basic premise of SCT is that the environment and individual cognitions, behavior, and motivations are interconnected and elucidate unique abilities and achievements (Bandura, 1986). In this sense, SCCT explains how the connection of concepts in SCT relates to career interests and decision-making. The following sections provide further information on the constructs illustrated in the conceptual model (see Figure 1).

Self-Efficacy

Self-efficacy is a primary facet of SCCT. Lent and Brown (2013) defined self-efficacy as one's perceived capability to accomplish a specific task or influence

anticipated results based on their actions. Perceived self-efficacy is unfixed because it changes according to new or modified self-appraisals of recent experiences, knowledge, and performance (Nachmias & Walmsley, 2015). According to SCCT, self-efficacy influences career motivations and decision-making processes (Spurk & Abele, 2014). Specifically, appraisals of previous performances and experiences extend from cognitions, motivations, and actions, resulting in self-efficacy's direct contribution to career decisions (Lent & Brown, 2013).

Environmental and contextual factors also influence one's level of self-efficacy (Bandura, 2003). For example, Fouad and Santana (2017) suggested that being a woman influences individuals' experiences and, in turn, develops into an antecedent in the decision to pursue male-dominated leadership positions. Beckwith et al. (2016) contended that the same influence on career decision-making is seen in racial differences, such as being African American. Based on the positions of Fouad and Santana (2017) and Beckwith et al. (2016), one could presume that the barriers related to the intersectionality of race and gender, as depicted in BFT, would reduce African American women's self-efficacy toward attaining leadership positions. On the other hand, higher self-efficacy levels would be vital to African American women's fortitude and perseverance in pursuing a senior-level leadership role (Beckwith et al., 2016). For African American women, high self-efficacy would enable them to persist through challenges, leverage their abilities, and focus more on what needs to be accomplished to successfully reach their leadership goals (Fouad & Santana, 2017). Furthermore, African American women with higher levels of self-efficacy may perceive challenges as less of an obstruction and more of a learning opportunity that could support success (Lent et al., 2000).

Outcome Expectations

Outcome expectations are what individuals expect to result from their actions and can influence career decisions (Lent & Brown, 2013; Lent et al., 2002). Essentially, the outcome expectations element of SCCT relates to how people imagine their careers if they pursue, act on, and achieve specific career goals (Bandura, 1986; Lent et al., 2000). However, the positivity or negativity of outcome expectations is contingent upon individual outlook or societal and group opinions (Barron, 2019; Mitchell, 2019). For example, people with high levels of self-efficacy will be more likely to envision positive outcomes from their actions. In contrast, people with low self-efficacy tend to envision adverse outcomes from their actions (Bandura, 2003). Additionally, when individuals envision positive outcomes, they are more motivated to pursue a challenging career pipeline, such as senior leadership. In contrast, individuals who envision adverse outcomes are less motivated to pursue positions that are difficult to attain or are motivated to pursue lower-level positions (Lent & Brown, 2013).

Lent and Brown (2013) contended that forecasting career consequences can be complicated because societal norms and workplace environments constantly change. These barriers to anticipating career outcomes are acutely present for minority groups such as African American women (Barron, 2019). According to Lent et al. (2016), the reason for this prevalence is that “individuals at an early age become predisposed to societal or cultural norms pertaining to gender and race and careers and positions within an organization” (p. 48). Barron (2019) also contended that barriers to predicting career outcomes may stem from ill-advised self-efficacy and unreasonable expectations. In conclusion, developing high self-efficacy can help individuals conquer negative thoughts

about attaining leadership, imagine positive results from their actions, and be motivated to act accordingly.

Personal Choice Goals

Career goals can be personally oriented or performance oriented. Personal (choice) goals relate to individual intentions to follow a specific career path, whereas performance goals relate to individual motivations to accomplish a specific task (Lent et al., 2000). Both personal and performance goals are influenced by one's self-efficacy and expected outcomes (Lent et al., 2000). Self-efficacy and outcome expectations serve as antecedents to career aspirations (e.g., senior leadership positions) and influence individual career decision-making processes (Lent et al., 2016). Regarding career self-management, choice goals in SCCT are individual objectives to behave in a manner conducive to coping with career tasks (Lent et al., 2016). Choice goals also offer structure and guide actions that will result in anticipated outcomes (Bocanegra et al., 2016). In conclusion, developing choice goals motivates individuals to overcome the barriers in their pathway to leadership, imagine successful outcomes, and choose to take actions that will meet those goals.

Career Decision-Making: Choice Actions

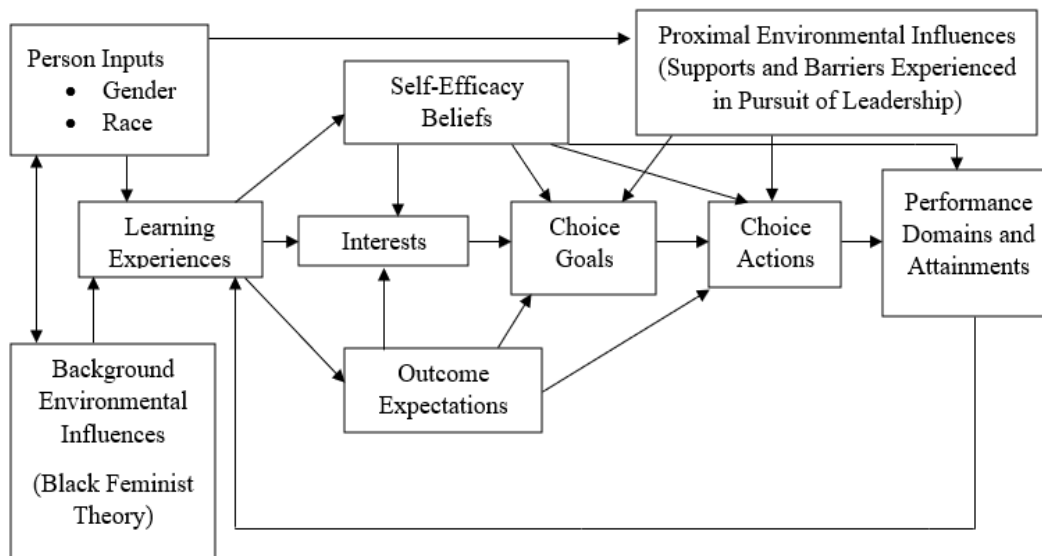
The career decision-making process is complex. It requires individuals to certify that their choice actions are plausible by clarifying the path they choose to follow, establishing goals, reviewing existing opportunities, comparing alternatives, and selecting the most appropriate option (Saaty, 2008). The career decision-making process is facilitated by current knowledge, past performance, experience, outcome expectations, perceptions of self-efficacy, and values (Nachmias & Walmsley, 2015). Of these

influential elements, past performance and experiences have the greatest impact on career self-efficacy, and career self-efficacy has the greatest impact on career decision-making (Saaty, 2008). Moreover, self-efficacy and outcome expectations take on a larger role in career decision making when the career aspiration is a leadership position (Barron, 2019; Lent & Brown, 2013). Finally, perceived internal factors (e.g., mental processes, self-image, psychological health) and external factors (e.g., environment, society, and norms) obstacles influence one's interest in leadership and subsequent decisions to navigate the leadership pipeline (Lent & Brown, 2013; Nachmias & Walmsley, 2015). In summary, all previously mentioned elements of SCCT influence the career decision-making process and individual choice actions.

All these facets are influenced by the context in which a person operates and the social position an individual occupies (hooks, 1984). In this way, BFT and SCCT work together to explain the macro- and microlevel influences brought to bear on an individual's career decision-making process. Figure 1 contains a suggestive model of both BFT and SCCT that loosely guided the questions of the semi-structured interviews used for this study.

Figure 1

Conceptual Model Illustrating the Connection Between BFT and SCCT



Note. Adapted from Lent et al.'s (1994) social cognitive career theory.

To summarize, the broad focus of this study was on the intersection of race and gender in the workplace, as experienced by African American women pursuing leadership positions. I investigated the leadership experiences among African American women senior leaders, examining potential barriers and supports experienced during their path to leadership and the influence of outcome expectations on career goals and actions. The study was exploratory and inductive because of the dearth of research on this topic. For guidance purposes, I employed the lenses of BFT (Collins, 1990) and social cognitive career theory (see Figure 1; Lent et al., 1994). The goal was to help frame the research questions, develop an interview guide, and contextualize the potential findings. Thus, the following research questions formed the basis for the first preliminary study:

RQ1. How do African American women describe their current experience as a leader?

RQ2. What barriers and supports did African American women experience during their pathway to leadership?

RQ3. How did the outcome career aspirations and expectations of African American women in senior leadership positions influence their career goals and actions?

Methodology

An inductive qualitative exploratory study was conducted using semi-structured interviews with African American women leaders to address these research questions. The results of this exploratory phase of the research were used to develop a model and testable hypothesis and conduct a quantitative study on a larger sample by employing developed and existing survey scales (see Creswell, 2015). Thus, the overall design of this two-part research project was a mixed-methods approach to triangulate and offer findings with specificity, depth, and limited generalizability (see Schoonenboom & Johnson, 2017). Using a qualitative or quantitative method alone would not achieve the breadth of inquiry desired for this study.

The exploratory sequential design was selected because of its focus on collecting and analyzing qualitative data before building the quantitative phase of the study. In this case, the goal of the quantitative phase was to measure the salient variables discovered when interpreting participants' perspectives (see Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). An explanatory sequential design was inappropriate for this study because such a design focused on collecting qualitative data in the second phase to help explain the quantitative

data collected in the first phase (see Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). A convergent design was also inappropriate because this design was used to collect quantitative and qualitative data simultaneously to compare or corroborate findings (see Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018).

Sample

The target population for this exploratory study was African American women in the United States who successfully secured senior leadership positions in higher education (HE) institutions. This study used a purposive sampling technique to obtain a sample of 10 to 13 individuals from this population. Purposive sampling is a technique that researchers use to select participants who obtain specific characteristics, knowledge, or experiences related to the topic of investigation (Etikan et al., 2016). I identified the target population using the professional social media network LinkedIn. I located HE presidents (self-identified) who presented as African American in their pictures and sent them detailed interview invitations.

Interview Protocol

As the researcher and interviewer, I was the primary instrument in this study. Data were collected using in-depth, semi-structured interviews guided by a researcher-developed interview protocol. I developed the interview protocol based on the research questions found in the literature.

I had an expert panel review the interview protocol. An interview protocol is often implemented by qualitative researchers to enhance interview questions' content validity and ensure the questions are worded clearly and free from bias (Rosenthal, 2016). The expert panel consisted of three experts: Two were experts in business administration, and

one was an expert in qualitative research methodology. Any recommended changes to the interview protocol were implemented before data collection began (see Appendix B for final interview guide questions).

Data Collection Procedures

The first step in the data collection process was to obtain approval from the university's Institutional Review Board (IRB). After gaining approval from the IRB, I used LinkedIn to identify African American women in senior leadership positions and reach out to them directly through LinkedIn's messaging system. Individuals willing to participate were interviewed through Zoom for 60 to 90 minutes using an in-depth, semi-structured interview protocol. However, before conducting the interviews, I required that each participant read and sign a letter of informed consent, acknowledging that they understood their rights and were volunteering to participate. With the participants' permission, interviews were recorded, and responses to the interview questions were transcribed by a qualified third party who worked under a nondisclosure agreement.

Data Analysis

Interview data were analyzed using NVivo software and a six-step thematic analysis (Braun et al., 2014). The six steps in thematic analysis are (a) becoming familiar with the data, (b) developing initial codes, (c) grouping codes to create themes, (d) evaluating the relevance of themes based on the research questions and context, (e) organizing and labeling themes, and (f) reporting the findings (Braun et al., 2014). I completed the first step of familiarizing myself with the data by reading and rereading the interview transcriptions (see Braun et al., 2014). I completed the second step by highlighting small portions of text that I felt were significant and connected with the

research questions, then assigned codes to the highlighted text (see Braun et al., 2014). The coding scheme I used includes initial coding during the first cycle and pattern coding during the second cycle (see Saldaña, 2016). During the third step, I combined similar codes in context to create themes (see Braun et al., 2014). I accomplished the fourth step by assessing the themes that emerged from the data to determine their relevance to the research questions and identify any themes that needed to be combined. In the fifth step, I organized the themes and labeled them based on their context or content (see Braun et al., 2014). Finally, I developed a narrative account of the results in the sixth step.

Rigor in Qualitative Research

In qualitative research, rigor is assessed according to perceptions of trustworthiness in the research procedures used (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Perceptions of trustworthiness are based on four concepts: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Credibility and transferability are related to validity, whereas dependability and confirmability are related to reliability (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Credibility

According to Korstjens and Moser (2018), credibility relates to the confidence level evident that the results accurately depict participants' shared experiences. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) posited that the credibility of a study might be reduced because of researcher biases that influence results or unintentionally sway the interpretation of findings. In this study, I took several measures to enhance credibility. First, I conducted member checking, a technique characterized by sharing interview transcriptions with participants before data analysis to ensure I accurately translated their responses to interview questions. Additionally, I engaged in *researcher reflexivity*, which involved

documenting potential personal experiences, viewpoints, or biases that could influence the research process (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). Lastly, I asked the previously mentioned expert panel review to evaluate the interview protocol, which enhanced the credibility of this study.

Researcher reflexivity

As an African American woman on the senior leadership team at an HE institution, I had a personal connection with this study. I believe my race and gender provided comfort to some participants and aided them in being honest and transparent during the interviews. Also, my experience assisted in creating the semi-structured interview protocol to provide open-ended questions that would allow the senior leaders to share the details of their career journey experiences. Lastly, my lived experience as an African American woman allowed me to receive their responses without judgment or filter. I also believe identity allowed me to identify critical aspects of their narratives and follow up with exploratory questions about their experiences, which increased their comfort in openly expressing themselves during the interview process.

Transferability

Transferability denotes the degree to which qualitative research results can be used for other populations, settings, and contexts (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). I increased the transferability of this study by providing in-depth descriptions of the research phenomenon, how it relates to the study's context and potential implications for practice. The transferability of this study was also enhanced by including detailed descriptions of the data collection procedures and data analysis techniques so future scholars,

practitioners, and leaders can establish whether the study's findings are applicable to alternative situations.

Dependability

Korstjens and Moser (2018) contended that dependability in qualitative research relates to how stable results are over time, given the research procedures used. My use of an audit trail will enhance the dependability of this study. According to Merriam and Tisdell (2016), "an audit trail in a qualitative study describes in detail how data were collected, how categories were derived, and how decisions were made throughout the inquiry" (p. 252). The expert panel review for the interview protocol enhanced this study's dependability.

Confirmability

Confirmability in qualitative research relates to how other researchers can verify results (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). As for dependability, the confirmability of this study was enhanced through an audit trail. Specifically, the audit trail comprised a detailed description of the data analysis process. The process included the coding scheme, the interview protocol and results of the expert panel review, and interview transcriptions as bases of evidence supporting other researchers' corroboration.

Ethical Concerns

A researcher's responsibility is to conduct ethical research that aligns with the principles of respect for persons, beneficence, and justice outlined in the *Belmont Report* (Arifin, 2018). During the research process, several actions were taken to ensure that the principles of ethical research are considered. First, I did not begin the data collection process before gaining approval from the university's IRB to make sure that my

procedures aligned with the principles of ethical research involving human subjects. I also required all participants to sign a letter of informed consent before beginning interviews to assure participants voluntarily participated and understood their right to withdraw without penalty (see Arifin, 2018).

Additionally, I adhered to the principle of beneficence by asking questions in the interviews that do not inherently elicit emotional responses from the interviewees (Moser & Korstjens, 2018). I also adhered to ethical principles by maintaining the confidentiality of participants' responses to interview questions using pseudonyms (i.e., Participant 1) in place of personally identifiable information. Finally, all data were kept secure on a password-protected hard drive that was not shared with anyone. After 5 years, I will permanently delete the data from the hard drive.

Study 1 Results

The interview findings were derived from the responses of 13 African American women in the United States who successfully secured senior leadership positions in HE institutions as current or past presidents. Four participants shared that their current roles were their first executive-level positions in the HE setting. The other nine participants had prior executive-level leadership experiences in HE institutions. All 13 participants shared that they never planned or aspired to be a college president.

The findings indicate some of the relationships among some of the constructs proposed in Figure 1 in which race and gender, contextual influences, environmental influences, and motivational influences may contribute to African American women's past and current experiences of leadership in HE institutions. Seven significant findings emerged from the analysis. Descriptions of the findings with evidence from direct quotes

from the interviews are presented in the following sections. An overview of the findings, the research question alignment, the number of supporting participants, and number of occurrences in the coded text is shown in Table 2, which qualitatively supports the connections between BFT And SCCT constructs proposed in Figure 1.

Table 2

Overview of Findings

RQ alignment	Finding	No. of supporting participants	No. of occurrences in the text
RQ1	Perceived characteristics needed by Black women for success in securing a leadership role	13	76
RQ2	Experiences of the barriers from the intersectionality of gender and race	12	121
	Sources of motivation and inspiration	8	22
	Leaders, women, colleagues, and other professionals who understand the struggles	12	22
RQ3	Motivational influences of goal progress	13	92
	Motivational influences of outcome expectations	13	52
	Motivational influences of social network	12	25

The 13 African American women interviewed described their current experiences as leaders, which involved personal characteristics that contributed to success in securing a senior leadership position in the HE setting. This significant finding was subdivided into two characteristics: self-awareness and resilience. Self-awareness involved the participants' strategic thinking throughout their pathway to leadership. Resilience entailed the participants' endurance and persistence amidst the challenges they encountered on the path to leadership.

Being Self-Aware of Applying Strategies in Leadership

All 13 participants disclosed experiences of self-awareness as part of their strategies in their senior leadership roles. The participants shared that other people, especially White males, tended to undermine their authority for being female, Black, or both. The participants reported being self-aware of their strategies to maintain authority in their current leadership roles. Participant 1 stated, “I’m a strategic thinker. I’m humble. I’ve figured out how to play the game. How to play the game and win.” Participant 4 had similar perceptions as Participant 1, such that she also expressed self-awareness in how and when to act. Participant 4 shared,

But I think humility, patience, and self-awareness are critical to being successful. I think being strategic, knowing how and when to push and when to let off, and just having the ability to frame very carefully the words that you use and the things that you say that doesn't put people on defense.

Participant 2 also discussed self-awareness through remaining humble. Participant 2 explained that having a “big head” hinders her from seeing what she needs to do as a leader. Participants 4 and 8 referred to self-awareness as being focused on their tasks in their current roles. Participant 4 described being focused as her ability to “compartmentalize and not internalize” her problems. She did not take the issues at work personally and chose to accomplish her tasks as needed. Participant 4 remarked, “I can compartmentalize it, I can let it roll off my back. I can do whatever needs to happen to get through and get to a place where I'm okay with the outcomes.” Participant 8 also did not take the problems at work personally. Participant 8 shared that she focused on her “mission” as a leader in a HE institution. With her focus on the job, Participant 8 shared

that she did not think about the influences of her dispositions, such as gender, race, and age:

I think it's important, one, to understand, or to be really clear on what you're here to do. Especially if you're in Higher Education, what is the mission of our industry? And what part of that mission are you there to fulfill? And you need to be reminded of that, or remind yourself of that every single day. So for me, I never wake up feeling like a woman, I never wake up feeling like a Black ... My race and my gender and my age, for me, have nothing to do with my leadership.

Participant 1 shared that knowing what she wanted to achieve in her leadership role did not only result in being focused on her tasks but also in being assertive in accomplishing her goals. Participant 1 stated, "You have to assert yourself. You have to know what you're going to let go and what you're going to stand up for." However, Participant 4 added that as a Black woman in leadership, she needed to be self-aware and cautious of assertive behaviors, as other people had preconceived beliefs that Black women tended to be aggressive. Participant 4 shared, "I had to be aware, always aware of the perceptions that others may have of me and try to see things through their lens, and adjust myself and my approach accordingly."

Being Resilient and Persistent Through Challenges

Nine participants generally described the personal characteristics needed in their current leadership roles, including resilience and persistence. The terms resilient, persistent, and hardworking were often used together when describing the personal characteristics of a Black female leader. The participants shared that they encountered challenges as women and African Americans in senior leadership in HE institutions. Participants 6, 8, 10, and 12 specified that the challenges were not necessarily barriers but trials that helped them become enhanced leaders. Participant 6 remarked, "I can't say that

there were barriers. Challenging situations, yes, but they just build character; they make you stronger.”

Participant 1 also faced challenges in her role but reiterated that she could persist and overcome the obstacles. Participant 1 expressed, “I'm resilient, right? Like hardships don't have to kill you. Like yeah. They bring you down. Yes, you have some scars. You learn, but I feel like a Phoenix. I can rise from the ashes.” Participant 1 also perceived that resilience and persistence did not necessarily mean she should continue to endure the problems at work. Participant 1 believed that knowing when and having the resolve to “walk away” for the sake of her mental health were also signs of her strength, as she could negotiate her boundaries. Participant 1 expressed,

I walked away. It wasn't a life sentence ... And regardless of how people are going to perceive it, to have the courage to do that and to be able to negotiate a better deal than what I was getting as a president. So yeah, I'm getting a better deal. I'm working reasonable hours, and I'm able to enjoy my kids right now. And that was a really hard decision.

Participant 2 attributed resilience and persistence to tenacity or having “thick skin.” Participant 2 contended that women in HE leadership generally did not have the same treatment as male leaders, in which double standards existed in the HE setting. The participant perceived that having thick skin was an essential characteristic needed in leadership. Participant 2 described,

Well, certainly tenacity, the ability to just stay focused, redirect when necessary, work extremely hard. I would say having a thick skin, because people... I don't think we women in higher ed get treated necessarily the same way as men. I just recently attended a ... With my very first in person Presidents Conference and some of the women presidents were getting together and talking about some of the shenanigans that some of the men have been involved in and saying, that if we had done that, we would have been promptly dismissed or we just felt like we wouldn't have gotten the same response.

Participant 2, along with Participants 7, 8, 10, 12, and 13, also perceived that resilience and persistence were related to their passion to serve in HE institutions.

Participant 7 stated, “I think that you certainly have to be really, really passionate about the work that you are doing. I think that persistence matters.” Participant 2 expanded,

Intellectual curiosity combined with a desire to serve. So, I mean, you can have people who are hard workers, but I could have been a hard worker and stayed in my box at the City when I was a City employee ... [I decided] I'm just going to run for office and then tell these people what to do. And then after I did that and saw some of the limitations for systemic change, then I was like, "Well shoot, I'm just going to go run a college so I can help people do better."

Experiences of the Barriers From the Intersectionality of Gender and Race

All 13 participants contributed to the experiences of barriers related to their gender and race in their pathway to leadership. As a Black woman journeying to leadership in HE institutions, the participants generally experienced inequities, subversion, bias, and discrimination. However, findings emerged from a minority of participants in which they experienced barriers specific only to being a woman, being Black, as well as being young. Four participants shared that gender-specific barriers included double standards for men and women, gender roles, and male dominance in the institution. Two participants shared race-specific barriers because of the general prejudice against Black individuals and because of being an immigrant who also experienced a language barrier. Two participants experienced being undermined in the workplace because they were younger than their counterparts and subordinates.

Inequities in workplace experiences

The inequities experienced in the workplace were observed by the 13 participants when they compared their own experiences to the experiences of White men, White

women, and Black men in HE leadership. Participant 6 stated that Black women lacked opportunities and mentorship when attempting to become a leader in HE institutions. Participant 6 explained that because of fewer opportunities than males and White females, Black women tended to have smaller and less diverse professional networks from which a guru could see their potential and choose to mentor them. Participant 6 stated, “Your mentorship could happen across the spectrum of diversity, and that’s networking, that’s mentorship ... That’s someone who sees you, understands what you bring to the table, and sees you in your authentic self.” Participant 7 believed similarly:

I don't know if it's a barrier as much as it is a limitation, because there's not a lot of people that you can go to and reference and talk about what this space looks like or what you need to do to even get into this space.

Participant 7 also perceived that Black women needed to work harder than their male and White counterparts. Participant 7 expressed, “I feel like sometimes the expectation is that we have to work harder in order to make it to the same positions as our other colleagues of a different race or of a different ... That’s a male.” Participant 3 experienced bias in the workplace, as her predecessor was a White male. Participant 3 shared that her counterparts and subordinates had biases about how women should act. Participant 3 stated, “They expected women to be a certain way. To be nice. To be convivial.” Specific to obtaining doctorate degrees as part of the path to HE leadership, Participant 2 shared that Black women did not have the same access to financial support as their male counterparts:

People who came up through a traditional academic track may not have experienced as much financial support along the way as maybe some of their White counterparts, because a lot of times folks who are not Black or not first generation, they may have more financial support from a variety of sources to help them to do fellowships and complete the doctorate.

Compared to White males, three participants perceived that double standards existed. Participants 4, 5, 8, 10, and 11 believed that they, as Black women, could not act or say certain things that White males could. Participant 4 perceived that White males and Black females had the “largest gap” in terms of double standards. Participant 4 perceived that Black women did not get “the benefit of the doubt” afforded to White men. Participant 4 reported that Black women needed to be cautious of coming off as aggressive and often dealt with other people doubting their credentials, while White men’s authority was seldom challenged. Participant 8 noted that her superior did not treat her the same way as her White male predecessor:

My new boss, who's an older White guy, he said to me, "Oh, I'm going to have to watch the way I talk about you," because my predecessor was a White guy that was his age. And I was like, "Why? I want to hear this, too. What are you talking about with him that you can't share with me?" But even with that, it was the expectation that because I'm young, I'm Black and I'm female, there's something he has to change about his communication style.

Concerning White women, five participants perceived that Black women still experienced more barriers because of race. Participant 7 perceived that being Caucasian was an advantage that White women had over Black women. Participant 7 stated, “I’ll go to Caucasian females, I think that their similarity in race with the majority culture does give them somewhat a leg up.” Participants 1 and 5 noted that White women tended to have privileges that Black women did not have. Participant 1 stated, “I think White women get a lot of passes. I mean, not to say like things aren't hard for them as women, but they get a lot of passes.” Participant 5 worked in a White male-dominated department with another White woman. Participant 5 shared that the White woman initially identified

with the White men because they were White. The White men also accepted the White woman:

I have a department that is predominantly, well, no, it is all White men and one White woman teaching in this particular discipline. And yet, they almost act like the White woman in there is one of them, and they just ignore the gendered role that she brings to the table.

As for the comparison with Black men, Participant 1 perceived that Black women and Black men had the most similar experiences of inequities in the workplace. On the contrary, Participant 2 insisted that Black men experienced less inequities than Black women, as they experienced less scrutiny of their authority than Black women.

Participant 2 revealed, “I’m sure there are some parallels to the experience. Though, I think, the Black males probably receive a little less scrutiny than a Black female.”

Being undermined

Nine participants reported their experiences of barriers in their pathway to leadership concerning subversion. The participants explained that their authority was often undermined, and they were often underestimated as Black female HE leaders. Six participants said Black women’s work and leadership potential were often not seen or noticed. Participant 1 additionally perceived that Black women did not know how to leverage themselves to be seen. Participant 1 stated, “I think generally Black women don't know how to ... They're not given visibility. And I think a lot of the times we don't know how to make ourselves visible, internally and externally.” Participant 7 also believed that Black women were unseen because they had fewer opportunities than men and women of different racial backgrounds:

And in some regards, there are less experiences and less opportunities because they have not been granted to you. So, unless you make those opportunities and you seek those experiences for yourself, you can find

that some of your peers, some of your counterparts, whether they're male or female of different races might have had those experiences.

Participant 7 added that Black women also had weaker networks than their counterparts. The participant perceived that African Americans have weaker networks than White males and females because of family connections in which African American families did not have as many connections as White families. Participant 4 described barriers to career advancement for Black women's weak professional network. Participant 4 disclosed, "I think that just the fact that our networks aren't as strong, as broad or as deep is certainly a challenge that causes us to not be promoted as equitably as our counterparts."

Participants 3 and 7 noted that Black women were undermined because they had to prove themselves using measures not meant for Black women. Participant 7 expressed, "I think probably the biggest barriers were having others to recognize that I deserved the seat at the table and that I did not have to do more than everyone else." As a person of color, Participant 3 perceived that Black women were not seen due to a significant chunk of their work being uncredited:

I think that for many of us, there's of course a real commitment and passion for making our students lives better, and other faculty of color, women of color, lives better, to support them. The kind of work that we do outside of writing papers is not seen as having credit. If you've got 15 students coming to your office every other day, students of color, women students who need you, who want your advice, that doesn't matter ... if you're involved in any activist activities, or advocacy, that's seen as not tenurable. That doesn't count, and can even count against you, because of politics.

Participant 1 shared her experience of having her authority undermined by a White male subordinate. The participant shared that her subordinate did not regard her decisions as the final word and often waited for the words of the male president.

However, Participant 1 also stated that the male subordinate only communicated with other males and did not interact with his female counterparts:

I have like one guy who reports to me. What I say really doesn't matter. At the end of the day, he's waiting to hear like what the president says, what the male says. And I see when he interacts, he will talk to other White males, but he won't really interact with the women. His conversation is always directed, and his engagement directed to men.

Prejudice and discrimination against Black women

Six participants experienced prejudice and discrimination on their pathway to HE leadership. The bias and discriminatory behavior toward the participants were often linked with both racism and sexism. Participant 3 emphasized, "I think that racism and sexism are at the root of it ... there's no way around it." The participants believed that other people had preconceived stereotypical perceptions about Black women. The common stereotype was the "angry Black woman." Participant 2 stated, "Just stereotypes about Black women that are confident being perceived as maybe aggressive, just unconscious bias...those are things that can make it difficult." Participant 2 also shared that other people had biased beliefs that Black people tended to have poorer performance than non-Black people. Participant 2 remarked, "I think, people have had lower expectations of me, probably, just because of race." Participant 5 had similar perceptions:

Of course, the perception. I also think that, and you hear this also about faculty, too. And I read an article, as Black people in general, we're on every committee, we're doing all this stuff. And sometimes because of that, we "don't get our work done." And then we get judged by it, right?

Participant 3 experienced discriminatory behavior because of the way she styled herself as any Black woman would. Participant 3 revealed, "I think the way that we look, they're not used to seeing women who have locks, or braids. They're not used to seeing women with the kind of jewelry, even the jewelry that we wear." Participant 8, an

immigrant from Jamaica, shared that she did not see herself in terms of race, age, or gender before coming to the United States:

I wasn't raised in a house where I was told, "You got to work twice as hard, and do twice as much." I wasn't raised with race being a barrier, ever ... I remember my mother saying, she didn't know she was Black until she got to America. So, it's never something that I spent a lot of time thinking about.

Participant 8 perceived that “dealing with stereotypes” about her race and gender was a challenge. As a woman, Participant 8 pointed out, “If you advocate for yourself, are you bossy, are you pushy?” As a woman of color, Participant 8 described her experience:

Last week, I went to go speak at the City Council in one of the counties where we serve, and I was leaving the restroom, one of the council members asked me if I was done cleaning the bathrooms. And so, by the same token, clearly, it's 2022, and you think that the only reason a woman of color would be leaving the restroom is because she just finished cleaning it.

Unequal career advancement opportunities

On the pathway to advancing their career in HE leadership, ten participants perceived that they, as Black women, did not have equal opportunities as their male and non-Black counterparts. Black women experienced barriers to career advancement, starting from the hiring stage to the promotion stage. When applying for a job, Participant 4 perceived that she was more qualified than the other candidates but was rejected, possibly because of her race:

Well, I think my race has been a barrier. I know that there were a couple of positions that I applied for and interviewed for and was the candidate that had the greatest amount of experience, and I think it came down to race. I mean, I can't prove that, of course, but it doesn't make any sense otherwise.

Participant 4 also perceived that her career advancement was held back because of her race. Participant 4 explained, “And part of it is probably because I think there's this underlying notion that we have accepted you, so you need to stay here.” Conversely, Participants 1 and 6 did not experience difficulty securing a job. However, both participants perceived that they got the job so that the institution could fulfill the diversity requirements. Participant 1 said, “Like they bring you in to make it look good, but they don't really care for your opinion.”

Participants 2 and 5 believed that their pathway to leadership would have been faster if they were not Black women. Participant 2 perceived that she would have received more support and would have found a mentor who would help her advance her career if she were not a Black woman. Participant 5 perceived that Black women’s career advancement had a slower pace than their White and male counterparts because they needed to have more qualifications than needed:

We look at a job description, if there's 10 things, we will apply if we got 11. Whereas men, "I'm not one of them, so I'm going to apply." Right? And I think for Black women, it's even more so, right? Because we know when we show up, we've got to do it. So, I'm not going to take a job that I'm like, "Ooh, I'm not sure I know the budget." Because when I come in, I want to slay it, right?

Sources of Motivation and Inspiration

Thirteen participants shared that the support they received in their pathway to HE leadership was linked with their sources of motivation and inspiration to keep going. The participants generally shared that their sources of motivation and inspiration were their families, friends, and mentors. Only Participant 6 shared that she was inspired and motivated by the students in the institution:

I'm inspired by all people who decide that they want to go to school. Because I know there's some sacrifice, there's some mission that they're on and I'm here for it all. So, students, people who want to learn really they inspire me more than anything else.

Participants 1, 2, and 8 were motivated and inspired by their families and friends.

All three participants cited the support of their husbands in their careers. Participants 1 and 2 stated that their husbands' support was "important" to their careers. Their husbands both shared the responsibility of taking care of their children. Participant 8 described her husband's support as, "I had to have a husband, or a partner, whose masculinity was not threatened by my success, or my earning potential, or my degrees."

Participants 1, 8, and 11 also felt motivated and inspired by their children.

Participant 1 shared that cuddling with her children after work relieved her stress and helped her "recenter" herself. Participant 11 shared that her daughter reminds her of her credentials and worth whenever she may be over the role, "declaring shenanigans in higher ed." Participant 8 shared that her child was supportive of her career and did not blame her for being busy:

I only have one child, but I had to accept that I really love my work. And my child's going to always be my child, but there's many times I had to pick work over motherhood. I had a child who said, "I know you like what you do." That means the world to me, to not have a child that says, "Oh, you neglect me." That's really helpful, to have that support, because when you lead, leadership is selfish. Very, very selfish, and you need a support system who's like, "You know what? I know that you're called to do something great, and so I'm going to sacrifice to help you do that."

Participant 8 also shared that her friends outside the HE setting motivated and inspired her. Her trusted friends helped her remember her mission as a leader and helped her remain accountable for her choices. Participant 8 expressed,

I would have to say, if I think about true friends that I have, the list is definitely less than 10, and maybe closer to five to seven. But there are

people who understand what I'm passionate about. And they are similarly passionate. And so, when we're talking, we speak a similar language, or we can get together, and just not talk about this work. We can just shoot the breeze, and act like we're kindergartners again, and that's been helpful.

Participants 1, 7, and 8 shared that their mentors were part of their support system that motivated and inspired them. All three participants had White and male mentors who supported their career advancement. Participant 1 shared, “And having some excellent White male mentors, like people who just wanted to see me succeed and with nothing in return to them, other than the satisfaction of seeing me succeed, those things have been really important.” Participant 8 perceived that her ability to deal with White men was a result of being “trained” by older White men. Participant 8 stated, “I've been trained by old White guys. And so ... I walk into a room of White males, 70-year-olds, and I'm home. I'm very comfortable.” Participant 7 shared her experiences of male mentors in which she felt she belonged. Participant 7 shared, “That quite a few of them have been males. Certainly, some African American males, but I've also had very, very good Caucasian males that have been incredible in terms of just inviting me into the space and encouraging me.”

Leaders, women, colleagues, and other professionals who understand the struggles

Seven participants perceived that they received support from other leaders, women, and colleagues in their pathway to leadership. Participant 7 shared that other HE institution presidents were her “best support system” because they understood the scenarios. Participant 7 specified talking to two Black male presidents who provided different perspectives on how to address the issues she encountered. The advice of the male presidents was drawn from their own professional experiences. Participant 7 shared,

There are times where I have to take what they say and how they say it differently because they're using their maleness. They're using their baritone to make it clear that, I mean X, Y, Z, and ABC. But they've been wonderful in terms of giving me [real examples that they've dealt with and maybe similar to what I'm dealing with.

Participants 3 and 4 regarded other HE leaders as their colleagues. The participants generally perceived that their colleagues were part of their support system in their pathway to leadership. Participant 3 perceived that talking to other presidents was more accessible than talking to their co-workers because they could not disclose all the issues to their co-workers.

Participant 1 shared her experiences of talking to other executive-level women. The participant perceived that while talking to friends helped her relieve stress, her non-executive friends did not truly understand her problems. Participant 1 shared,

Executive level, some women who are independently wealthy [know] what it's like, how hard it is. And I have some friends who don't get it, but we're just like, okay, when the shit hits the fan or when you having a hard time, yeah. I just hang out with them.

Nonetheless, Participant 1 reiterated the importance of her “sister circles” to her support system:

I have a group of diverse women locally on whom I rely on, and we get together. We do things for each other as women when we hear another woman coming through. So, it's mostly White women, but there are a number of us who are Black women who just got a brand new Black president of the hospital. We made a party, we had a party for her. Someone who comes in, when I came in, they had a party for me, and I became part of the circle.

Participant 7 was also part of a group of women who helped each other. The group was within the HE institution. Participant 7 shared how the support group helped her and the other women navigate the workplace and eventually advance their careers or receive tenure:

There was a group of women there who were non-tenured, and we formed a support group. Through that group, all of us eventually got tenured. That group really helped me to navigate, to navigate being a Black woman in academia. All of us weren't all Black women. One woman was Latino. A woman was White. There were a couple of lesbian women, biwomen, White women, Jewish. It was a very mixed group, but we all supported each other, and we all talked about that intersectionality in our identities, and how people's expectations of us, and so on. We really gave each other strategies and sometimes even role played how to talk to your department chair.

Motivational influences of goal progress

Goal progress was one of the influences on career choices and actions, as experienced by all 13 participants. This finding was two-fold: Goal progress may be motivational, but hindrances to goal progress may be demotivational for Black female leaders. Six participants shared that at some point in their pathway to leadership, they felt discouraged to continue; however, despite feeling dejected, the participants generally shared that they did not think of giving up. Participants 1 and 6 looked back at their progress and felt motivated to “push through.” Participant 6 shared her volunteering experiences at Habitat for Humanity, where she helped build a house. She likened the experience to her pathway to leadership and stated that progress did not happen overnight.

Participant 8 also felt discouraged at some point but did not give up as she thought of losing her progress in leading “transformational change” in the institution:

I think about people like Doctor King, or Gandhi, or anyone who's ever been part of transformational change. I'm pretty sure that they had those same thoughts. And I always think, what would have happened if Doctor King gave up? What would have happened if certain people? Where would we be as a nation if people gave up? And so, not that I think I'm Doctor King, but I know giving up is not what I was called to do.

Although progress motivated some participants, five participants shared that hindrances to their goal decreased their motivation. Participant 1 shared her experiences of being unable to receive the salary she wanted and resolved to leave the institution:

If he's going to not going to give me \$5,000 more, I'm willing to leave the organization," and I was. So, in my mind, like this either happens or I fake it while I'm there, still do my job, fake happiness, but ultimately have an exit strategy, so that's what I did.

Participants 1 and 7 also shared their experiences needing other people's affirmation to validate their progress. Participant 7 shared her worry about being her "authentic self" at work because her behaviors and appearance might derail her progress when other people have stereotypical notions about Black women.

Motivational influences of outcome expectations

All the participants perceived that the imagined results of their actions motivated their career decisions. Twelve participants shared the motivational influences of their expectations that being a leader in HE institutions may lead to changes that would improve the situation for other people of color. Participant 8 shared,

[These] really are important to me ... being able to improve access and retention and graduation rates of Men of Color, which was my focus when I was doing my doctoral studies. Or, People of Color. Access to really marginalized, underserved communities. Being able to watch people mobilize themselves socially and economically.

Participant 7 was initially contented with being the vice president and had no aspirations of becoming the president. However, when George Floyd's murder became news, she questioned herself and became motivated to do more than what she was doing.

Participant 7 expressed,

I know and knew that as the executive vice president, a lot of what was happening I was controlling it. That's how it happens when you're the VP, it kind of. But I question myself on was that enough. Did I allow enough

young African American females or males to see me? Did I allow enough first-generation low-income college students to understand that I know them and I see them? Was I hiding behind that role and what can I do more of? So, after that happened, I started to rethink what was required of me.

Participants 3 and 8 were motivated by the outcome expectations of their servitude. Participant 8 shared, “I don't love the role as much as I love the opportunity to have a greater impact for those that I serve.” Participant 6 believed that she used her leadership role to advocate for equity for students of color:

My orientation is one that believes in bringing diverse voices to the table, supporting students, advocating for equity, do things that make everyone sort of access education at the way they should, regardless of their backgrounds and their experiences.

Motivational influences of social support network

Twelve participants shared the motivational influences of their social support network on their career goals and actions. Four participants perceived that their small personal and professional network supported and encouraged them to pursue the pathway to HE leadership. Participant 2 shared,

There haven't really been a lot of instances where the people who were personally close to me were able to help me advance in my career. They provided more personal support. But, more my professional network was helpful, as far as people I met who had common interests would try to guide me in the right direction on professional moves.

Participant 8 differentiated her personal and professional network and perceived the motivational influences of her professional network. She perceived that her professional network was a source of information and resources that helped her on her pathway to leadership. Her professional network was comprised of other leaders who understood her mission. Participant 8 shared,

And so, that network has been essential, because when I need information, when I need resources, I can reach out at any time, and rely on that network, and there's an understanding that we don't have to be friends. But we are leaders in this space, and we have a mission that is very similar.

Summary of the Findings

The findings of this study were aligned with the BFT and SCCT framework in that career choice goals and actions were influenced by personal inputs, environmental influences, and motivational influences. To reiterate, the purpose of the study was to answer the following three research questions: (a) How do African American women describe their current experience as a leader? (b) What barriers and supports did African American women experience during their pathway to leadership? and (c) How did the outcome expectations of African American women in senior leadership positions influence their career goals and actions? An inductive, qualitative exploratory study was conducted using semi-structured interviews with African American women leaders to address these research questions. Seven critical themes were identified, as discussed more in the following section: (a) perceived characteristics needed by Black women for success in securing a leadership role; (b) experiences of the barriers from the intersectionality of gender and race; (c) sources of motivation and inspiration; (d) leaders, women, colleagues, and other professionals who understand the struggles; (e) motivational influences of goal progress, (f) motivational influences of outcome expectations; and (g) motivational influences of social support network.

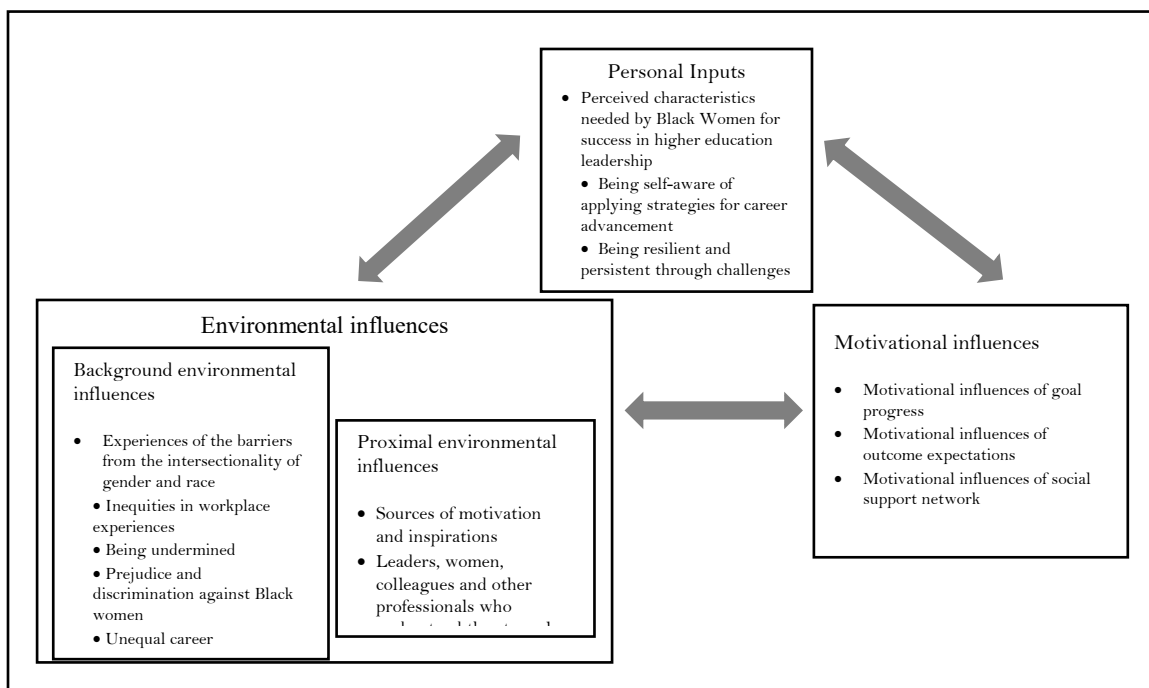
Discussion and Implications

Figure 2 is an overview of the framework that potentially captures the results of this study. It shows how the characteristics of Black women, the context of the intersectionality of gender and race, the support and barriers to securing a senior

leadership role, the goal progress, outcome expectations, and social support network influenced their career advancement. In its entirety, this framework contributes to the study.

Figure 2

Suggested Framework of Personal Inputs, Environmental Influences, and Motivational Influences



This framework correlated to the research questions and the seven critical themes identified: (a) perceived characteristics needed by Black women for success in securing a leadership role; (b) experiences of the barriers from the intersectionality of gender and race; (c) sources of motivation and inspiration; (d) leaders, women, colleagues, and other professionals who understand the struggles; (e) motivational influences of goal progress, (f) motivational influences of outcome expectations; and (g) motivational influences of social support network. Theme (a) pertained to RQ1, whereas Themes (b) to (d) pertained

to RQ2, and Themes (e) to (g) pertained to RQ3. These key themes can be addressed in the context of literature and theory.

Discussion

The discussion of key themes is divided based on the themes of the resulting framework. Seven critical themes were identified, as discussed in this section: (a) perceived characteristics needed by Black women for success in securing a leadership role; (b) experiences of the barriers from the intersectionality of gender and race; (c) sources of motivation and inspiration; (d) leaders, women, colleagues, and other professionals who understand the struggles; (e) motivational influences of goal progress, (f) motivational influences of outcome expectations; and (g) motivational influences of social support network.

Personal inputs

When describing their leadership experience (RQ1), participants suggested only a single theme of “perceived characteristics needed by Black women for success in securing a leadership role.” All 13 participants’ responses addressed this theme, but the specific characteristics that the results revealed were not uniform. Instead of the various characteristics that the participants described, two key subthemes emerged that represented points of consensus. The first theme was self-awareness, and the second was resilience and persistence.

All 13 participants spoke to the subtheme of self-awareness as part of their strategies in their leadership roles. This theme addressed the need to be aware of continual efforts to undermine their leadership and to discern appropriate self-aware strategies to combat this continual undermining effort. This type of self-aware

strategizing to overcome a continuous threat speaks to the self-efficacy that Beckwith et al. (2016) suggested would characterize African American women who successfully rose to leadership positions. The awareness of these attempts to undermine their authority and the need to combat them, though, contradicts Lent et al.'s (2000) assertion that African American women with higher levels of self-efficacy may perceive challenges as less of an obstruction and more of an opportunity, as the participants instead saw the challenge of efforts to undermine their authority as an ongoing threat. This finding aligns with BFT (Collins, 2009) in that the participants received continual challenges to their authority because of their intersectional identities. The results also align with a significant body of research supporting African American women using powerful strategies to succeed (Benschop et al., 2015; Downs et al., 2015; Gamble & Turner, 2015; Hague & Okpala, 2017) as well as with the body of research and theory regarding emotional intelligence, of which self-awareness is a core characteristic (Bar-On, 2006).

The second subtheme, reported by nine of the 13 participants, was that of resilience and persistence, which were perceived as key characteristics in overcoming continual challenges. This finding also aligns with a core characteristic of emotional intelligence, as theorized by Bar-On (2006). The participants' perception of resilience and resistance as valuable assets for overcoming trials and growing aligns with Lent et al.'s (2000) understanding of how successful African American women would engage with such trials. At the same time, the emphasis on the need to possess these traits to overcome a multitude of trials aligns with the extensive research regarding the myriad barriers faced by African American women on the way to and in leadership positions (Alvarez-Cleveland, 2017; Barron, 2019; Rahman et al., 2016).

Environmental influences

Three themes arose when participants were asked to describe barriers and support experienced along their pathway to leadership (RQ2). These three themes were experiences of the barriers from the intersectionality of gender and race; sources of motivation and inspiration; and leaders, women, colleagues, and other professionals who understand the struggles.

The first theme relating to environmental influences pertains to barriers. The participants experienced a series of barriers, including inequities, subversion, bias, and discrimination. However, a subset of the participants also experienced barriers based on gender, such as double standards, barriers based on race or immigration status, or barriers based on seniority. These different sources of intersectional barriers strongly align with the foundational premises of BFT (Collins, 2009). At the same time, not all the barriers resulted from the intersection of Black and female issues. Instead, participants experienced an even more comprehensive array of intersectional barriers in some cases that showed the need for a broader conceptualization of intersectionality.

Regarding SCCT and BFT, these influences' second and third themes addressed supports. Between these two themes, the two different sources of support identified were inspiration/motivation and direct support from colleagues who understood their issues. The theme of motivation and inspiration aligns closely with social cognitive career theory (Lent et al., 1994), as SCCT is a theory of careers that considers motivation a key driver. Per Spurk and Abele (2014), motivation is also linked to self-efficacy. However, the participants in this study never identified self-efficacy as a source of motivation. Instead, most respondents cited motivation centered on other people, such as students or family

members, which questioned the utility of the self-efficacy aspect of motivation in the context of African American women leaders in HE.

Although these participants identified their motivation as coming from individuals, that motivation differed from the second theme, instead addressing sources of support from those who understood their struggles. Suppose motivation can be understood as coming from outside their professional context. In that case, the support theme should instead be understood as coming from within or adjacent to their professional context. SCCT posits that such support is essential to a successful career path (Lent et al., 1994), but identifying the actual support structures was one of the gaps in the literature that motivated this study. Hence, there is little literature against which to compare this aspect of the results.

Motivational influences

Lastly, three additional themes arose from this study that focused on participants' motivation and how their own outcome expectations in their leadership positions affected their career goals and actions (RQ3). Those three themes were motivational influences of goal progress, motivational influences of outcome expectations, and motivational influences of social support networks. All three of these themes reflected motivational effects as opposed to other effects. No themes reflected solely the negative effects of outcome expectations, although motivational effects could be positive or negative.

The first theme was related to the motivational effects of goal progress. The direction of goal progress can be positive or negative; making progress toward a goal was perceived as motivational, but setbacks in goal progress could be demotivational. Unlike the discussion of motivation in response to environmental influences, this theme better

reflects Spurk and Abele's (2014) notion of motivation being linked to self-efficacy. Progress toward a goal was proof of self-efficacy and improving motivation, or at least this finding is one way to interpret the theme. However, whereas SCCT links motivational effects explicitly to career path arcs, the participants in this study noted they did not consider giving up or changing course even when they experienced demotivational effects from lack of goal progress or setbacks.

The second theme was related to outcome expectations. Seven of the 13 participants found motivation in the idea that their positions as educational leaders could lead to changes that would improve the situation for other people of color. Unlike the dual motivational and demotivational effects of goal progress, this motivational effect was purely positive. This finding aligns with the literature (Barron, 2019; Lent & Brown, 2013) that indicates outcome expectation plays a larger role in career aspirations vis-à-vis leadership positions.

The final theme was related to social support networks. The motivational effects of social support networks were noted by half the participants and included both inside and outside of workplace support. Like outcome expectations, the motivation from social support networks was perceived as only a motivating factor, not a demotivational one. Social support was not a theme in the literature reviewed for this study, therefore representing a potentially valuable novel finding.

Implications for Theory

Based on the findings of Study 1 viewed through the lens of SCCT and BFT, some implications for theory are present. BFT emphasizes the intersectionality of gender and race for African American women and their many oppressions according to a central

concept, which is that African American women's experiences of oppression differ from those experienced by women from other groups (Collins, 1990), while SCCT helps illustrate how people develop interests, make decisions, and achieve goals related to education and career (Lent et al., 1994). This notion was supported by the findings in Study 1, where 12 participants expressed the importance of social motivations in their careers. The same finding about motivation and social support added depth to BFT as well, as Participant 1 reiterated the importance of her "sister circles" to her support system: "I have a group of diverse women locally on whom I rely on, and we get together." Participant 1 found more help from those of similar backgrounds and races than within their workplace, showing how the intersection of identity and race may influence decisions about who to trust.

SCCT indicates that central contextual factors, such as perceived obstacles and support, impact individual career aspirations and decisions (Lent et al., 1994). The findings of Study 1 not only aligned with SCCT and BFT, but also added to the validity of those theories. Social support from inside and outside the organization was identified as critical, as were outcome expectations and goal progress, enhancing the SCCT notion that perceived obstacles and support would influence one's career. For example, 12 participants shared the motivational influences of their social support network on their career goals and actions, aligning with SCCT and supporting the theory's assertion of the necessity of support in one's career. Four participants perceived that their small personal and professional network supported and encouraged them to pursue the pathway to HE leadership, adding depth to SCCT.

SCCT highlights the influence of background contextual factors and individual contributions on career-related self-efficacy perceptions and outcome expectations (Lent et al., 1994). Self-efficacy is a person's self-assessed ability to achieve a goal (Bandura, 1986), as shown in Study 1 with participants' comments. For example, the participants shared that they encountered challenges as women and African Americans in senior leadership in HE institutions. Participant 6 remarked, "I can't say that there were barriers. Challenging situations, yes, but they just build character; they make you stronger." This comment shows self-efficacy, adding to the SCCT's notion that self-efficacy may help a person overcome situations, especially the intersection of race and gender suggested by the BFT, in their careers. In conclusion, the study's findings added to and supported the SCCT and BFT, showing research based on these theories may uncover more connections.

Implications for Practice

Based on the study's results, several practical conclusions can be drawn. Overall, the study served its exploratory purpose well. The results relating to the first research question reveal a persistent and pervasive struggle for successful African American educational leaders. Although the study results suggest that successful leaders overcome the constant challenges to their authority through self-awareness strategies, these challenges suggest a need for better policy. Higher educational institutions should do more to ensure that educational leaders do not need to constantly expend their energy, avoiding the undermining of their authority based on race and gender.

The results of the second research question also suggest an ongoing need for policy solutions to address the identified barriers of subversion, bias, and discrimination.

However, the results support that HE institutions can foster a more supportive environment by building professional networks from which African American women leaders can draw support. At the same time, the results indicate that looking at the intersectionality of Black and women's issues may not be enough; instead, a more expansive intersectionality approach is needed. Results also indicate that outside support—such as help from families and friends—is a critical source of support. Educational institutions should ensure that their educational leaders have a healthy work-life balance.

The results of the third research question offer essential insight into motivations. Although the two factors of outcome expectation and social support were wholly positive, institutions cannot leverage them beyond what was already indicated. The factor of goal progress could potentially be leveraged, however. Higher educational institutions could potentially work to identify African American women leaders' goals more actively and, where possible, foster outcomes that support progress toward those goals to improve motivation and avoid the risk of worsening it.

Limitations

The prominence of self-reported data limited the results of the present study. Participants' responses could not be independently or empirically verified; however, the results were generally accepted as valid. Relatedly, the participants might have been affected by social desirability bias, leading them to give the type of answers they perceived as socially desirable. This bias might have intensified when participants wanted to please the researcher, a fellow African American woman in HE. Confidentiality

lowered the risk of this type of bias but did not eliminate it. Overall, this topic's risk of social desirability bias was likely low.

Another critical limitation of the study was that it only identified participants who had succeeded. This limitation made the study valuable for identifying those with the characteristics to overcome the challenges faced by African American women in HE leadership. However, because the study did not include those who failed on the way or achieved then lost leadership positions, its results focus more on factors leading to success than on barriers. As a result, the findings regarding barriers experienced were less extensive than they could have been if the lessons drawn from those who failed along their career paths had been included.

A third significant limitation of the study was the lack of potential for generalizability because of a relatively small sample size. Originally, the study was to include 12 to 15 participants. As a result, it was hard to be certain that full representations of the perceptions of the study population were fully captured. However, the final sample was defined at least in part by the practicality of identifying relevant participants interested in participating in the study. As a related issue, there was the potential for self-selection bias because the participants only represented a specific sample of the population amenable to participating in the study. Research ethics made this limitation unavoidable.

Future Directions

Based on the findings and limitations of the present study, several essential directions are present for future research to pursue. The first direction for future research is to repeat the present study with more participants from various backgrounds. The

present study was not substantially lacking in this regard. However, in addition to the aspect that repetition strengthens any findings, the sample size fell below the originally sought numbers; therefore. The results would be improved by combining them with the results of future replications.

Perhaps more importantly, a key direction for future research would be to explore the nature and patterns of experience among those who failed. Such research may target either African American women who strove to achieve leadership positions in HE but never did or African American women who achieved HE leadership positions but then lost them or fell short of their career objectives. Either of these populations may offer deeper insight into barriers. The present study identified some important barriers, but the results focused much more on the support side of the purpose. A deeper exploration of barriers alone may be precious. In the sense that identifying the barriers most likely lead to failure would enable specific policy efforts to eliminate or lower those barriers.

A third potential direction for future research would be to quantitatively investigate the strength of the supports identified in this study. The results showed that different supports registered with different numbers of participants. Understanding how many successful African American educational leaders utilize each type of support from a more empirical, quantitative perspective could have key benefits. Though all HE institutions could benefit from the practical implications of the present study, correctly identifying the most valuable to the broadest number of potential leaders could inform the decision of which factors and opportunities to prioritize.

A fourth potential direction for future research involves a similar quantitative inquiry but focused on the degree to which themes uncovered in Study 1 are present in

recently graduated African American women and how these themes might relate to these women's career goals. Such a study could more thoroughly investigate the role of social support/collegial understanding, the experience of intersectional barriers to advancement, self-efficacy, resilience, and career motivation in explaining the perceived career success of participants, thus shedding light on factors that could be addressed through policies and practices designed to increase career success for young African American women entering their careers. This focus was adopted for Study 2, discussed in subsequent chapters.

Conclusions

In conclusion, the general problem that this study addressed was that African American women were underrepresented as leaders in U.S. organizations. The specific research problem was that not enough information is known about African American women's experiences and expectations in their quest for leadership to make informed decisions regarding the necessary steps for personal and career management diversity, equity, and inclusion planning. The purpose of the present study was to answer the following three research questions to address this problem: (a) How do African American women describe their current experience as a leader? (b) What barriers and supports did African American women experience during their pathway to leadership? and (c) How did the outcome expectations of African American women in senior leadership positions influence their career goals and actions? In response to these research questions, the 13 participants yielded seven themes: (a) perceived characteristics needed by Black women for success in securing a leadership role; (b) experiences of the barriers from the intersectionality of gender and race; (c) sources of motivation and inspiration; (d) leaders,

women, colleagues, and other professionals who understand the struggles; (e) motivational influences of goal progress; (f) motivational influences of outcome expectations; and (g) motivational influences of social support network.

Overall, the findings of this study revealed the supports and factors that helped the participants overcome the barriers and factors that hindered them. As anticipated under the conceptual framework, motivational effects were vital to success, and intersectionality between African Americans' and women's barriers intensified resistance. However, although the participants felt their authority was constantly undermined, self-aware strategies, resilience, and perseverance helped them to succeed. Social support from inside and outside the organization was also identified as critical, as were outcome expectations and goal progress. The results also offered novel insight into the benefits of social support, a key result in the present study for which no precedent was found in the literature on African American women in HE leadership.

The intersectionality issues creating barriers for African American women's career path went beyond two critical factors of race and gender presented in BFT. The research sample also revealed additional factors of relative youth, language barriers, and other personal characteristics. Hence, a more expansive intersectionality perspective may be more helpful. By the same token, though SCCT was mainly supported, there were motivational effects that did not align with self-efficacy as motivation in SCCT typically does. This finding suggests the need for a more expansive understanding of motivation in SCCT, at least within HE leadership. To address this research need, a follow-up quantitative investigation (Study 2) was designed to determine which factors explain perceived career success for recently graduated African American women. Study 2 was

conducted because it was not known to what extent the key themes uncovered in Study 1—including social support/collegial understanding, the experience of intersectional barriers to advancement, self-efficacy, resilience, and career motivation—were present in recently graduated African American women and how these themes might relate to these women’s career goals. This investigation comprises Study 2 for this project and is discussed in subsequent chapters.

CHAPTER 4

STUDY 2: INTRODUCTION

Statement of the Problem

The research problem for Study 2 was that it was not known to what extent the key themes uncovered in Study 1—including social support/collegial understanding, the experience of intersectional barriers to advancement, self-efficacy, resilience, and career motivation—are present in recently graduated African American women and how these themes might relate to these women’s career goals. These factors were uncovered in the qualitative analysis performed in Study 1. In addition, these factors are supported in the existing literature. For example, Beckwith et al. (2016) addressed the value of self-efficacy to African American women in career success, while Lent et al.’s (2000) results also supported resilience.

The importance of intersectional barriers to Black women is emphasized in BFT (Collins, 2009), in addition to the results of Study 1. SCCT also posits the importance of social and collegial supports, in alignment with the results of Study 1 (Lent et al., 1994). However, it is less apparent if these factors are important to African American women who have only recently graduated. Understanding the prevalence of these factors and how they affect the career goals and success of young African American women today is crucial in determining how to put the wisdom of the successful African American women leaders in Study 1 into practice and effectively pass it on to a new generation.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the quantitative correlational/regression design was to determine what relationship, if any, existed between some of the factors identified in Study 1,

including social support/collegial understanding; the experience of intersectional barriers to advancement, self-efficacy, resilience, and career motivation; and the outcome of recently graduated African American women's career success and goals.

Hypotheses

A key finding in Study 1 was that motivation was one of the key sources of support that African American women leaders experienced along the pathway to leadership. Motivation is the extent to which an individual is driven to do something (Spurk & Abele, 2014). Inspiration is closely related to motivation and reflects being motivated by a specific experience or individual. Motivation and inspiration align closely with SCCT (Lent et al., 1994). However, the presentation of these concepts in Study 1 differed from their more self-efficacy-related presentation using SCCT. Therefore, a broader approach is needed to understand the motivation and inspiration of younger African American women rather than just what SCCT contains. Hence, the first hypothesis for this study was the following:

H1: A significant, positive relationship exists between career motivation and the perceived career success of recently graduated African American women.

Another key facilitator along the path to leadership is social support, as determined in Study 1. As with motivation, SCCT posits that such support is important to a successful career path (Lent et al., 1994). However, the specific form of support structures was one of the novel findings of Study 1. Study 1 revealed that the participants perceived social support from inside and outside the organization as a key driver of motivation rather than motivation and social support being connected through self-efficacy. With the findings from Study 1 in mind, it is key to address social support as a

variable rather than just an adjacent to self-efficacy within SCCT. This study adds a variable to measure the specific social support that participants experience at work and in the form of mentoring relationships. The decision was to include only this type of at-work social support because it is more directly relevant to an individual's career and perceived career success than outside-work social support. The second hypothesis was the following:

H2: A significant, positive relationship exists between social support at work/collegial understanding and the perceived career success of recently graduated African American women.

Another key outcome of Study 1 was related to intersectional barriers to leadership. In this context, intersectional barriers refer to barriers that exist for Black women because they are *both* Black and female (MacNeil & Ghosh, 2017; Sabharwal, 2015). These barriers are not specific to reaching leadership positions but are most pronounced along the path to leadership (Catalyst, 2017). Intersectionality is central to BFT (Collins, 2009), a theory used to show the struggles and successes of Black women. In Study 1, it was determined that successful African American women leaders had needed to overcome substantial intersectionality barriers. Hence, it is important to understand how these barriers are understood by younger African American women and how such barriers shape their career goals. The concept of barriers resulting from the intersectionality of race and gender will be measured using the perceived discrimination scale developed by Williams et al. (1997). Hence, the third hypothesis pertained to intersectionality barriers:

H3: A significant, negative relationship exists between perceived discrimination and the perceived career success of recently graduated African American women.

The concept of self-efficacy, though not as emphasized in the results of Study 1 as some other themes, was still important. In particular, Study 1's results demonstrated that African American women leaders found self-efficacy essential in their leadership pathway. Self-efficacy specifically emerged through the importance of goal progress, which Spurk and Abele's (2014) research linked expressly to self-efficacy. Despite its somewhat less central role in the actual results, self-efficacy is also a key construct from a theoretical perspective because it is the central concept in SCCT (Lent et al., 1994). If intersectionality presents barriers to Black women on the way to leadership, self-efficacy is a tool to overcome those barriers. This finding raises an important question regarding the extent to which self-efficacy shapes the perceived career success of recently graduated African American women. Hence, the fourth hypothesis was the following:

H4: A significant, positive relationship exists between self-efficacy and the perceived career success of recently graduated African American women.

A final key idea is that of resilience. Resilience represents a person's ability to endure and bounce back from harmful experiences (Alvarez-Cleveland, 2017). Study 1 and many other researchers (Alvarez-Cleveland, 2017; Barron, 2019; Rahman et al., 2016) have identified many barriers African American women face on the way to and in leadership positions. These barriers often take the form of negative or detrimental experiences for African American women, experiences that could be disheartening or otherwise harmful (Rahman et al., 2016). Hence, it follows that resilience, which can be understood as the ability to persevere in facing these types of barriers and setbacks, was a

key subtheme for overcoming obstacles in Study 1. Because of the importance this creates for resilience in terms of allowing Black women to reach leadership positions, it is important to understand the state and role of resilience in the perceived career success of recently graduated African American women. Hence, the final hypothesis was the following:

H5: A significant, positive relationship exists between resilience and the perceived career success of recently graduated African American women.

Finally, bringing all the variables in H1 to H5 together into a single model is valuable, especially one controlled by demographics. A key observation in this regard is that the factors in H1 to H5 can be divided into the external factors of social support and perceived discrimination and the internal factors of career motivation, self-efficacy, and resilience. Arguably, the external factors are more similar to demographics because the participants cannot directly control them. Therefore, the combined model was used to address the following hypotheses:

H6: When controlling for participant demographics, the external factors of social support and/or perceived discrimination significantly explain the perceived career success of recently graduated African American women.

H7: When controlling for participant demographics and the external factors of social support and perceived discrimination, the internal factors of career motivation, self-efficacy, resilience significantly explain the perceived career success of recently graduated African American women.

Methodology

The research method for the present study was quantitative. Quantitative research focuses on the empirical relationships between variables (Hackett, 2018). Quantitative inquiry tends to be driven by theory, focusing on the variables and hypotheses suggested by extant theory (Apuke, 2017). Instead, the strength of a quantitative approach is that because it involves closed-ended data collection, it can collect large volumes of data (Apuke, 2017). Closed-ended data can be more feasibly collected and analyzed from large sample sizes than more open-ended data. These data, in turn, allow for statistical analysis and statistical power, making the results generalizable (Hackett, 2018).

The quantitative approach to research was aligned with this study for several reasons. First, the present study was relational. The research purpose and the seven key research questions examined the relationships between variables. Secondly, the present study tested hypotheses developed because of the more theoretically oriented results in Study 1. Consequently, there was no need for exploration. Because the central ideas were key variables, it was possible to identify existing and validated instruments with which to operationalize them. These instruments facilitated collecting a large volume of closed-ended quantitative data from a sample size large enough to create statistical power and make the results generalizable. Therefore, a quantitative study was ideal for answering the research questions that guided this study.

There are two central approaches within the quantitative realm: experimental and non-experimental (Johnson, 2001). Experimental research is the stronger type of quantitative inquiry, allowing a researcher to determine causation (Ross & Morrison, 2013). However, experimental research is stringent (Ross & Morrison, 2013). The

present study adopted a self-report survey correlational design. Per Johnson (2001), a correlational design tests the correlation between two key variables. Correlational research can test mere correlation using a correlation coefficient or build a more complex predictive model using regression (Johnson, 2001). In either case, a correlational design uses real-world data to research the extent to which variables explain one another. This process made a correlational design a strong fit for this study because the present study was concerned with the explanatory power of several key independent variables for understanding the outcomes of perceived career success (career goals) and success.

Population and Sample

The population of interest for the present study was recently graduated African American women in the United States. In this context, graduating refers to graduating with at least a 4-year degree. Those who recently graduated have obtained such a degree within 3 to 10 years. The population began at 3 years to ensure that all participants had some real-world experience post-graduation. Implicit in these inclusion criteria were also that the participants should identify as African American and female and be at least 18 years of age.

Within this population, a sample of at least 92 was recruited. The minimum necessary sample size of 92 was calculated using a G*Power analysis for a multiple linear regression model with five predictors. Key power analysis parameters included a medium effect size ($f^2 = 0.15$), a significance level of 0.05, and a statistical power of 80%. Ideally, the sample size was increased to at least 100 participants, contingent on access, to account for attrition. Sampling entailed using a convenience sample as there

was no systematic way to access the relatively narrow population of interest. The specific approach to sampling is discussed in the procedure section.

Instruments

Subjective career success inventory

Perceived career success was measured using Shockley et al.'s (2016) 24-item Subjective Career Success Inventory (SCSI). The SCSI has been validated on multiple populations and uses a 5-point Likert scale. The SCSI represents a good, relatively short-form measure of subjective career success, and it is recent, which is relevant as career success and goals conceptualization may shift over time. The measure also includes the construct of goals. Each item in the SCSI begins with the same stem: "Considering my career as a whole." Individual sample items include "I have chosen my own career path," and "I have felt as though I am in charge of my own career." Initial validation by Shockley et al. (2016) yielded strong results for criterion, convergent, and discriminant validity, as well as strong internal consistency reliability ($\alpha = .94$). The original instrument used a 5-point Likert scale. However, this study used a 7-point Likert scale substituted for improved granularity in the results.

Career motivation

The concept of career motivation and inspiration was measured using London's (1993) 17-item career motivation scale. This scale contains 17 items on a 5-point Likert scale, with an overall reliability score of 0.80. Sample items include "To what extent do you want your boss to recognize your professional accomplishments?" and "To what extent do you feel ready to welcome job and organizational changes?" The scale was chosen because it had good reliability and was found to be a widely used measure of this

construct in the existing literature. The original instrument used a 5-point Likert scale, but this study used a 7-point Likert scale substituted for improved granularity in the results.

Mentoring and communication support scale

The concepts of social support at work and collegial understanding of struggles were operationalized using the Mentoring and Communication Support Scale (MCSS), originally developed by Hill et al. (1989) and updated more recently by Rubin et al. (2020). The scale contains 15 items on a 5-point Likert scale with good reliability ($\alpha > 0.75$). Sample items include “My mentor encourages me to establish an independent career,” and “My mentor is helpful in providing direction and guidance on professional issues.” The original instrument used a 5-point Likert scale, but this study used a 7-point Likert scale substituted for improved granularity in the results. This scale included a screening item, asking, “Do you currently have a mentor?” Individuals responding “yes” to this yes/no item were the only respondents who then completed the 15 items of the MCSS.

Perceived discrimination scale

The concept of barriers resulting from the intersectionality of race and gender was measured using the everyday discrimination scale developed by Williams et al. (1997). This scale measured how often participants perceived discrimination against them every day. The scale contains 13 items on a 5-point Likert scale with a reliability of 0.86. Items begin with the stem, “In your day-to-day life, how often have any of the following things happened to you?” Individual sample items include “You are treated with less courtesy or respect than other people,” and “People act as if they think you are not smart.” The

original instrument used a 5-point Likert scale, but this study used a 7-point Likert scale substituted for improved granularity in the results.

New general self-efficacy scale

Self-efficacy was measured using Chen et al.'s (2001) New General Self-Efficacy Scale (NGSE). The NGSE is an 8-item measure of general self-efficacy with a strong reliability of 0.86. Sample items include "When facing difficult tasks, I am certain that I will accomplish them," and "I will be able to achieve most of the goals that I set for myself." The NGSE scale was appropriate because it represented an improved version of a traditional and widely used measure. The original instrument used a 5-point Likert scale, but this study used a 7-point Likert scale substituted for improved granularity in the results.

Resilience scale for adults

Resilience was measured using Smith et al.'s (2008) Brief Resilience Scale (BRS). The BRS is a validated 6-item measure of resilience. Across four different samples, the BRS demonstrated good reliability values of 0.84, 0.87, 0.80, and 0.91. The BRS is measured on a 5-point Likert scale. Smith et al. (2008) developed the BRS to measure the essential construct of resilience with as few key items as possible. Sample items include "I tend to bounce back quickly after hard times," and "I usually come through difficult times with little trouble." The original instrument used a 5-point Likert scale, but this study used a 7-point Likert scale substituted for improved granularity in the results.

In the interest of continual engagement and not taxing participants with time demands, after testing with a pilot sample of 5, I used the most abbreviated versions of the aforementioned validated scales for each of the study measures.

Demographics

Several specific demographics were used as control variables. The demographics identified as potentially relevant included the type of college (historically Black versus not), the specific field of study/major, grade point average (GPA), the participants' intended employment sector, and the participant's geographic location (region of the country). Individual categorical or dichotomous response items measured these demographics.

Open-Response Items

Three open-response items were developed as the final aspect of the survey. These items were used in an explanatory capacity relative to the results of the closed-ended data, offering brief insights into the issues of *why*. The items consisted of the following:

- In your own words, what kinds of things shape your perception of what makes for a successful career? Why are these things important?
- In your own words, how do you feel that being a Black woman is likely to affect your career path and career success? Why?
- Are there any important factors you perceive as affecting your expected career path and career success that this survey did not cover?

Procedure

Data collection for the present study was carried out as follows. First, IRB approval to conduct the study was obtained through the university IRB. Any changes needed to secure IRB approval were made. Then, the data collection began. No data were collected or participants recruited before IRB approval. The study was not conducted in any centralized context, but site authorization was needed from individual recruitment sites. This authorization was handled on a rolling basis as sites were identified and contacted.

The participants in the study were identified and contacted by a recruitment post. This post was posted to social media groups on Facebook and LinkedIn that were partially or fully for young African American female professionals. As with the email version, these posts contained an overview of the study and a link to the survey hosted through an online survey service. Interested participants had to click it to participate. More groups were sought in which to post the link until the desired sample size of 100 had been achieved or exceeded. Thirdly, participants from the first study were asked if they would refer any further potential participants. As leaders, the first study's participants had mentees or other recently graduated African American women working under them who would be interested in participating in this research.

The survey was hosted through an online survey site, namely Qualtrics. Qualtrics was an online survey hosting service interoperable with SPSS software and available through the university. It comprised all the instruments included in the instrumentation section above. The survey began with an informed consent cover page, which participants must read and agree to proceed. The informed consent information included the nature of

the study, its purpose, the anonymity of data collection, and the expected length of the survey. Following informed consent was a set of screening questions to ensure participants met the inclusion criteria. Those who did not were thanked for their interest and redirected away. The survey responses were collected anonymously through the platform until the desired number of responses was reached. At this point, all data were downloaded and imported to SPSS for data analysis. Before data collection, the dissertation committee pilot-tested the complete survey. Additionally, a preliminary sample of three to five participants from the target population was recruited for further pilot testing.

Data Analysis

Data analysis for the present study consisted of descriptive statistics, exploratory factor analysis, correlation, and multiple linear regression analysis. All data analyses were carried out using SPSS statistical software. Descriptive statistics had two key aspects: describing the sample and characterizing the data. The sample characterization presented information about the participants using demographic items. Then, the basic statistical properties for each variable were assessed, including the mean, median, range, and standard deviation.

Once the descriptive and factor analyses were complete, correlation analysis was used to test the first five hypotheses. A multiple linear regression model was developed to answer the sixth and seventh hypotheses. A single regression model was appropriate as all the variables were continuous, and the hypotheses pertained to five independent variables of the same vital outcomes. First, the assumptions of the model were tested,

including non-perfect multicollinearity, homoscedasticity, and approximate normality (Eberly, 2007). Each of these assumptions was validated using the appropriate tests.

Then, the model was developed. To test the overall model, an F -test of the multiple R -squared value was carried out (Eberly, 2007). The analysis could proceed if this test demonstrated that the model explained a significant variance. If not, none of the null hypotheses would be rejected. If the overall model was significant, then each research question was answered by the t -test associated with the corresponding coefficient of regression for the IV in that hypothesis. The coefficients of correlation between a given independent variable and the outcome were assessed using Pearson's R . If the coefficient of regression was significant for any dimension of the outcome, then the null hypothesis was rejected, and the alternative hypothesis was accepted. The standardized version of the regression coefficients was used to determine further information about the strength and direction of the relationship. The t -test in SPSS used the unstandardized beta weight divided by the standard error.

Finally, a two-step hierarchical multiple linear regression was used to test H6, and a three-step hierarchical multiple linear regression was used to test H7. To begin, a regression model was developed with only the demographic control variables and its multiple R -squared values assessed. This model served as a baseline. Then, the external variables of social support and perceived discrimination were added. To test H6, a test was undertaken to determine if the multiple R -squared of the model, including the external factors, had improved the amount of variance explained above and beyond the control variables. As above, the regression coefficients for each independent variable were used to assess its specific explanatory power. Finally, to test H7, the internal factors

of self-efficacy, resilience, and motivation were added. Again, a test was undertaken to determine if the multiple *R*-squared of the model, including the internal factors, had improved the amount of variance explained above and beyond the control and external variables. The coefficients of regression for each independent variable were also used to assess its specific explanatory power. In the discussion of results that appears in Chapter 6, quantitative findings are discussed by hypothesis. In each hypothesis-specific discussion, themes emerging from participants' responses to the survey's open-ended items also appear to contextualize and deepen the findings.

Study 2 Results

The research problem for Study 2 was that it was not known to what extent the key themes uncovered in Study 1—including social support/collegial understanding, the experience of intersectional barriers to advancement, self-efficacy, resilience, and career motivation—were present in recently graduated African American women and how these themes might relate to these women's career goals. The purpose of this quantitative correlational study was to determine what relationship, if any, existed between some of the factors identified in Study 1, including social support/collegial understanding, the experience of intersectional barriers to advancement, self-efficacy, resilience, career motivation, and the outcome of recently graduated African American women's career success and goals. This chapter presents the results of Study 2, as well as a discussion of the findings and implications for practice. The following hypotheses guided this study:

H1: A significant, positive relationship exists between career motivation and the perceived career success of recently graduated African American women.

H2: A significant, positive relationship exists between social support at work/collegial understanding and the perceived career success of recently graduated African American women.

H3: A significant, negative relationship exists between perceived discrimination and the perceived career success of recently graduated African American women.

H4: A significant, positive relationship exists between self-efficacy and the perceived career success of recently graduated African American women.

H5: A significant, positive relationship exists between resilience and the perceived career success of recently graduated African American women.

H6: When controlling for participant demographics, the external factors of social support and/or perceived discrimination significantly explain the perceived career success of recently graduated African American women.

H7: When controlling for participant demographics and the external factors of social support and perceived discrimination, the internal factors of career motivation, self-efficacy, resilience significantly explain the perceived career success of recently graduated African American women.

Descriptive Findings

Descriptive statistical analyses were conducted to describe the characteristics of the sample, totaling 91 participants. For participant demographics, frequencies and percentages were calculated (see Table 3). According to the analyses, 43 (47.3%) participants graduated in 2018 to 2020. Additionally, 83 (91.2%) graduated from a non-HBCU institution. Participants' GPA varied; however, the options with the most responses were 3.00 ($n = 16$; 17.6%) and 3.50 ($n = 16$; 17.6%). For geographical region,

52 (57.1%) participants resided in the South, 22 (24.2%) participants resided in the Northeast, 10 (11.0%) participants resided in the Midwest, and seven (7.7%) participants resided in the West. Participants indicated that they worked in 16 sectors, the most popular sector being healthcare ($n = 26$; 28.6%). For participants' majors, seven options were available, including "other." The most selected options were business, administration, marketing, or accounting ($n = 31$; 34.1%). Finally, 33 (36.3%) indicated that they received mentoring work support, and 58 (63.7%) indicated that they did not receive mentoring work support.

Table 3

Participant Demographics

Variable	Response option	<i>N</i>	%
Graduation Year	2013-2014	18	19.8%
	2015-2017	30	33.0%
	2018-2020	43	47.3%
University Type	HBCU	8	8.8%
	Non-HBCU	83	91.2%
GPA	2.40	1	1.1%
	2.50	2	2.2%
	2.70	1	1.1%
	2.80	4	4.4%
	2.89	1	1.1%
	2.90	1	1.1%
	2.95	1	1.1%
	2.97	1	1.1%
	3.00	16	17.6%
	3.14	1	1.1%
	3.20	6	6.6%
	3.30	2	2.2%
	3.40	4	4.4%
	3.47	1	1.1%
	3.50	16	17.6%
	3.60	1	1.1%
	3.65	2	2.2%
	3.70	2	2.2%
	3.75	1	1.1%
	3.80	9	9.9%
3.84	1	1.1%	
3.90	3	3.3%	
3.98	1	1.1%	
4.00	6	6.6%	

Table 3 Continued

Variable	Response option	<i>N</i>	%	
	4.30	2	2.2%	
	Missing	5	5.5%	
Geographical Region	Midwest	10	11.0%	
	Northeast	22	24.2%	
	South	52	57.1%	
	West	7	7.7%	
Sector	Education	12	13.2%	
	Healthcare	26	28.6%	
	Administration	5	5.5%	
	Human Resources	4	4.4%	
	Finance	4	4.4%	
	Technology	7	7.7%	
	Customer Service	4	4.4%	
	Social Services	3	3.3%	
	Government	2	2.2%	
	Fine Arts	2	2.2%	
	Law	2	2.2%	
	Manufacturing	1	1.1%	
	Entertainment	2	2.2%	
	Research	3	3.3%	
	Self-employed	2	2.2%	
	Sports	1	1.1%	
	Missing	11	12.1%	
	Major	Business, Administration, Marketing, or Accounting	31	34.1%
		Fine Arts or Digital Media	5	5.5%
		Humanities	9	9.9%
Physical Sciences		10	11.0%	
Social Sciences		15	16.5%	
Mathematics, Statistics, or Computer Science		5	5.5%	
Other		16	17.6%	
Had Mentoring Work Support	Yes	33	36.3%	
	No	58	63.7%	

Descriptive statistical analyses were also conducted to describe the variables. The descriptive statistics used to describe the variables included mean, median, variance, standard deviation, minimum, maximum, range, interquartile range, skewness, and kurtosis. Table 4 includes the results of the descriptive statistical analyses for the dependent variable of perceived career success and the independent variables: career

motivation, social support at work/collegial understanding, perceived discrimination, self-efficacy, and resilience.

Table 4

Descriptive Statistics for Variables

		Descriptives		
		Statistic	SE	
Perceived Career Success	<i>M</i>	5.44	.10	
	95% CI for <i>M</i>	Lower Bound	5.24	
		Upper Bound	5.64	
	5% Trimmed <i>M</i>	5.46		
	<i>Mdn</i>	5.50		
	Variance	.91		
	<i>SD</i>	.96		
	Minimum	3.42		
	Maximum	7.00		
	Range	3.58		
	Interquartile Range	1.38		
	Skewness	-.16	.25	
	Kurtosis	-.67	.50	
	Career Motivation	<i>M</i>	4.83	.10
95% CI for <i>M</i>		Lower Bound	4.62	
		Upper Bound	5.03	
5% Trimmed <i>M</i>		4.84		
<i>Mdn</i>		4.80		
Variance		1.00		
<i>SD</i>		1.00		
Minimum		1.07		
Maximum		7.00		
Range		5.93		
Interquartile Range		1.07		
Skewness		-.32	.25	
Kurtosis		1.73	.50	
Social Support at Work		<i>M</i>	5.83	.26
	95% CI for <i>M</i>	Lower Bound	5.29	
		Upper Bound	6.36	
	5% Trimmed <i>M</i>	6.03		
	<i>Mdn</i>	6.14		
	Variance	2.27		
	<i>SD</i>	1.51		
	Minimum	1.00		
	Maximum	7.00		
	Range	6.00		
	Interquartile Range	1.39		
	Skewness	-2.15	.41	
	Kurtosis	4.908	.80	
	Perceived Discrimination	<i>M</i>	3.48	.16
95% CI for <i>M</i>		Lower Bound	3.16	
		Upper Bound	3.79	
5% Trimmed <i>M</i>		3.43		
<i>Mdn</i>		3.40		

Table 4 continued

		Descriptives		
		Statistic	SE	
Self-efficacy	Variance	2.30		
	<i>SD</i>	1.52		
	Minimum	1.00		
	Maximum	7.00		
	Range	6.00		
	Interquartile Range	2.00		
	Skewness	.19	.25	
	Kurtosis	-.44	.50	
	<i>M</i>	5.96	.10	
	95% CI for <i>M</i>	Lower Bound	5.75	
		Upper Bound	6.16	
	5% Trimmed <i>M</i>		6.03	
	<i>Mdn</i>		6.12	
	Variance		.99	
	<i>SD</i>		1.00	
Resilience	Minimum	3.00		
	Maximum	7.00		
	Range	4.00		
	Interquartile Range	1.50		
	Skewness	-.98	.25	
	Kurtosis	.32	.50	
	<i>M</i>	4.84	.12	
	95% CI for <i>M</i>	Lower Bound	4.61	
		Upper Bound	5.08	
	5% Trimmed <i>M</i>		4.84	
	<i>Mdn</i>		4.67	
	Variance		1.27	
	<i>SD</i>		1.13	
	Minimum		1.50	
	Maximum		7.00	
Range		5.50		
Interquartile Range		1.67		
Skewness		.18	.25	
Kurtosis		-.14	.50	

The mean score for the dependent variable of perceived career success was high, at 5.44 ($SD = .96$). The range of 3.58 was quite small, and taken with the standard deviation, the results indicated that most participants considered themselves successful in their careers. Similarly, high mean scores were achieved for social support at work ($M = 5.83$, $SD = 1.51$) and self-efficacy ($M = 5.96$, $SD = 1.00$). The lowest reported mean score was perceived discrimination ($M = 3.48$, $SD = 1.52$). However, there was some

variability in participants' responses (range = 6.00), indicating substantial heterogeneity among the sample regarding their experiences of discrimination.

Reliability analyses were conducted for each of the scales included in this study. The reliability analyses used Cronbach's alpha as the reliability coefficient. According to the results, each of the scales was considered reliable. Specifically, Cronbach's alpha values were .93 for perceived career success, .89 for career motivation, .99 for social support at work, .84 for perceived discrimination, .94 for self-efficacy, and .74 for resilience (see Table 5).

Table 5

Reliability Analysis

	Cronbach's alpha
Perceived Career Success	.93
Career Motivation	.89
Social Support at Work	.99
Perceived Discrimination	.84
Self-Efficacy	.94
Resilience	.74

Assumptions Testing

Steps were taken to determine whether the data met the assumptions of parametric testing. The specific assumptions for correlation analysis were normality, linearity, and outliers. These assumptions were also assumptions of regression analysis; however, regression analysis had the assumptions of independence of residuals, homoscedasticity, and multicollinearity. The results of the testing for each assumption are in this section.

Normality was assessed using the Shapiro-Wilk test. According to the Shapiro-Wilk statistic, data for all variables included in the study met the assumption of normality ($p < .05$). According to the results of the Shapiro-Wilk test, neither the dependent

variable nor any of the independent variables were normally distributed (see Table 6 for the results of the Shapiro-Wilk test).

Table 6

Test for Normality

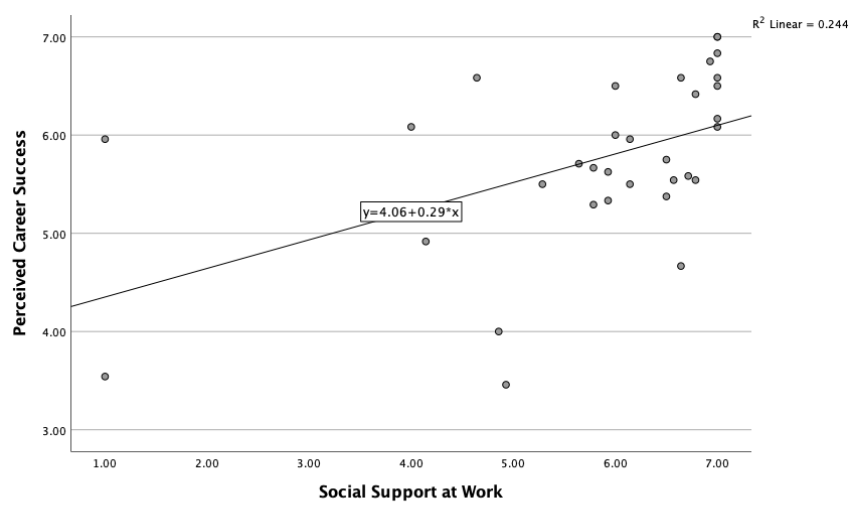
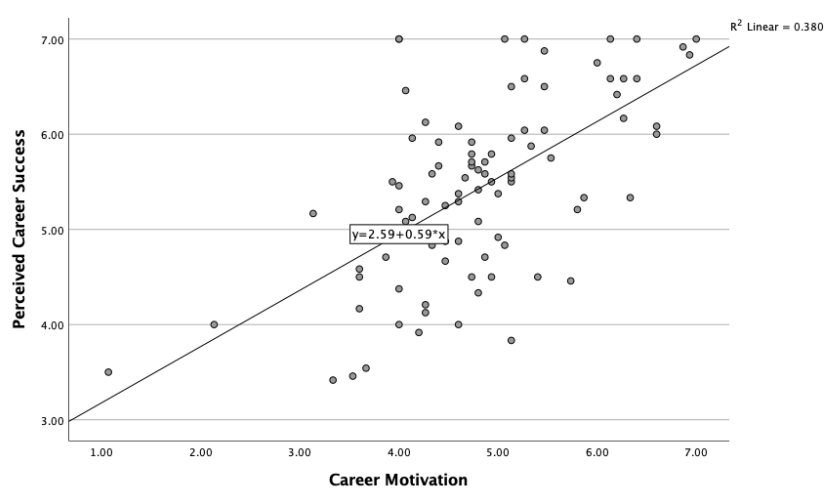
	Shapiro-Wilk		
	Statistic	<i>df</i>	Sig.
Perceived Career Success	.972	91	.046
Career Motivation	.962	91	.009
Social Support at Work	.734	33	< .001
Perceived Discrimination	.972	91	.045
Self-Efficacy	.886	91	< .001
Resilience	.964	91	.012

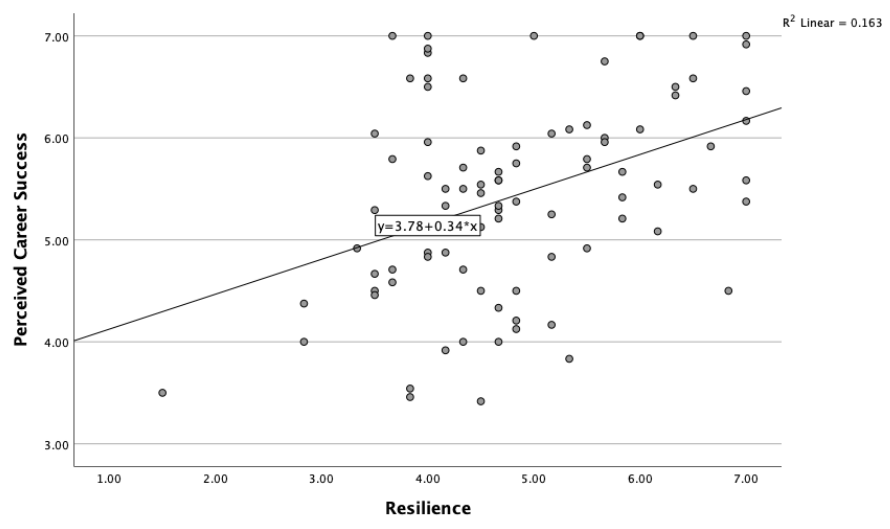
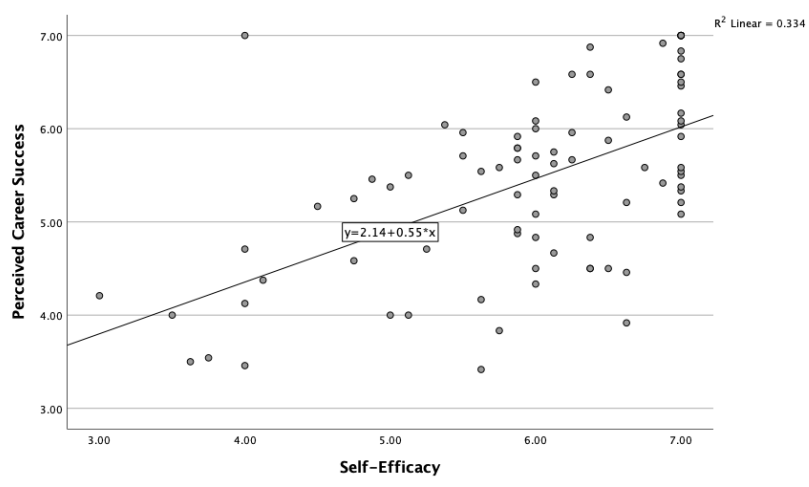
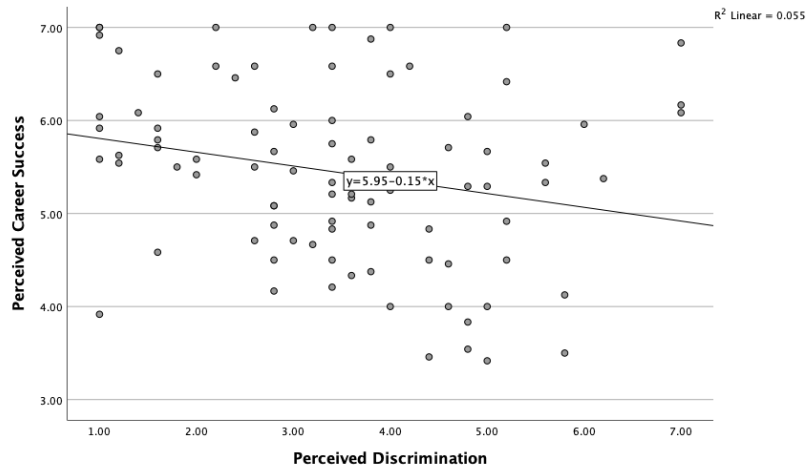
Although all variables were demonstrated as non-normally distributed, social support at work ($p < .001$) and self-efficacy ($p < .001$) were the most non-normal due to substantial right-skew; as described, mean scores for these variables were high, as participants reported high levels of support at work and self-efficacy. All variables exhibited this skewness, although to a lesser degree. The log transformation of the data did not yield any improvement in normality. As a result, the untransformed data were used in the analysis.

The assumption of linearity was assessed using scatter plots. A visual inspection showed that, overall, all independent variables had some type of linear relationship with perceived career success. Career motivation, self-efficacy, and resilience showed a linear relationship with perceived career success, meeting the assumption of linearity. Figure 3 shows the scatter plots.

Figure 3

Scatter Plots of Linear Relationships

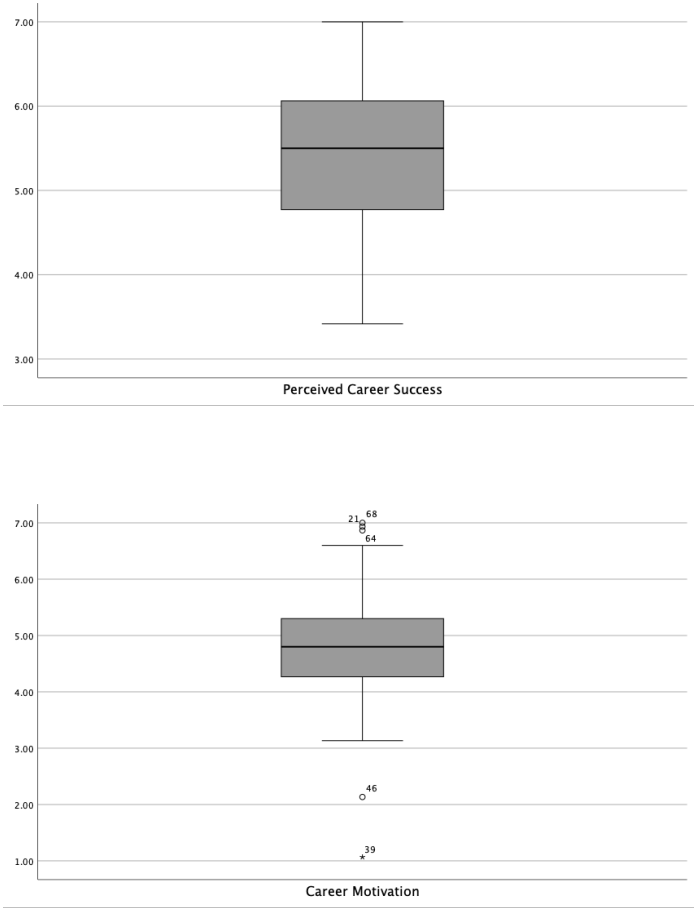


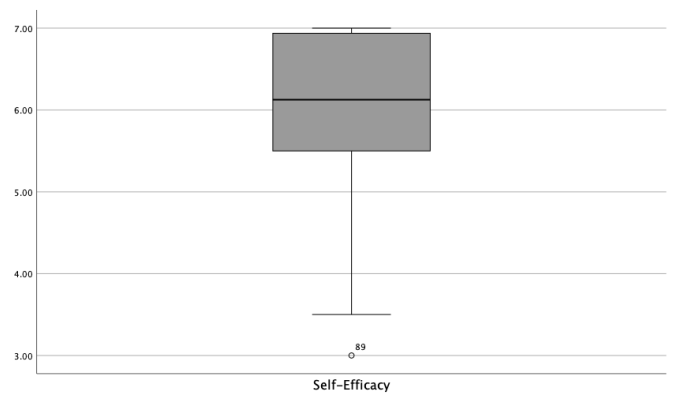
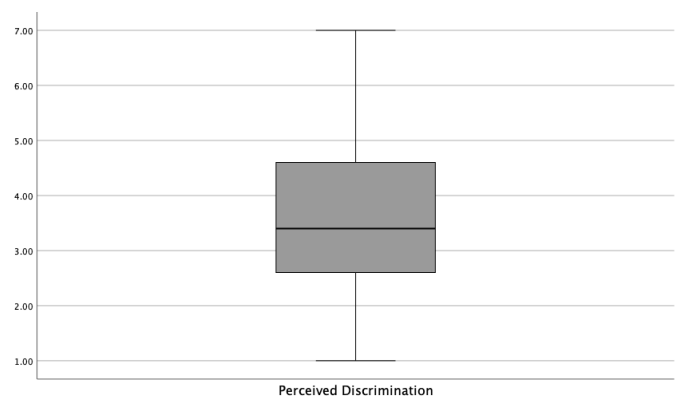
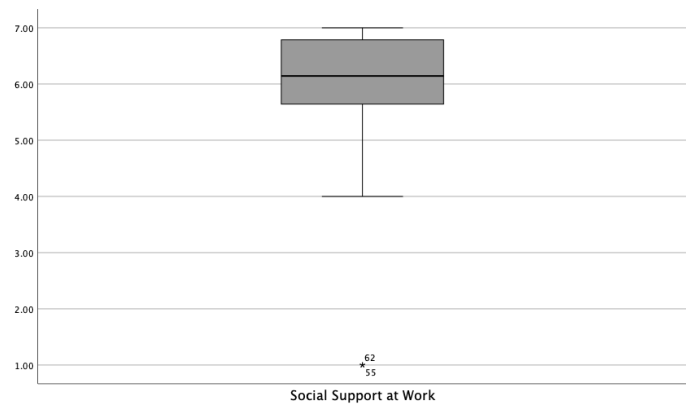


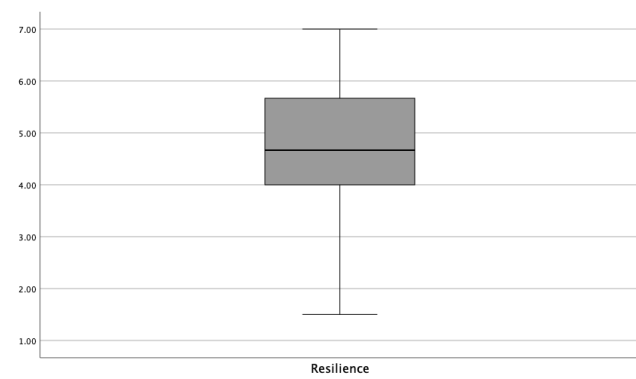
Boxplots were used to assess the assumption of outliers. When no data points were found 1.5 box lengths outside the box, the assumption of outliers was considered met. This analysis revealed a small number of outliers for career motivation, social support at work, and self-efficacy. The limitations section in this chapter discusses the presence of these outliers. No outliers were found for perceived career success, perceived discrimination, and resilience. Figure 4 provides the box plots for each variable.

Figure 4

Boxplots for Variables







The Durbin-Watson test was used to assess whether data for the dependent variable perceived career success met the assumption of independence of residuals. The acceptable ranges for the Durbin-Watson test were 1.5 to 2.5. The Durbin-Watson statistics produced in the output for Hypotheses 6 and 7 were 2.03 and 1.95, indicating that the assumption of independence of residuals was met (see Table 7).

Table 7

Results of the Durbin-Watson Test

Model	<i>R</i>	<i>R</i> square	Adjusted <i>R</i> square	SE of the estimate	Durbin-Watson
Hypothesis 6	.390	.068	.030	.940	2.03
Hypothesis 7	.712	.507	.462	.701	1.95

The assumption of homoscedasticity was assessed using scatter plots. A visual analysis of the scatter plots for each regression model (i.e., Hypotheses 6 and 7) showed that the data for the dependent variable clustered in a rectangular shape, signifying that the assumption of homoscedasticity was met. Figures 5 and 6 include the output for the scatterplots.

Figure 5

Scatter Plot for Hypothesis 6

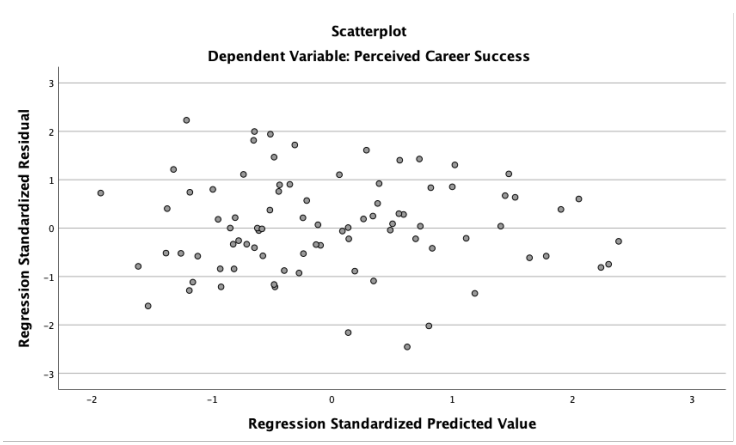
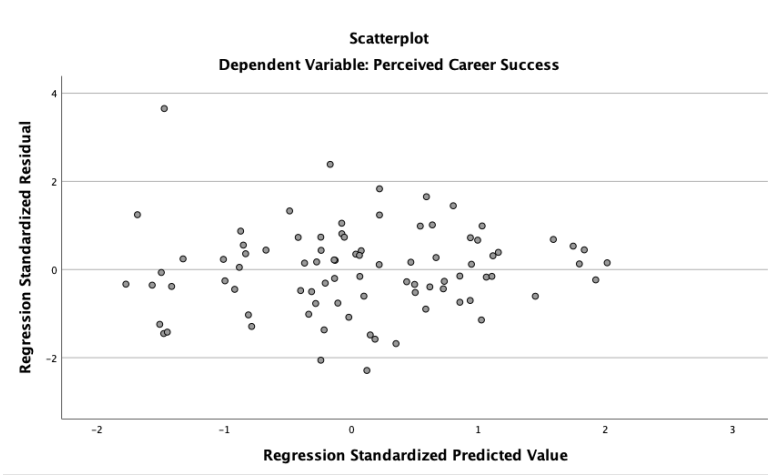


Figure 6

Scatter Plot for Hypothesis 7



Multicollinearity was tested using the collinearity statistic, variance inflation factor (VIF). VIF values less than 10 indicated acceptable levels of multicollinearity. The VIF for perceived discrimination was 1.06, the VIF for career motivation was 1.10, the VIF for self-efficacy was 1.03, and the VIF for resilience was 1.01. Therefore, the assumption of multicollinearity was met (see Table 8).

Table 8*Variance Inflation Factors for Each Variable*

	Collinearity Statistics	
	Tolerance	VIF
Perceived Discrimination	.95	1.06
Career Motivation	.91	1.10
Self-efficacy	.97	1.03
Resilience	.99	1.01

Although some of the data in this study violated assumptions of parametric testing, Pearson's correlation coefficient was still used instead of the non-parametric alternative, Spearman's rank order correlation. The reason for using Pearson's correlation instead of Spearman's correlation was that both were used to establish correlations, and the results revealed no meaningful differences between the two tests. Regression analysis was still used for Hypotheses 6 and 7 because there was no non-parametric alternative for regression analysis.

Findings

Pearson correlation and hierarchical regression analyses were conducted to answer seven research questions. Before conducting these analyses, a correlation matrix was created to identify correlations between each variable. However, social support at work was excluded from the correlation matrix because the sample size for that variable was only 33, which was much lower than the sample size for the other variables ($N = 91$). The sample size for social support at work was lower because only those who indicated that they received mentoring work support responded to the social support items. Table 9 provides the correlation matrix. The results of the study are arranged according to the research question.

Table 9*Correlation Matrix*

		Career Motivation	Perceived Discrimination	Self- Efficacy	Resilience	Perceived Career Success
Career Motivation	Pearson Correlation Sig. (2- tailed)					
Perceived Discrimination	Pearson Correlation Sig. (2- tailed)	.006				
Self-efficacy	Pearson Correlation Sig. (2- tailed)	.596	-.180			
Resilience	Pearson Correlation Sig. (2- tailed)	<.001	.088			
Perceived Career Success	Pearson Correlation Sig. (2- tailed)	.358	-.150	.548		
		<.001	.156	<.001		
		.616	-.235	.578	.404	
		<.001	.025	<.001	<.001	

Hypothesis 1

H1: A significant, positive relationship exists between career motivation and inspiration and the perceived career success of recently graduated African American women. Research Question 1 asked the following: What relationship, if any, exists between career motivation and inspiration and the perceived career success of recently graduated African American women? A Pearson's correlation analysis was conducted to test the hypothesis associated with Research Question 1. The results of the correlation analysis revealed a positive and significant relationship between perceived career success and career motivation, $r = .62$, $p < .001$ (see Table 10). Given the result, Hypothesis 1 was supported.

Table 10*Correlation Coefficient for Perceived Career Success and Career Motivation*

		Perceived Career Success	Career Motivation
Perceived Career Success	Pearson Correlation		
	Sig. (2-tailed) <i>N</i>		
Career Motivation	Pearson Correlation	.616	
	Sig. (2-tailed)	<.001	
	<i>N</i>	91	

In addition to completing the survey, participants responded to three open-ended items, one of which regarded factors influencing career success. In these responses, participants shared insights related to the correlation analysis findings for Research Question 1. Participants were divided in their responses regarding the role of motivation and inspiration: One group focused on the influence of external factors, principally adequate pay and advancement opportunities, as core drivers of career success. Speaking of payment, although some participants discussed income as an end, participants were much more likely to describe income as the end of financial stability and the ability to support oneself and others. According to one participant, career success was defined by this ability—being “able to provide things for yourself” rather than “living paycheck to paycheck.” When discussing advancement opportunities, participants described ascending to leadership positions as indicative of success.

For some participants, the ability to attain leadership positions seemed to rest on factors outside individuals’ control, such as awareness or respect from a boss. These responses directly or indirectly implicated discrimination, as discussed in the section devoted to Research Question 3. For other participants, though, advancement and more general career success were matters of motivation and inspiration. Most participants

responding to the open-ended items described factors within one's control as determining career success, particularly motivation. "Drive," "dedication," "determination," and "perseverance" were all cited by participants as important factors; for several participants, these qualities manifested in hard work. For one participant, motivation meant "be[ing] disciplined enough," which "makes you tough and strong at everything you do." Other participants described motivation in more general terms as an issue of mindset, suggesting that career success emerged from one's perception or attitudes.

Therefore, participants seemed divided on the degree to which motivation and inspiration were influential. Some suggested that success rested more on external factors, and others indicated that motivation, inspiration, and related internal factors were more influential on career success. Taken together, these findings partially supported Hypothesis 1.

Hypothesis 2

H2: A significant, positive relationship exists between social support at work/collegial understanding and the perceived career success of recently graduated African American women. Research Question 2 asked the following: What relationship, if any, exists between social support at work/collegial understanding and the perceived career success of recently graduated African American women? To test the hypothesis associated with Research Question 2, a Pearson's correlation analysis was conducted. The results of the correlation analysis revealed a positive and significant relationship between perceived career success and social support at work, $r = .49$, $p = .003$ (see Table 11). Thus, Hypothesis 2 was supported.

Table 11*Correlation Coefficient for Perceived Career Success and Social Support at Work*

		Perceived Career Success	Social Support at Work
Perceived Career Success	Pearson		
	Correlation		
	Sig. (2-tailed)		
	<i>N</i>		
Social Support at Work	Pearson	.49	
	Correlation		
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.003	
	<i>N</i>	33	

Participants responding to the open-ended questions disagreed with whether social support at work influences perceived career success. This omission might result from how the survey was constructed, as it operationalized social support at work as coming from a mentor figure; only approximately one-third ($n = 33$) of participants described having a mentor. However, social support was indirectly part of some responses, particularly as participants described needing a boss who “is honest with you, sees your potential, and is not afraid to let you grow,” in the words of one respondent. For most participants mentioning bosses, it seemed to be the absence of discrimination from a superior that mattered more than any active support. For instance, the participant above stated, “These things are important because some people’s boss or direct manager holds their associates or managers back even when they are doing well.” Responses regarding perceived discrimination are discussed in the section on Hypothesis 3. Participants’ responses to the open-ended items offered limited support for Hypothesis 2.

Hypothesis 3

H3: A significant, negative relationship exists between perceived discrimination and barriers resulting from the intersectionality of race and gender and the perceived career success of recently graduated African American women. Research Question 3

asked the following: What relationship, if any, exists between barriers resulting from the intersectionality of race and gender and the perceived career success of recently graduated African American women? A Pearson's correlation analysis was conducted to test the hypothesis associated with Research Question 3. The results of the correlation analysis revealed a negative and significant relationship between perceived career success and perceived discrimination, $r = -.23$, $p = .025$ (see Table 12). Given this result, Hypothesis 3 was supported.

Table 12

Correlation Coefficient for Perceived Career Success and Perceived Discrimination

		Perceived Career Success	Perceived Discrimination
Perceived Career Success	Pearson Correlation		
	Sig. (2-tailed)		
	<i>N</i>		
Perceived Discrimination	Pearson Correlation	-.235	
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.025	
	<i>N</i>	91	

Participants responded openly about the influence of perceived discrimination in drafting answers to all three open-response items. In addition to the question about influences on career success, participants responded to two other questions: “In your own words, how do you feel that being a Black woman is likely to affect your career path and career success? Why?” and “Are there any other factors you perceive as affecting your expected career path and career success that this survey did not cover?” Even though participants were asked directly about whether being a Black woman influences their career success, many respondents discussed their identities and perceived discrimination in the question, asking them about other factors not already covered. Participants

continued to discuss discrimination when given the opportunity, showing the importance of this influence for participants.

When discussing discrimination, participants described that discrimination resulted from their status as Black people in general and as Black women in particular. One participant was straightforward, saying, “We are seen as the uneducated beast.” Another participant shared a fuller response:

I think just America in general does not want Black people to succeed. There are always going to be obstacles, like the fight for natural hair in the workplace. We as a community need to be uplifting each other and working as a unit.

Other participants responded similarly, describing that particular stereotypes existed that prevented Black women from being as successful as their White and/or male peers. Most prominent was the stereotype of the “angry Black woman,” which was associated for one participant with the notion of women as “emotional.”

For some participants, the experience of discrimination is related to motivation to achieve career success. Several participants noted that because of their identities as Black women and the stereotypes behind those identities, they had to work hard to have the same opportunities and success that came easily and naturally to their White and/or male counterparts. Some such responses articulated that even with working “twice, sometimes three times as hard,” Black women could not experience the level of success available to others.

Despite the pervasiveness of the experience of discrimination for most participants, a minority of participants described adopting a mindset where being a Black woman came with advantages that could allow them to overcome barriers. One

participant said, “I believe being a Black woman gives me more power in my career path and success. We have an essence like no other.” For this participant and others, there was something fundamental to being a Black woman that imbued individuals with such an essence. According to another participant, that essence was supplemented by their learning:

Black women are strong in general because of the things that we were taught and the things we had to experience ourselves. Our ancestors, our lineage is strong our power is strong. So when I think about my career path and success I lean into that fact and that's what helps me pursue my destiny.

Participants' responses offered mixed support for Hypothesis 3; for many participants, their identities as Black women were important to their career success. However, only some participants stated that significance helped them filter through their experiences of discrimination.

Hypothesis 4

H4: A significant, positive relationship exists between self-efficacy and the perceived career success of recently graduated African American women. Research Question 4 asked the following: What relationship, if any, exists between self-efficacy and the perceived career success of recently graduated African American women? A Pearson's correlation analysis was conducted to test the hypothesis associated with Hypothesis 4. The results of the correlation analysis revealed a positive and significant relationship between perceived career success and self-efficacy, $r = .58, p < .001$ (see Table 13). Thus, Hypothesis 4 was accepted.

Table 13*Correlation Coefficient for Perceived Career Success and Self-Efficacy*

		Perceived Career Success	Self-Efficacy
Perceived Career Success	Pearson Correlation		
	Sig. (2-tailed)		
	N		
Self-efficacy	Pearson Correlation	.578	
	Sig. (2-tailed)	<.001	
	N	91	

Self-efficacy did not emerge explicitly in participants' responses to the open-ended items in the survey. Instead, self-efficacy was implied by some participants in describing the factors that influenced their career success, carried in responses overtly asserting that Black women had control over their career success. Again, although some participants described themselves as beholden to external forces outside their control, some participants described that factors such as hard work, dedication, perseverance, and willed positivity were crucial to career success. By making it clear that Black women had it within their power to achieve success, these participants conveyed the assumption that self-efficacy was a powerful influence. In all, then, participants' responses offered support for Hypothesis 4.

Hypothesis 5

H5: A significant, positive relationship exists between resilience and the perceived career success of recently graduated African American women. Research Question 5 asked the following: What relationship, if any, exists between resilience and the perceived career success of recently graduated African American women? A Pearson's correlation analysis was conducted to test the hypothesis associated with Research Question 5. The results of the correlation analysis revealed a positive and

significant relationship between perceived career success and resilience, $r = .40, p < .001$ (see Table 14). Thus, Hypothesis 5 was accepted.

Table 14

Correlation Coefficient for Perceived Career Success and Resilience

		Perceived Career Success	Resilience
Perceived Career Success	Pearson Correlation		
	Sig. (2-tailed)		
	N		
Resilience	Pearson Correlation	.404	
	Sig. (2-tailed)	<.001	
	N	91	

Like self-efficacy, resilience was implicit in participants' responses asserting their power over their career success. As discrimination was an almost universally cited experience, some participants discussed that Black women could rise above that discrimination through motivation, hard work, and positive thinking. However, two participants described resilience in explicit terms. One described overcoming negative responses to her skin color and hair: "It hurt but it helps. It builds character. It gives you wisdom to go out and gain knowledge." Another participant described resilience more generally: "Being able to bounce back from challenges is a skill set that is also a must have in order to have a successful career." Again, however, these responses were rare; participants were more apt to discuss other influences. For these reasons, participants' responses to the open-ended items supported Hypothesis 5.

Hypothesis 6

H6: When controlling for participant demographics, the external factors of social support and/or perceived discrimination significantly explain the perceived career success of recently graduated African American women. Hypothesis 6 asked the following: When

controlling for participant demographics, do the external factors of social support and perceived discrimination significantly predict the perceived career success of recently graduated African American women? A two-step hierarchical regression analysis was conducted to test the hypothesis associated with Research Question 6. The first regression model included demographic variables (i.e., graduation year, mentoring work support, and GPA) and produced $R^2 = .068$, $F(3, 82) = 1.994$, $p = .12$, which was insignificant. The second regression model was significant, included demographic variables and perceived discrimination, and produced $R^2 = .152$, $F(4, 81) = 3.632$, $p = .009$, indicating that the model explained 15.2% of the variance in perceived career success. Although the second model was statistically significant, the variance explained was very small and may not have practical significance (see Tables 15 and 16 for the R^2 , F , and p values). Mentoring work support and perceived discrimination were the only variables that made a significant unique contribution to the model (see Table 17). Given that the overall model was significant, Hypothesis 6 was accepted. Again, it should be noted that the mentoring work support variable was completed by 33 respondents who first completed an item indicating that they had a mentor.

Table 15*Model Summary for the Two-Step Hierarchical Regression*

Model	<i>R</i>	<i>R</i> Square	Adjusted <i>R</i> Square	SE of the Estimate
1	.261 ^a	.068	.034	.94031
2	.390 ^b	.152	.110	.90241

- a. Predictors: (Constant), GPA, Mentoring Work Support, GradYrRecode_a
- b. Predictors: (Constant), GPA, Mentoring Work Support, GradYrRecode, Perceived Discrimination_b
- c. Dependent Variable: Perceived Career Success_c

Table 16*ANOVA for the Two-Step Hierarchical Regression*

Model		Sum of Squares	<i>df</i>	<i>M</i> Square	<i>F</i>	Sig.
1	Regression	5.289	3	1.763	1.994	.121 ^b
	Residual	72.504	82	.884		
	Total	77.793	85			
2	Regression	11.830	4	2.958	3.632	.009 ^c
	Residual	65.963	81	.814		
	Total	77.793	85			

- a. Dependent Variable: Perceived Career Success_a
- b. Predictors: (Constant), GPA, Mentoring Work Support, GradYrRecode_b
- c. Predictors: (Constant), GPA, Mentoring Work Support, GradYrRecode, Perceived Discrimination_c

Table 17*Coefficients for the Two-Step Hierarchical Regression*

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	<i>t</i>	Sig.
		<i>B</i>	SE	Beta		
1	(Constant)	4.242	.873		4.858	<.001
	Graduation Year	.017	.133	.014	.129	.897
	Mentoring Work Support	.499	.211	.252	2.364	.020
	GPA	.144	.242	.064	.596	.553
2	(Constant)	4.820	.863		5.588	<.001
	Graduation Year	.061	.129	.049	.474	.637
	Mentoring Work Support	.613	.206	.310	2.971	.004
	GPA	.098	.233	.044	.422	.674
	Perceived Discrimination	-.188	.066	-.298	-2.834	.006

As shown in the tables, the addition of perceived discrimination to the second regression analysis resulted in a model that explained a much larger share of the variance in perceived career success (15.2% versus 6.8%); additionally, the second regression model achieved significance ($p = .009$). Regarding the predictiveness of individual variables, mentoring work support was positively related to perceived career success in the first regression model ($p = .02$) and the second ($p = .004$). When added to the second regression model, perceived discrimination was negatively associated with perceived career success ($p = .006$).

Hypothesis 7

H7: When controlling for participant demographics and the external factors of social support and perceived discrimination, internal factors of career motivation, self-efficacy, and resilience significantly explain the perceived career success of recently graduated African American women. RQ7 asked the following: When controlling for participant demographics and the external factors of social support and perceived

discrimination, do internal factors of career motivation, self-efficacy, resilience significantly predict the perceived career success of recently graduated African American women? A three-step hierarchical regression analysis was conducted to test the hypothesis associated with RQ7. The first two models were the same as the ones used for RQ6.

The first regression model included demographic variables (i.e., graduation year, mentoring work support, and GPA) and produced $R^2 = .068$, $F(3, 82) = 1.994$, $p = .12$, which was insignificant. Again, the second regression model included demographic variables and perceived discrimination and produced $R^2 = .152$, $F(4, 81) = 3.632$, $p = .009$, indicating that the model explained 15.2% of the variance in perceived career success. The third regression model included demographic variables, perceived discrimination, career motivation, self-efficacy, and resilience and produced $R^2 = .507$, $F(7, 78) = 11.439$, $p = <.001$, indicating that the model explained 50.7% of the variance in perceived career success.

Models 2 and 3 were significant; however, the third model explained a greater amount of variance than the second model (see Tables 18 and 19 for the R^2 , F , and p values). Mentoring work support and perceived discrimination made significant unique contributions to the second model, and perceived discrimination, career motivation, and self-efficacy made significant unique contributions to the third model (see Table 20). Given that the overall models were significant, Hypothesis 7 was accepted.

Table 18*Model Summary for the Three-Step Hierarchical Regression*

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	SE of the Estimate
1	.261 ^a	.068	.034	.94031
2	.390 ^b	.152	.110	.90241
3	.712 ^c	.507	.462	.70152

- a. Predictors: (Constant), GPA, Mentoring Work Support, GradYrRecode_a
- b. Predictors: (Constant), GPA, Mentoring Work Support, GradYrRecode, Perceived Discrimination_b
- c. Predictors: (Constant), GPA, Mentoring Work Support, GradYrRecode, Perceived Discrimination, Resilience, Career Motivation, Self-Efficacy_c
- d. Dependent Variable: Perceived Career Success_d

Table 19*ANOVA for the Three-Step Hierarchical Regression*

Model		Sum of Squares	df	M Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	5.289	3	1.763	1.994	.121 ^b
	Residual	72.504	82	.884		
	Total	77.793	85			
2	Regression	11.830	4	2.958	3.632	.009 ^c
	Residual	65.963	81	.814		
	Total	77.793	85			
3	Regression	39.407	7	5.630	11.439	<.001 ^d
	Residual	38.386	78	.492		
	Total	77.793	85			

- a. Dependent Variable: Perceived Career Success_a
- b. Predictors: (Constant), GPA, Mentoring Work Support, GradYrRecode_b
- c. Predictors: (Constant), GPA, Mentoring Work Support, GradYrRecode, Perceived Discrimination_c

Table 19 continued

d. Predictors: (Constant), GPA, Mentoring Work Support, GradYrRecode, Perceived Discrimination, Resilience, Career Motivation, Self-Efficacy_d

Table 20

Coefficients for the Three-Step Hierarchical Regression

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	<i>t</i>	Sig.
		<i>B</i>	SE	Beta		
1	(Constant)	4.242	.873		4.858	<.001
	Graduation Year	.017	.133	.014	.129	.897
	Mentoring Work Support	.499	.211	.252	2.364	.020
	GPA	.144	.242	.064	.596	.553
2	(Constant)	4.820	.863		5.588	<.001
	Graduation Year	.061	.129	.049	.474	.637
	Mentoring Work Support	.613	.206	.310	2.971	.004
	GPA	.098	.233	.044	.422	.674
3	Perceived Discrimination	-.188	.066	-.298	-2.834	.006
	(Constant)	1.945	.801		2.428	.017
	Graduation Year	.028	.101	.023	.282	.779
	Mentoring Work Support	.287	.168	.145	1.711	.091
	GPA	-.015	.183	-.007	-.084	.933
	Perceived Discrimination	-.134	.053	-.213	-2.531	.013
	Career Motivation	.388	.100	.404	3.894	<.001
Self-efficacy	.222	.109	.232	2.048	.044	
Resilience	.078	.081	.092	.959	.340	

With the third regression model, adding career motivation, self-efficacy, and resilience resulted in a model explaining much more variance (50.7%) in perceived career success than the second model (15.8%) or the first model (6.8%). Additionally, the result was more strongly significant ($p < .001$). Regarding individual variable contributions to the model, career motivation ($p < .001$) and self-efficacy ($p = .04$) were both significant, playing more meaningful roles in perceived career success than resilience ($p = .34$).

Interestingly, although perceived discrimination ($p = .01$) remained significant in the third model, mentoring work support ($p = .09$) did not.

Discussion of the Findings

The results of Study 2 were aligned with many of the themes uncovered in Study 1 as well as the literature, as discussed in this section.

Hypothesis 1

The existence of a significant positive relationship between career motivation and perceived career success aligns with the theoretical framework used to guide this study, which was the SCCT (Lent et al., 1994). According to SCCT, career motivation is a key driver of a successful career (Lent et al., 1994). SCCT also contends that self-efficacy, another variable in this study, influences career motivations and decision-making processes (Spurk & Abele, 2014). This result also aligns with a key finding in Study 1, which is that motivation can support African American women leaders along the pathway to leadership. However, the sources of motivation were not specifically related to career choice or path for every participant. Whereas SCCT links motivational effects explicitly to career path arcs, the participants in this study noted they did not consider giving up or changing career courses even when they experienced demotivational effects from a lack of goal progress or setbacks. This finding suggests that motivation was remarkably durable for the participants in this study. Additionally, because the participants were relatively early in their careers (the majority graduated between 2018 and 2020), it could be that participants were less likely to have experienced setbacks that were sufficiently demotivating to prompt doubts or new decisions regarding their career arcs.

Hypothesis 2

The finding of a significant positive relationship between social support at work and perceived career success aligns with several researchers' work in the literature. The research results of such studies revealed that sponsorship, mentoring work support, and networking positively influence African American women's ability to succeed in their pathway to leadership (Benschop et al., 2015; Downs et al., 2015; Gamble & Turner, 2015; Hague & Okpala, 2017). Additionally, Alvarez-Cleveland (2017) found in a qualitative study that positive support and feedback and mentoring or mentoring influenced African American women's advancement to leadership positions. Holder et al. (2015) and Liggins-Moore (2016) also found that a coping strategy African American women employ during their pathway to leadership is finding a mentor or other form of support. Furthermore, the lack of mentorship opportunities led by other African American women is considered a barrier to African American women's career success (Greene, 2019). This finding is because having a mentor as social support at work helps break down barriers associated with the intersection of gender and race (Beckwith et al., 2016; Gamble & Turner, 2015).

Despite the alignment of this finding with the extant literature, the information that participants in this study were early in their careers might be important. Specifically, participants in this study might not have experienced the career advancement signaled by the literature as an outcome associated with receiving mentoring work support. Instead, it could be that participants perceived their receipt of mentoring work support as indicative of career success by the expectation that this relationship would lead to advancement or for some other reason. Additionally, because the number of participants responding to

social support items in the survey was small ($n = 33$), it could be that the results instead point to individuals high in motivation and perceived career success were more likely to have pursued mentoring relationships. Additional research is recommended to determine the mechanism(s) underlying this relationship.

Hypothesis 3

The fact that a negative relationship existed between perceived discrimination and perceived career success in this study was supported by several studies found in the literature. For instance, the literature has revealed that unspoken bias precedes unfavorable consequences for African American women along their pathway to leadership (Avery et al., 2015). That is, African American women are stereotyped as dominant, angry, and incompetent (Rosette et al., 2016). Mitchell (2019) also found that African American women experience barriers in their advancement to leadership positions, including being denied opportunities, implicit bias, the presence of a glass ceiling, and stereotypes. The results of this study were like those in Alvarez-Cleveland's (2017) study, which showed the barriers to African American women's pursuit of leadership were receiving negative feedback, reduced compensation compared to that of White or male colleagues, and ill perceptions of their leadership capabilities.

Hypothesis 4

This study's finding that self-efficacy is associated with career success aligns with Hailey's (2018) study, where African American reported several strategies that helped them succeed in their leadership positions, including developing control, remaining confident, and embracing change. Similarly, Beckwith et al. (2016) found support for the value of African American women's self-efficacy in career success. For African

American women, high self-efficacy would enable them to persist through challenges, leverage their abilities, and focus more on what needs to be accomplished to successfully reach their leadership goals (Fouad & Santana, 2017).

Study 1's results also demonstrated that African American women leaders found self-efficacy essential in their leadership pathway. Self-efficacy specifically emerged through the importance of goal progress, which Spurk and Abele's (2014) research linked expressly to self-efficacy. The relationship between self-efficacy and perceived career success also aligns with this study's theoretical framework, as self-efficacy is a central concept in SCCT (Lent et al., 1994). Under the lens of SCCT, African American women who believe they can achieve their career goals are likelier to succeed. The results of hypothesis testing for H4 support this assertion. Again, because most participants had relatively little time in their careers, these results could speak to expectations rather than experiences for the participants. Participants might not have experienced the setbacks that could challenge their self-efficacy or perceive themselves as unlikely to achieve career success.

Hypothesis 5

The finding of a relationship between resilience and perceived career success aligns with the research conducted by McMillion (2017) and Lent et al. (2000), who found that resilience influenced career decision-making and success. Additionally, resilience understood as the ability to persevere in the face of barriers and setbacks, was a key subtheme for overcoming obstacles in Study 1. In Study 1, resilience entailed the participants' endurance and persistence amidst the challenges they encountered on the

path to leadership. Nine participants described the personal characteristics needed in their current leadership roles, including resilience and persistence.

The participants' perception of resilience as an asset for overcoming barriers and facilitating growth aligns with Lent et al.'s (2000) theoretical understanding of how successful African American women would engage with barriers associated with intersectionality. At the same time, the emphasis on the need to possess resilience to overcome a multitude of barriers aligns with the extensive research regarding the unique challenges African American women experience on the path to and during their careers (Alvarez-Cleveland, 2017; Barron, 2019; Rahman et al., 2016). Participants in the current study reported comparatively lower levels of perceived discrimination; given the understanding that resilience is developed or emerges through the experience of adversity, further research should investigate the origins of resilience for early-career participants such as the individuals in this study.

Hypothesis 6

The finding that perceived discrimination predicts perceived career success—where demographic characteristics are not predictive—aligns with a plethora of research results showing discrimination as a factor that obstructs African American women's path to leadership and success in their positions (Alvarez-Cleveland, 2017; Avery et al., 2015; Mitchell, 2019; Rosette et al., 2016). As described above, bias against African American women, stemming at least in part from stereotypes of these workers being angry and incompetent, can predict poor career outcomes for African American women striving toward leadership positions (Avery et al., 2015; Rosette et al., 2016). The findings in this

study confirm these findings, indicating that the experience of discrimination significantly predicts lower levels of perceived career success.

Hypothesis 7

Adding the other independent variables—career motivation, self-efficacy, and resilience—into the model significantly increased its predictive power, as suggested by the literature. Specifically, studies have indicated that career motivation (Spurk & Abele, 2014), perceived discrimination (Alvarez-Cleveland, 2017; Mitchell, 2019), self-efficacy (Hailey, 2018), and resilience (McMillion, 2017) all have relationships with perceived career success. However, the latter finding, regarding resilience, contradicts the literature's finding. That is, although resilience significantly correlates with perceived career success, it failed to achieve significance in this study when added to a regression model alongside the other independent variables. Further research is necessary to examine the relative lack of importance of resilience compared to factors such as career motivation and self-efficacy. It could be that participants early in their careers had not yet encountered setbacks that might help develop resilience; thus, results may differ for participants later in their careers.

Implications for Theory

Based on the findings of Study 2 viewed through the lens of SCCT and BFT, some implications for theory are present. BFT emphasizes the intersectionality of gender and race for African American women and their many oppressions (Collins, 1990), while SCCT helps illustrate how people develop interests, make decisions, and achieve goals related to education and career (Lent et al., 1994). This notion was supported by the findings in Study 2. Multiple findings from the second study showed the importance of

having the characteristics of resilience and career motivation on the pathway of career success, needed social support, and the recognition of how bias and discrimination can negatively impact career success, adding to the notions expressed by the BFT and SCCT while aligning with Study 1 findings.

For example, H1 showed alignment with SCCT, adding depth to the theory. The existence of a significant positive relationship between career motivation and perceived career success aligns with the theoretical framework used to guide this study, which was the SCCT (Lent et al., 1994). According to SCCT, career motivation is a key driver of a successful career (Lent et al., 1994). SCCT also contends that self-efficacy, another variable in this study, influences career motivations and decision-making processes (Spurk & Abele, 2014). This result also aligns with a key finding in Study 1, which is that motivation can support African American women leaders along the pathway to leadership. However, the sources of motivation were not specifically related to career choice or path for every participant.

H4 also presented implications to the SCCT and BFT, as African American women who believe they can achieve their career goals are likelier to succeed, especially when supported by similar mentors or social connections, as shown in Study 1. The results of hypothesis testing for H4 supported this assertion. Again, because most participants had relatively little time in their careers, these results could speak to expectations rather than experiences for the participants. Participants might not have experienced the setbacks that could challenge their self-efficacy or perceive themselves as unlikely to achieve career success. In conclusion, the study's findings added to and

supported the SCCT and BFT, showing research based on these theories may uncover more connections.

Implications for Practice

The results of Study 2 have implications for positive social change and several implications for practice. The findings of this study suggest that positive social change can be achieved by raising awareness among organizational leaders about racial and gender inequalities in workplace policies, procedures, recruitment, advancement strategies, learning opportunities, and compensation (Barron, 2019; Beckwith et al., 2016; Gamble & Turner, 2015; Hailey, 2018; Rosette et al., 2016). Creating such awareness fosters diverse, inclusive work environments and ensures equitable opportunities for African American women to attain and thrive in leadership positions (Hague & Okpala, 2017; Livingston, 2015). Moreover, highlighting discrimination, stereotypes, and implicit bias within organizations can open avenues for researchers to explore potential organization-wide solutions to African American women's challenges (Pace, 2018; Thompson, 2016). Lastly, identifying and sharing the successful strategies African American women employ in their journey to leadership may assist aspiring African American women leaders in making more informed career decisions and applying effective strategies (Greene, 2019; Liggins-Moore, 2016). With finite resources, these aspiring leaders may utilize the insights generated by the study to allocate time and energy to those strategies that will yield results in terms of their paths to leadership.

Regarding the specific strategies are successful, significant results that show relationships among the independent variables (career motivation, social support at work, perceived discrimination, self-efficacy, and resilience) and the dependent variable

(perceived career success) among African American women can have important implications for practice in various areas. For example, based on the significant relationships found, career counseling programs can be tailored to address the specific needs of African American women. These programs may focus on building self-efficacy, resilience, and career motivation to enhance perceived career success. Because resilience is a factor that may emerge from or be activated by the experience of diversity, support strategies may involve African American women who have experienced discrimination or other forms of adversity, as a means to help them develop and harness resilience to persevere at work and in their careers. The current study did not investigate what factors may result in a lack of self-efficacy for participants, but further research could explore those factors to further guide the development of strategies designed to build self-efficacy for aspiring African American female leaders. Additionally, coping with perceived discrimination and leveraging social support at work can be beneficial, both for the activation of resilience and to yield other benefits.

Furthermore, recognizing the value of social support at work and especially implementing mentoring work support and networking initiatives can help African American women build supportive relationships within their professional environments. These initiatives can provide opportunities for career guidance, skill development, and access to a supportive network; such networks may be developed within individual organizations, but they may also be developed through networking opportunities that connect aspiring African American female leaders to mentors in their industry but at different organizations. Organizations may also do well to supplement these supports with additional ones that help African American women create and sustain supportive

networks outside their places of work. These supports would enable African American women to connect meaningfully with others in their career areas and may help them gain mentoring work support; the fact that few participants in this study had been in mentoring relationships may speak to a lack of access. Regardless, organizations should support African American women in building these industry networks by sponsoring their membership in professional societies, paying for trips to conferences and outside workshops, and other activities that bring African American women into contact with others in their field. Organizations can also foster supportive work cultures that value diversity and provide equal opportunities for career growth. Implementing policies that promote work-life balance and address workplace stress can increase perceived career success (Amin, 2012; Najam et al., 2020). This study's significant results can serve as a basis for advocating for policy changes to reduce discrimination and promote equity in career opportunities for African American women.

Practitioners may also use the research findings to design evidence-based interventions targeting the identified factors associated with perceived career success. These interventions can be tailored to the unique needs and challenges African American women face in the workplace. Regarding the implications for practice drawn from the findings, it is important to note that the specific implications for practice may vary depending on the sample's unique characteristics, the study's context, and the nuances of the relationships between the variables. Practitioners and organizations should carefully consider these implications and tailor their approaches to best support the career success of African American women in their particular setting.

Limitations

Several limitations were present in this study. For one, the participants in this study were not a random sample of the population; therefore, the study results may be limited in scope and generalizability to a broader population. This limitation could not be avoided because it was not feasible to identify and contact all members within the population of recently graduated African American women in the United States.

Another limitation stemmed from using a correlational research design. Correlational research was used to examine the statistical relationship between two or more variables without manipulating them. Although this approach was valuable in many areas of study, the results could not imply causation. Just because two variables were related did not mean one caused the other. Other unknown factors (confounding variables) might influence the relationship between the variables under study. Also, correlation only showed that two variables were related, but it did not provide insights into the underlying reasons or mechanisms behind the observed relationship.

Furthermore, correlation coefficients can be sensitive to outliers or influential data points, which may distort the strength and direction of the relationship between variables. The results of assumptions testing revealed outliers for career motivation, social support at work, and self-efficacy. However, these outliers were not removed because doing so would have reduced the already small sample size.

An additional limitation of this study was its small sample size. Although the sample was large enough to achieve sufficient statistical power in the hypothesis testing, it was not large enough to enable testing of the factor structure of the SCSI. Because this

instrument had not been validated with a sample like the one in this study, the failure to determine validity through factor analysis constituted a limitation.

A final limitation that emerged during the study also regarded low sample size, in this case, for social support at work. Specifically, only 33 of 91 participants responded to items on the social support scale because they had selected *yes* when asked whether they had a mentor. Because the sample size for social support at work was much lower than that for other variables, it was excluded from the regression models. Despite these limitations, researchers can use the results of this study as a starting point to generate hypotheses and guide further investigations, as discussed in the following section.

Future Directions

Several directions for future research were identified during this study. One area that produced avenues for future research was responses to the open-ended question that asked the following: Are there any important factors you perceive as affecting your expected career path and career success that this survey did not cover? The responses included economic factors, socioeconomic status, sexuality, disability/weight, pay, home life, mental health, competition/seniority, and acquiring new skills/continuous learning. Any of these could be addressed in future research as potential correlates or independent variables to perceived career success. This finding may be an important avenue for researchers who wish to build on this study's finding that the independent variables only account for 50.7% of the variance in perceived career success. This finding means other factors not explored in this study fill up the remaining 49.3% of the variance.

Future researchers can explore potential moderating or mediating variables to understand better the underlying mechanisms and conditions influencing the observed

correlations. It may be that external factors mediate or moderate internal factors that relate to perceived career success. For instance, items designed to determine whether participants have been considered or selected for one or more promotions will be helpful in showing the degree to which participants have progressed along their respective career arcs and to what degree their motivation, self-efficacy, resilience, and other traits have been “tested” by those experiences. An additional variable that can be influential is perceived belongingness, which speaks more to a general feeling than does perceived discrimination. For individuals early in their careers, that feeling of belonging may be important in explaining the observed relationships.

The results of this study only provide a snapshot of the relationship between variables at a particular point in time. Longitudinal studies, which follow participants over an extended period, may help determine if the correlation remains stable or changes. It may be interesting to discover whether African American women’s perceived career success changes with time as they gain experience in their positions.

Replicating the findings of this study is another future research direction. Researchers can replicate this study using the same population, instruments, and procedures to help bolster the reliability and validity of Study 2 results. However, future researchers may seek to replicate the study using different samples, methodologies, and a bigger sample size to test the factor structure of the SCSI.

Conclusions

In conclusion, the problem that this study addressed was that it was not known to what extent the key themes uncovered in Study 1—including social support/collegial understanding, the experience of intersectional barriers to advancement, self-efficacy,

resilience, and career motivation—were present in recently graduated African American women and how these themes might relate to these women's career goals. Therefore, the purpose of this quantitative correlational study was to determine what relationship, if any, existed between some of the factors identified in Study 1, including social support/collegial understanding, the experience of intersectional barriers to advancement, self-efficacy, resilience, and career motivation and the outcome of recently graduated African American women's career success and goals. To fulfill this purpose, several Pearson correlation analyses and two hierarchical regression analyses were conducted to answer seven research questions.

The analyses revealed significant positive relationships between the independent variables, career motivation, social support at work, self-efficacy, and resilience, and the dependent variable, perceived career success. The results also revealed a significant negative relationship between perceived discrimination and perceived career success. As a follow-up to the correlation analyses for H1 through H5, H6, and H7 combined the factors into hierarchical models that controlled for demographics. The factors in H1 through H5 were divided into the external factors of social support at work and perceived discrimination and the internal factors of career motivation, self-efficacy, and resilience. Only the external factor perceived discrimination and demographic variables (GPA, mentoring work support, and graduation year) were included in the model for H6 because the sample size for support at work was 33 compared to 91 for the rest of the variables. Demographic variables, perceived discrimination, and internal factors were included in the model for H7. The results of the hierarchical regression analyses revealed that most variance in perceived career success was explained when the internal factors of career

motivation, self-efficacy, and resilience were added to the final model. Implications for positive social change and practice, limitations, and future directions were discussed considering the findings.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS, LIMITATIONS, AND APPLICATIONS

Conclusions

Many conclusions are drawn from the findings of the first and second studies to provide a deeper understanding and synthesis. For this purpose, the seven themes from the first study are compared with the findings that have answered the seven research questions from the second study. Then, further synthesis is provided to draw these additional conclusions.

Perceived Characteristics Needed by Black Women for Success in Securing a Leadership Role

This major finding from the first study was subdivided into two characteristics: self-awareness and resilience. Self-awareness involved the participants' strategic thinking throughout their pathway to leadership. Resilience entailed the participants' endurance and persistence amidst the challenges they encountered on the path to leadership. The results of the correlation analysis from the second study that answered RQ5 also revealed a positive and significant relationship between perceived career success and resilience. The results of the correlation analysis from the second study that answered RQ4 revealed a positive and significant relationship between perceived career success and self-efficacy.

Although the characteristic of self-efficacy was only explicitly included in the second study, resilience was a quality of perceived characteristics needed by Black women for success in securing a leadership role in both studies; among these Black women who successfully secured senior leadership positions in HE institutions as a current or past president, and among recent college graduates who were Black women.

However, comparing self-awareness among more professionally seasoned Black women and self-efficacy among recently graduated may provide additional insight into these perceived characteristics. Implications may further suggest that self-awareness is a quality that develops over time with more professional experience. In contrast, self-efficacy is a quality that recent college graduates may perceive first.

Experiences of the Barriers from the Intersectionality of Gender and Race

The participants of the first study generally shared that other people, especially White males, tended to undermine their authority for being female, Black, or both. These participants generally shared that they encountered challenges as women and African Americans in senior leadership at HE institutions. The inequities experienced in the workplace were observed by all participants when they compared their own experiences to the experiences of White men, White women, and Black men in HE leadership. The participants explained that their authority was often undermined, and they were often underestimated as Black female HE leaders. Six participants experienced prejudice and discrimination on their pathway to HE leadership. The bias and discriminatory behavior toward these participants were often linked with both racism and sexism. On advancing their career in HE leadership, 10 participants perceived that Black women did not have equal opportunities as their male and non-Black counterparts. Black women experienced barriers to career advancement from the hiring stage to the promotion stage.

The results of the correlation analysis from the second study that answered RQ3 revealed a negative and significant relationship between perceived career success and perceived discrimination. The two-step hierarchical regression analysis results from the second study that answered RQ6 revealed the following. The first regression model

included demographic variables (i.e., graduation year, mentoring work support, and GPA) and produced a result that was not significant. The second regression model was significant, included demographic variables and perceived discrimination, and produced a result that explained 15.2% of the variance in perceived career success.

The second study specifically focused on perceived discrimination as a barrier to perceived career success. The negative and significant relationship between perceived career success and perceived discrimination that was found through correlational and two-step hierarchical regression analysis among these African American women who were recent college graduates aligns with this key finding from the first study of experiences of the barriers from the intersectionality of gender and race, particularly among six participants who shared experiencing prejudice and discrimination on their pathway to HE leadership that was often linked with both racism and sexism. Therefore, these findings from both studies emphasized that real or perceived discrimination was a significant barrier to career success for African American women who were beginning their professional careers and who were more professionally advanced.

Sources of Motivation and Inspiration

All of the participants from the first study shared that the support they received on their pathway to HE leadership was linked with their sources of motivation and inspiration to keep going. These participants shared that their sources of motivation and inspiration were their families, friends, and mentors. The results of the correlation analysis from the second study that answered RQ1 revealed a positive and significant relationship between perceived career success and career motivation and inspiration. This key theme from the first study of sources of motivation and inspiration revealed that these

sources were generally from families, friends, and mentors. Although RQ1 from the second study more broadly asked about career motivation and inspiration, this finding of a positive and significant relationship between perceived career success and career motivation and inspiration underscored the importance of having career motivation and inspiration on the pathway of career success among these African American women beginning their professional careers. The more advanced professional African American women from the first study shared that the support they received from others was a significant source of motivation and inspiration to keep going.

Leaders, Women, Colleagues, and Other Professionals Who Understand the Struggles

Seven participants from the first study perceived that they received support from other leaders, women, and colleagues in their pathway to leadership. This key finding links with the previous theme from the first study of sources of motivation and inspiration. However, this theme pointed to support from others with whom these African American women were professionally associated. There was no finding from the second study that paired with this theme from the first study.

Motivational Influences of Goals Progress

Goal progress was one of the influences on career choices and actions as experienced by all 13 participants of the first study. This finding was two-fold: Goal progress may be motivational, but hindrances to goal progress might be demotivational for these Black female leaders. Six of these participants shared that at some point in their pathway to leadership, they felt discouraged to continue; despite feeling dejected, the participants shared that they did not think of giving up. This key finding demonstrated how these professional African American women possessed the characteristic of

resilience described in this study's first important finding. The finding from the second study of a positive and significant relationship between perceived career success and resilience among recent college graduates who were African American women further supported the significance of resilience in achieving career success.

Motivational Influences of Outcome Expectations

All the participants from the first study perceived that the imagined results of their actions motivated their career decisions. Twelve participants shared the motivational influences of their expectations that being a leader in HE institutions might lead to changes that would improve the situation for other people of color. There was no finding from the second study that paired with this theme from the first study.

Motivational Influences of Social Support Network

Twelve participants from the first study shared the motivational influences of their social support network on their career goals and actions. Four perceived that their small personal and professional network supported and encouraged them to pursue the pathway to HE leadership. The results of the correlation analysis from the second study that answered RQ2 revealed a positive and significant relationship between perceived career success and social support at work.

The results from the hierarchical regression analysis from the second study that answered RQ7 revealed the following. The first regression model included demographic variables (i.e., graduation year, mentoring work support, and GPA) and produced a result that was not significant. Again, the second regression model included demographic variables and perceived discrimination, producing a result that explained 15.2% of the variance in perceived career success. The third regression model included demographic

variables, perceived discrimination, career motivation, self-efficacy, and resilience and produced a result that explained 50.7% of the variance in perceived career success.

Mentoring work support and perceived discrimination made significant unique contributions to the second model, and perceived discrimination, career motivation, and self-efficacy made significant unique contributions to the third model.

This key finding from the first study of the motivational influences of their social support network on their career goals and actions pairs with the key finding from the second study of a positive and significant relationship between perceived career success and social support at work. Both findings highlight the importance of having a social support network among these African American women to facilitate career success.

Regarding the hierarchical regression analysis from the second study that answered RQ7, demographic variables alone were not significant on perceived career success among these participants, yet when linked with perceived discrimination and mentoring work support, they were. Moreover, these demographic variables were also significant when linked with career motivation, self-efficacy, and resilience. The interaction of all these variables continues to emphasize the significance of perceived discrimination, mentoring work support, and possessing the characteristics of career motivation, self-efficacy, and resilience on perceived career success among these college graduates.

Contribution to the Literature

First, both studies offer a valuable contribution to the literature from the specific populations of the study samples of a focus on African American women in HE leadership and on African American women who recently graduated from college; this study was the first to assess perceived career success among a sample of recently

graduated African American women. Within this novel context, multiple findings from these studies contributed to the existing literature on the topics of resilience and career success, self-efficacy and career success, perceived discrimination at work, social support at work, and how these variables interact. Additional findings and themes from the first study of self-awareness as a perceived characteristic needed by Black women for success in securing a leadership role, motivational influences of goal progress, and motivational influences of outcome expectations also made valuable contributions to the literature.

Regarding the specific finding from both studies of resilience as being one of the perceived characteristics needed by Black women for success in securing a leadership role and a positive and significant relationship between perceived career success and resilience, both of these findings contributed to the research conducted by McMillion (2017) and Lent et al. (2000), who found that resilience influenced career decision-making and success. At the same time, the emphasis on the need to possess resilience to overcome many barriers contributed to the extensive research regarding the unique challenges African American women experience in their career pathways (Alvarez-Cleveland, 2017; Barron, 2019; Rahman et al., 2016). The second study's specific finding of a positive and significant relationship between perceived career success and self-efficacy contributed to the literature about Hailey's (2018) study, where African American women reported several strategies that helped them succeed, including developing control, remaining confident, and embracing change. Similarly, Beckwith et al. (2016) found support for the value of African American women's self-efficacy in career success. Moreover, for African American women, high self-efficacy enabled them

to persist through challenges, leverage their abilities, and focus more on what needs to be accomplished to reach their goals (Fouad & Santana, 2017).

Both current studies also found experiences of barriers from the intersectionality of gender and race, specifically about a negative and significant relationship between perceived career success and perceived discrimination in the second study that contributed to several studies found in the literature. For instance, the literature revealed that unspoken bias precedes unfavorable consequences for African American women along their pathway to leadership (Avery et al., 2015). That is, African American women were stereotyped as dominant, angry, and incompetent (Rosette et al., 2016). Mitchell (2019) also found that African American women experienced barriers in their advancement to leadership positions, including being denied opportunities, implicit bias, the presence of a glass ceiling, and stereotypes. The results of this study were like those in Alvarez-Cleveland's (2017) study, which discovered that the barriers to African American women's pursuit of leadership had received negative feedback, reduced compensation compared to that of White or male colleagues, and ill perceptions of their leadership capabilities.

The findings from the first study showed that leaders, women, colleagues, and other professionals understood the struggles and could discuss the motivational influences of a social support network. The second study showed a significant positive relationship between social support at work and perceived career success, contributing to the work of several researchers found in the literature. The research results of such studies revealed that sponsorship, mentoring work support, and networking positively influenced African American women's ability to succeed in their career pathway

(Benschop et al., 2015; Downs et al., 2015; Gamble & Turner, 2015; Hague & Okpala, 2017). Additionally, Alvarez-Cleveland (2017) found in their qualitative study that positive support and feedback and mentoring or mentoring influenced African American women's advancement to leadership positions. Holder et al. (2015) and Liggins-Moore (2016) also found that a coping strategy African American women employed during their pathway to leadership was finding a mentor or other form of support. Furthermore, the lack of mentoring work support opportunities led by other African American women was considered a barrier to African American women's career success (Greene, 2019). A lack of mentoring work support was recognized in the literature as a barrier because having a mentor as social support at work helped break down barriers associated with the intersection of gender and race (Beckwith et al., 2016; Gamble & Turner, 2015).

The finding from the second study that perceived discrimination predicted perceived career success, where demographic characteristics were not predictive, contributed to a plethora of research results showing discrimination as a factor that obstructs African American women's path to career success in their positions (Alvarez-Cleveland, 2017; Avery et al., 2015; Mitchell, 2019; Rosette et al., 2016). The addition of the other independent variables in the second study increased the predictive power of the models utilized significantly, which further contributed to the literature on this topic. Specifically, studies have indicated that career motivation (Spurk & Abele, 2014), perceived discrimination (Alvarez-Cleveland, 2017; Mitchell, 2019), self-efficacy (Hailey, 2018), and resilience (McMillion, 2017) all have relationships with perceived career success. These findings also contributed to the collective body of literature by

revealing that, when examined together, these variables can predict perceptions of career success among African American women.

The themes from the first study of self-awareness as a perceived characteristic needed by Black women for success in securing a leadership role, motivational influences of goal progress, and motivational influences of outcome expectations made valuable contributions to the literature. Self-awareness involved the participants' strategic thinking throughout their pathway to leadership. This concept of self-awareness and strategic thinking makes a unique and valuable contribution to the literature by showing leadership paths among these African American women who successfully secured senior leadership positions in HE institutions as current or past presidents. Motivational influences of goal progress as being motivational and a possible hindrance to goal progress that may be demotivational for these Black female leaders was also a unique and valuable contribution to the literature. Self-efficacy specifically emerged through the importance of goal progress, which Spurk and Abele's (2014) research linked to self-efficacy. Moreover, all the participants from the first study perceived that their actions' imagined results motivated their career decisions. The vast majority shared that the motivational influences of their expectations of being a leader in HE institutions may lead to changes that will improve the situation for other people of color and make a unique and valuable contribution to the literature.

Contributions and Applications to Practice

The results from both studies offered several contributions and applications to practice. The results relating to the first research question from the first study revealed a persistent and pervasive struggle for successful African American educational leaders.

Although the results from the first study further revealed that these successful leaders overcame the constant challenges to their authority through resilience and self-awareness strategies that were supported by findings from the second study of a positive and significant relationship between perceived career success and resilience, the existence of these challenges is enough to suggest a need for better practices. Therefore, these study findings contribute to practice by pointing to the need for HE institutions to do more to ensure that educational leaders do not need to constantly expend their energy to avoid undermining their authority based on race and gender. When applied, doing more may include developing and implementing better workplace policies to decrease these challenges to their authority.

The results of the second research question from the first study contribute to practice by having specifically identified the barriers of subversion, bias, and discrimination these African American female leaders experienced and struggled with that undermine their authority. Findings from the second study also contribute to practice by indicating that there was a negative and significant relationship between perceived career success and perceived discrimination among recent college graduates who were African American women. Therefore, when applied to practice, these specific barriers can be included to implement better workplace policies of inclusion to ensure that these barriers are more effectively addressed. Moreover, when applied to practice, these findings from the second study show the need to address discrimination more effectively against African American women in all workplace policies.

The results from the first study for the second research question also contribute to practice by indicating that outside support, such as help from families and friends, were

critical sources of motivation and inspiration. When applied to practice, HE institutions may ensure that educational leaders have a healthy work-life balance and can benefit from this outside support. Findings from the first study contribute to practice by indicating that professional social support networks are a significant source of help and inspiration. Findings from the second study further indicated a positive and significant relationship between perceived career success and social support at work. Therefore, when applied to practice, HE institutions can foster a more supportive environment by building professional networks from which African American women leaders and recent college graduates can draw support.

The results of the third research question from the first study offer important insight into the motivations of these educational leaders that contribute to practice. The finding from the second study of a positive and significant relationship between perceived career success and career motivation and inspiration underscored the importance of having career motivation on the pathway of career success among these African American women who were beginning their professional careers. Therefore, when applied to practice, HE institutions could potentially work to identify African American women leaders' goals more actively among recent college graduates and foster outcomes to support progress toward these goals that will improve their motivation.

Limitations

I recognized several limitations as they pertained to this first study. The first study's results were limited because of the prevalence of self-reported data. Therefore, the participant's responses could not be independently or empirically verified. However, the results were accepted as being valid. Relatedly, the participants might have been affected

by social desirability bias, leading them to give the type of answers they perceived as socially desirable. Confidentiality lowered the risk of this type of bias but did not eliminate it.

Another key limitation of the first study was that it only identified participants who had succeeded. This limitation made the study valuable for identifying those with the characteristics to overcome the challenges faced by African American women in HE leadership. However, because the study did not include those who failed on the way or achieved and then lost leadership positions, the results focus more on factors leading to success than on barriers. As a result, the findings regarding barriers experienced were less extensive than they could have been if the lessons drawn from those who failed along their career paths had been included.

A third important limitation of the first study was the relatively small sample size. As a result, it was hard to be certain that full representations of the perceptions of the study population were fully captured. However, at least in part, the final sample was defined by the practicality of identifying relevant participants interested in participating in the study. As a related issue, there was the potential for self-selection bias in that the participants only represented a specific sample of the population amenable to participation in the study. Research ethics made this limitation unavoidable.

I also recognized several limitations of this second study. First, the participants in this study were not a random sample of the population. Therefore, the study results may be limited in scope and generalizability to a broader population. This limitation could not be avoided because it was infeasible to identify and contact all members within the population of recently graduated African American women in the United States.

Another limitation stemmed from using a correlational research design.

Correlational research was used to examine the statistical relationship between two or more variables without manipulating them. Although this approach was valuable in many areas of study, the results could not imply causation. Just because two variables were related did not mean one caused the other. Other unknown factors (confounding variables) might influence the relationship between the variables under study. Also, correlation only showed that two variables were related, but it did not provide insights into the underlying reasons or mechanisms behind the observed relationship. Furthermore, correlation coefficients were sensitive to outliers or influential data points, which could have distorted the strength and direction of the relationship between variables. The results of assumptions testing revealed outliers for career motivation, social support at work, and self-efficacy. However, these outliers were not removed because doing so would have reduced the small sample size.

Another limitation that emerged during the second study was a low sample size for mentoring work support social support at work. Specifically, only 33 of 91 participants responded to items on the social support scale because they had selected *yes* when asked whether they had a mentor. Because the sample size for social support at work was much lower than that for other variables, the binary measure (Yes, No) of mentoring work support was used in the regression models. Despite these limitations, researchers can use the results of this study as a starting point to generate hypotheses and guide further investigations.

Overall Conclusion

This chapter provided a final discussion of the results from the first qualitative exploratory study and the second quantitative correlational study. The research problem for Study 2 was that it was not known to what extent the key themes uncovered in Study 1—including social support/collegial understanding, the experience of intersectional barriers to advancement, self-efficacy, resilience, and career motivation—are present in recently graduated African American women and how these themes might relate to these women's career goals. Key findings from this first study were from African American women who successfully secured senior leadership positions in HE institutions. The findings indicated that although these women felt their authority was constantly undermined because of bias and discriminatory behavior often linked with both racism and sexism, self-awareness strategies, and resilience helped them to succeed. Social support from inside and outside the organization was also identified as critical, as were outcome expectations and goal progress. Key findings from this second study among African American women who were recent college graduates indicated significant positive relationships between the independent variables of career motivation, social support at work, self-efficacy, and resilience and the dependent variable of perceived career success. The results also revealed a significant negative relationship between perceived discrimination and perceived career success.

Multiple findings from the second study supported the first study's findings, particularly by recognizing the importance of having the characteristics of resilience and career motivation on the pathway of career success, needed social support, and the recognition of how bias and discrimination can negatively impact career success.

Therefore, HE institutions can and must do more to help African American women succeed and continue to succeed in their career pathways. HE institutions can increase opportunities for career motivation and social support while decreasing African American women's exposure to bias and discrimination through policies that foster more inclusion so that everyone has an equal opportunity to succeed.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

CAREER CHOICE GOALS AND ACTIONS DATA

RQ Alignment	Model constructs	Dimensions	Measures
RQ2	Proximal environmental influences	Barriers	1. What are the most common barriers you have faced toward achieving your current position as President/Executive in higher education?
RQ2	Proximal environmental influences	Barriers	2. What are the most formidable barriers you have overcome in your position as a Black woman in higher education?
RQ3	Personal inputs	Outcome expectations	3. Discuss your most notable or significant experience(s) as a Black woman in higher education?
RQ3	Personal inputs	Attributions	4. What are the personal characteristics and qualities you feel are necessary for Black women to advance career-wise in higher education?
RQ1	Personal inputs	Choice goals	5. Is your current position the one to which you aspired when you first completed your undergraduate program?
RQ1	Motivational influences	Goal progress: Performance domains and attainments	6. Is this your first position as President/Executive?
RQ2	Proximal environmental influences	Support: Social support	7. What sources of encouragement and support do you identify as important to your success in higher education?
RQ2	Background environmental influences	Learning experiences, personal inputs, background environmental influences (intersectionality of race and gender)	8. What are the commonly perceived challenges among Black women to being promoted in higher education?
RQ3	Motivational influences	Goal progress: Sources of motivational influences	9. Did you ever feel discouraged or think about giving up prior to getting to this role?
RQ1	Background environmental influences	Learning experiences, personal inputs, background environmental influences (intersectionality of race and gender)	10. Do you continue to experience barriers in your current role?
RQ2	Personal inputs	Self-efficacy beliefs	11. Which of your personal characteristics do you attribute most to your success?

RQ Alignment	Model constructs	Dimensions	Measures
RQ2	Background environmental influences	Learning experiences, personal inputs, background environmental influences (intersectionality of race and gender)	12. How do you think your experience compares to your counterparts that identify as: a. White female b. White males c. Black male
RQ2	Background environmental influences	Learning experiences, personal inputs, background environmental influences (intersectionality of race and gender)	13. In your opinion, what impact does gender and/or race have on promotion and career advancement of Black women?
RQ3	Background environmental influences	Learning experiences, personal inputs, background environmental influences (intersectionality of race and gender)	14. In your opinion, discuss how you perceive your gender and race have impacted your career advancement.
RQ2	Proximal environmental influences	Support: Networking	15. Discuss how your social network impacted your career as a Black woman in higher education?
RQ2	Background environmental influences	Learning experiences, personal inputs, background environmental influences (intersectionality of race and gender)	16. What do you think are the key factors leading to inequalities or inequities among Black women in higher education?
RQ2	Background environmental influences	Personal inputs, background environmental influences (intersectionality of race and gender)	17. Are you able to recognize any subtleties common in the higher education environment that work against your career success of advancement/achievement of Black women in general?
RQ2	Motivational influences	Behavior: Practice	18. Identify the most common behaviors of Black women that you believe derail their retention, advancement, or achievement in higher education?
RQ3	Proximal environmental influences	Support	19. What strategies do you think colleges and universities should implement to hire more Black women in higher education?
RQ1	Proximal environmental influences	Support	20. What does your college or university do to support the retention and success of Black women?
RQ1	Proximal environmental influences	Support	21. What supports do you continue to use in your role as President/Executive?
RQ3	Personal inputs	Outcome expectations	22. What influenced your decision to continue your career path at your current college or university?

RQ Alignment	Model constructs	Dimensions	Measures
RQ2	Proximal environmental influences	Support	23. What changes would you suggest to college and university leaders to recruit, hire, and retain Black women in top executive/executive-track position?
RQ3	Personal inputs	Outcome expectations	24. What advice do you have for recent graduates?

APPENDIX B
INITIAL CODING

Interview Questions	Codes	No. of Supporting Participants	No. of Occurrences in the Text
01 What are the most common barriers you have faced toward achieving your current position as President/Executive in higher education?		13	13
	did not plan to become the president	8	8
	microaggression	3	3
	misunderstanding the needs and capacities of Black women	1	1
	potential was not seen	2	2
	value of Black women is undermined	1	1
	lack of credentials	1	1
	lack of experience in the higher education setting	1	1
	unaware of the possible leadership opportunities in their career path	1	1
	no mentor	1	1
	aligning everyone's goals	1	1
	prejudice about Black people	0	0
	aggressive	1	1
	race more than gender	1	1
	unprofessional	1	1
	prejudice about age	0	0
seen as young	2	2	
02 What are the most formidable barriers you have overcome in your position as a Black woman in higher education?		9	9
	being underestimated for being a Black woman	4	4
	prove oneself with others' metrics	2	2
	other people thinking they can do a better job	2	2
	need evidence that they can do the job	1	1
	challenges made them stronger	2	2
	thoughts of failing to overcome the barriers	1	1
	other people's expectations	3	3
	doubt about one's qualifications	1	1
03 Discuss your most notable or significant experience(s) as a Black woman in higher education?		13	13

Interview Questions	Codes	No. of Supporting Participants	No. of Occurrences in the Text
	told by a White male that she would never have a leadership role	1	1
	prejudice against Black women	1	1
	one's achievements	0	0
	seen as a representation	1	2
	being able to walk away and acknowledge one's achievements	1	1
	getting the position	1	1
	one's support network	0	0
	got a 'stamp of approval'	1	1
	hired for being Black	0	0
	made the most of the opportunity	5	5
	one's opportunity to improve the situation	0	0
	advocate equity	3	3
	alternative leadership style	1	1
04 What are the personal characteristics and qualities you feel are necessary for Black women to advance career-wise in higher education?		10	10
	resilience	2	2
	tenacity	3	3
	be strategic	1	4
	humility	5	5
	self-aware of how they come across as a Black woman	2	2
	professionalism	1	1
	assertiveness	3	3
	passionate	1	1
	focused	0	0
	focused on one's role and goals	1	1
05 Is your current position the one to which you aspired when you first completed your undergraduate program?		12	12
	did not plan to be a leader in HE	5	5
	had other career plans	2	2
	self-doubt	1	1
	was not aware of career advancement	4	4
	remain unsure about leadership	1	1
06 Is this your first position as President/Executive?		11	11
	first HE leadership experience	4	4
	had former HE leadership experiences	3	3
07 What sources of encouragement and support do you identify as important to your		13	13

Interview Questions	Codes	No. of Supporting Participants	No. of Occurrences in the Text	
success in higher education?	life partner, spouse, significant other	4	4	
	supportive of career	2	2	
	other women - sister, friends, colleagues	6	6	
	group of women in the workplace	3	7	
	like-minded women	3	3	
	self	0	0	
	self-care	2	2	
	knowing when to take a break	1	1	
	children	1	1	
	relieve stress	1	1	
	understand the demands of her job	1	1	
	mentor	1	1	
	White male who wanted to see her succeed	3	3	
	predecessor	1	1	
	hired life coach	0	0	
	teach balance	1	1	
	therapist	1	1	
	paid service to express oneself freely	1	1	
	colleagues	0	0	
	presidents of other institutions	3	3	
	students	1	1	
	source of inspiration	1	1	
	people from the foundational years	0	0	
	told that she could be anything she wanted to be	1	1	
	08 What are the commonly perceived challenges among Black women to being promoted in higher education?		13	13
		uncredited work when helping minorities	4	4
		how to be seen	0	0
others' perceptions of their abilities		3	5	
unaware of the opportunities		2	2	
weaker network than males or Whites		2	2	
race		1	1	
making a big deal out of being hired		1	1	
stereotypes about Black women		1	1	
gender		3	3	
different standards for men and women		1	1	
female leaders are outnumbered by male leaders		1	1	
gender roles in leadership	1	1		
09 Did you ever feel discouraged or think about giving up prior to getting to this role?		13	13	
	felt tired of pushing through	2	2	
	discouraged	2	2	

Interview Questions	Codes	No. of Supporting Participants	No. of Occurrences in the Text
	discouraged but not giving up	5	5
	discouraged by dealing with unreasonable people	1	1
	not discouraged	1	1
	past experiences prepared her for the role	1	1
	looking back at achievements	1	1
	discouraged in some tasks but not the role itself	0	0
10 Do you continue to experience barriers in your current role?		9	9
	undermined by a male subordinate	1	1
	other people's expectations	0	0
	expectations that they would fail	2	2
	better than when they first started	0	0
	gained respect and understanding	2	2
11 Which of your personal characteristics do you attribute most to your success?		13	13
	passion to serve	5	5
	personable	3	3
	authentic	2	6
	cautiousness of how others perceived them as a Black person	1	1
	resilience	4	4
	hard working	1	1
	focused	1	1
	strategic thinking	0	0
	learned from mistakes	2	2
	persistence	0	0
	not giving up	1	1
	grabbing the opportunities to learn	3	3
12a White females		3	3
	privileged attitude	2	2
	race is an advantage	1	1
	identify with White men because they are White	1	1
12b White males		5	5
	double standards	2	2
	not enough experience to form an opinion	1	1
	Black females don't get the benefit of the doubt	2	2
	used to dealing with White males	1	1
	biased perceptions	0	0
	paternalistic	1	1
12c Black males		4	4
	most similar	1	1
	less scrutinized than Black females	1	1
13 In your opinion, what impact does gender and/or race have on promotion and career		10	10

Interview Questions	Codes	No. of Supporting Participants	No. of Occurrences in the Text	
advancement of Black women?	gender	0	0	
	insecurity of men	1	1	
	finding the balance between family and career	2	2	
	race	0	0	
	the addition of being an immigrant	0	0	
	both	0	0	
	the appearance of Black women	1	1	
	needed to work harder than Whites and males	1	1	
14 In your opinion, discuss how you perceive your gender and race have impacted your career advancement.		13	13	
	hired because of diversity requirements	2	2	
	used to her advantage	1	1	
	career advancement could have been faster	1	1	
	needed more qualifications than males	2	2	
	need more qualifications than Whites	1	1	
	lower expectations of others because of race	1	1	
	not hired because of race	2	2	
	other's perceptions of Black individuals	0	0	
	perceived as aggressive	1	1	
	being an immigrant	0	0	
	did not think of racial barriers before	1	1	
15 Discuss how your social network impacted your career as a Black woman in higher education?		12	12	
	provided support and encouragement	6	6	
	small personal network	5	8	
	professionals outside the campus	1	1	
	socializing was difficult during the pandemic	1	1	
	organizations with other Black females	3	3	
	cut off people who have bad influences on her career	1	1	
	reach out to network if in need of resources	1	1	
	diverse network that is strictly professional	1	1	
	other people's perception of her	0	0	
	to be surrounded with people who appreciate her uniqueness	1	1	
16 What do you think are the key factors		12	12	

Interview Questions	Codes	No. of Supporting Participants	No. of Occurrences in the Text
leading to inequalities or inequities among Black women in higher education?	discrimination	7	7
	lack of financial support	1	1
	conflicts with other Black women	1	1
	lack of mentorship	1	1
18 Identify the most common behaviors of Black women that you believe derail their retention, advancement, or achievement in higher education?		10	10
	seeking validation and affirmation from others	1	3
	afraid of being themselves	3	3
	fighting for breaking the glass ceiling	1	2
	distracted by working on diversity	2	2
	fighting against people resistant to change	1	1
19 What strategies do you think colleges and universities should implement to hire more Black women in higher education?		13	13
	need for deliberate actions	0	0
	quantifiable accountability	1	2
	create conditions for success	1	1
	provide mentorship	3	3
	encourage students from minorities to create wider pool	1	1
	actions from leaders	2	2
	be honest about the conditions	1	1
20 What does your college or university do to support the retention and success of Black women?		1	1
	not much. surface talk only	1	1
	Black female VP	0	0
21 What supports do you continue to use in your role as President/Executive?	advocates support for people of color	1	1
		9	9
	family	5	5
	other women	2	3
	other executive-level women who understand the struggles of career advancement	1	1
	2	4	
	therapist	2	4

Interview Questions	Codes	No. of Supporting Participants	No. of Occurrences in the Text
	work-life balance	2	2
	a hobby	1	1
	things outside of work	3	3
	religious faith	2	2
	other leaders	1	1
	trusted friends	3	3
22 What influenced your decision to continue your career path at your current college or university?		10	10
	chance to make a difference	7	7
	servitude	3	3
	alignment with staff	2	2
	supportive environment	1	1
	influence of friend	2	2
24 What advice do you have for recent graduates?		13	13
	be prepared to face stressful situations	6	6
	have plans	4	4
	build and nurture relationships	3	3
	be wary of people	1	1
	be prepared for leadership	0	0
	know their aspirations	6	7
	find a mentor	5	5
	know what being a leader entails	2	2
	join leadership activities	2	2
	start early	1	1

APPENDIX C

MODEL CONSTRUCTS AND DIMENSIONS ALIGNMENT

Environment - social support	
Proximal environmental barriers 01	What are the most common barriers you have faced toward achieving your current position as President/Executive in higher education?
did not plan to become the president	
microaggression	
misunderstanding the needs and capacities of Black women	
value of Black women is undermined	
lack of credentials	
lack of experience in the higher education setting	
unaware of the possible leadership opportunities in their career path	
no mentor	
aligning everyone's goals	
prejudice about Black people	
prejudice about age	
Proximal environmental support 19	What strategies do you think colleges and universities should implement to hire more Black women in higher education?
need for deliberate actions	
Social support 07	What sources of encouragement and support do you identify as important to your success in higher education?
life partner, spouse, significant other	
other women - sister, friends, colleagues	
self	
children	
mentor	
hired life coach	
therapist	
colleagues	
students	
people from the foundational years	
Proximal environmental barriers 02	What are the most formidable barriers you have overcome in your position as a Black woman in higher education?
being underestimated for being a Black woman	
challenges made them stronger	
thoughts of failing to overcome the barriers	

doubt about one's qualifications

Social network 15 Discuss how your social network impacted your career as a Black woman in higher education?

provided support and encouragement

professionals outside the campus

socializing was difficult during the pandemic

organizations with other Black females

cut off people who have bad influences on her career

reach out to network if in need of resources

other people's perception of her

to be surrounded with people who appreciate her uniqueness

Social support 21 What supports do you continue to use in your role as President/Executive?

family

other women

therapist

work-life balance

religious faith

other leaders

trusted friends

Proximal environmental support 20 What does your college or university do to support the retention and success of Black women?

not much. surface talk only

Black female VP

advocates support for people of color

Context

Background environmental influences 03 Discuss your most notable or significant experience(s) as a Black woman in higher education?

told by a White male that she would never have a leadership role

prejudice against Black women

one's achievements

one's support network

hired for being Black

one's opportunity to improve the situation

advocate equity

advocating for students of color

alternative leadership style

Background environmental influences 08 What are the commonly perceived challenges among Black women to being promoted in higher education?

uncredited work when helping minorities

how to be seen

race

gender

different standards for men and women

female leaders are outnumbered by male leaders

gender roles in leadership

Background environmental influences 14 In your opinion, discuss how you perceive your gender and race have impacted your career advancement.

hired because of diversity requirements

career advancement could have been faster

lower expectations of others because of race

not hired because of race

other's perceptions of Black individuals

being an immigrant

did not think of racial barriers before

Background environmental influences 16 What do you think are the key factors leading to inequalities or inequities among Black women in higher education?

discrimination

lack of financial support

conflicts with other Black women

lack of mentorship

Background environmental influences 10 Do you continue to experience barriers in your current role?

undermined by a male subordinate

other people's expectations

better than when they first started

gained respect and understanding

Background environmental influences 13 In your opinion, what impact does gender and/or race have on promotion and career advancement of Black women?

gender

race

both

the appearance of Black women

needed to work harder than Whites and males

Background environmental influences 12b White males

double standards

not enough experience to form an opinion

Black females don't get the benefit of the doubt

used to dealing with White males

biased perceptions

paternalistic

Background environmental influences 12a White females

privileged attitude

race is an advantage

identify with White men because they are White

Background environmental influences 12c Black males

most similar

less scrutinized than Black females

Cognition

Self-efficacy beliefs 11 Which of your personal characteristics do you attribute most to your success?

passion to serve

personable

cautiousness of how others perceived them as a Black person

resilience

hard working

focused

strategic thinking

persistence

not giving up

grabbing the opportunities to learn

Outcome expectations 24 What advice do you have for recent graduates?

be prepared to face stressful situations

build and nurture relationships

be prepared for leadership

know their aspirations

find a mentor

know what being a leader entails

join leadership activities

start early

Attributions 04 What are the personal characteristics and qualities you feel are necessary for Black women to advance career-wise in higher education?

resilience
 be strategic
 assertiveness
 passionate
 focused

focused on one's role and goals

Goals 05 Is your current position the one to which you aspired when you first completed your undergraduate program?

did not plan to be a leader in HE

had other career plans

self-doubt

was not aware of career advancement

remain unsure about leadership

Motivation-Behavior

Goal progress 09 Did you ever feel discouraged or think about giving up prior to getting to this role?

felt tired of pushing through

discouraged

discouraged by dealing with unreasonable people

not discouraged

past experiences prepared her for the role

looking back at achievements

discouraged in some tasks but not the role itself

recently gave birth

Goal progress 06 Is this your first position as President/Executive?

first HE leadership experience

had former HE leadership experiences

Goal progress 22 What influenced your decision to continue your career path at your current college or university?

chance to make a difference

servitude

alignment with staff

supportive environment

influence of friend

Practice 18 Identify the most common behaviors of Black women that you believe derail their retention, advancement, or achievement in higher education?

seeking validation and affirmation from others

fighting for breaking the glass ceiling

distracted by working on diversity

fighting against people resistant to change

Outcome expectations 22 What influenced your decision to continue your career path at your current college or university?

chance to make a difference

servitude

alignment with staff

supportive environment

influence of friend
