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Walden University

College of Management and Technology

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Walden University
2019

Abstract

African American Women Middle Managers' Stories of Stereotype Threat
and Leadership Aspirations

by

Rockell Chandler Ashley

MA, Bethel University, 2013

BS, Limestone College, 2011

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Management

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Abstract

Even with the rise of racial diversity in the workplace, African American women remain underrepresented in upper management and organizational leadership positions, making up only 1% of U.S. corporate officers. The purpose of this qualitative narrative inquiry study was to explore the daily experiences of African American women middle managers in regard to stereotype threat and the effect of these experiences on their engagement with leadership aspirations. The narrative inquiry method was used to address this gap and answer the research question, through storytelling from African American women in middle-management positions. This study was framed by 2 key concepts that focus on minority group workplace experiences with stereotype threat and the implications of these experiences on minority group members for their engagement with leadership aspirations: Inzlicht and Kang's concept of *stereotype threat spillover* and Major, Spencer, Schmader, Wolfe, and Crocker's concept of *psychological disengagement*. The data-gathering process involved semistructured telephone interviews with 7 college-educated African American women, in U.S.-based organizations, in which participants told the story of their stereotype threat experiences in middle management roles. Two of the 5 key themes uncovered were impact of stereotype threat spillover and disengagement from leadership and career aspirations. The information gathered from the narrative study will help drive social change by bringing awareness to the issue and reducing threat experiences of disadvantaged groups across organizations.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Introduction

Even with the rise of racial diversity in the workplace, African American women remain underrepresented in upper management and organizational leadership positions (Beckwith, Carter, & Peters, 2016; Levchak, 2018). African American women make up only 1% of U.S. corporate officers (McDowell & Carter-Francique, 2017). Scholars theorize that African American women aspiring to leadership positions in organizations often experience a phenomenon called *stereotype threat* that can undermine motivation and cause underperformance in organizations (Rosette, Koval, Ma, & Livingston, 2016; Walton, Murphy, & Ryan, 2015). Limited research exists about minority women middle managers and their experiences with stereotype threat and the potential consequences of stereotype threat within this group that may lead to their disengagement from pursuing leadership roles (Einarsdottir, Christiansen, & Kristjansdottir, 2018; Kalokerinos, von Hippel, & Zacher, 2014).

One coping strategy often used by individuals discouraged by stereotype threat is to psychologically disengage their self-esteem from domains such as their work role, where they experience performance evaluation (Crocker, Major, & Steele, 1998; Major & Schmader, 1998; Nussbaum & Steele, 2007). Individuals experiencing stereotype threat may perceive that they have fewer options for pursuing leadership positions and thus may disengage from their career aspirations (Casad & Bryant, 2016; Godsil, Tropp, Goff, & MacFarlane, 2016). Researchers have noted that disengagement may be especially present among African American female leaders experiencing stereotype threat, who are

often the only—or one of a few—African American women in a supervisory position (Emerson & Murphy, 2015; Lawson, 2018). An extension of stereotype threat is *stereotype threat spillover*, Inzlicht and Kang's (2010) unique concept that *coping* with threat, and not the threat itself, may have long-term behavioral and psychological effects after employees leave the workplace. Scholars have further suggested that stereotype threat spillover may have significant implications for organizations in retaining talented employees from marginalized groups in the leadership track (Kalokerinos et al., 2014; Kang & Inzlicht, 2014).

This introductory chapter will present the background literature leading to the problem statement formation and will include an exposition of the gap in the scholarly literature. The demonstration of rational alignment between problem, purpose, and research questions and conceptual framework of the study will follow. Lastly, this chapter will include the significance, assumptions, and limitations of the study, along with definitions of key terms used throughout this document.

Background of the Study

Since civil rights laws made discrimination illegal, minority presence in the workplace has increased, but African American women are still underrepresented in management positions (Holder, Jackson, & Ponterotto, 2015). African American women in management positions face substantial obstacles in career advancement, often requiring them to exceed performance expectations in order to avoid repercussions based on stereotypes (Beckwith et al., 2016). Rosette et al. (2016) examined the racial stereotypes of African American women and how negative historical views, such as

“being dominant but not competent” hinder their aspirations into leadership positions. Beckwith et al. (2016) further suggested that traditional stereotype behaviors in the workplace influence the underrepresentation of African American women in management positions. The problem is not that there are not enough minorities to fill these middle-management positions, but rather that minorities avoid these positions in an effort to prevent historical stereotypical treatment (Hekman, Johnson, Foo, & Yang, 2017). Insight into these experiences can aid in raising consciousness of stereotype actions and foster organizational cultural change, possibly bringing about equality in the workforce and middle-management positions (Einarsdottir et al., 2018).

Consequences of stereotype threat have driven minorities to explore avenues of self-affirmation, educational attainment, and humorous reinterpretation to help close the gap and cope with the negative effects, giving them confidence and motivation to pursue advancement (Kalokerinos et al., 2014). Hekman et al. (2017) suggested that, in an effort to avoid stereotypical actions, this group of individuals has the tendency to not engage at their peak of performance, thus lowering their career standards. These types of strategies are essential to help cope with stereotype threat, and the exploration of minorities’ experiences is vital to support minimization of racial bias and microaggression on the job (Block, Cruz, Bairley, Harel-Marian, & Roberson, 2018).

The need for additional understanding of stereotype threat has been documented as a necessary requirement for managers today to aid in reducing stereotype actions against employees (von Hippel, Kalokerinos, & Zacher, 2017). All persons within the workforce may be judged in some way, but employees from negatively stereotyped

groups, such as African Americans, are more likely to experience stereotype threat (Kalokerinos et al., 2014). Stereotype threat is situational in nature but always has negative implications for minority employees (Walton et al., 2015). It is important to introduce the effects that negative stereotyping has on the actions of ethnic minority women, which may cause this group to disengage from leadership positions (Hekman et al., 2017). Each person's individual experience will be different, which is why this research is significant in the exploration of stories to build on those stereotype threat experiences and evolve understanding of how to handle them to prevent career hindrance (Block et al., 2011; Einarsdottir et al., 2018). Reduced career aspirations in response to stereotype threat, particularly for non White women middle managers, may contribute to the documented gender gap in organizational leadership (Einarsdottir et al., 2018; Hoyt & Simon, 2017). Addressing these barriers with data-based evidence may reveal noncompliance of organizations in eradicating that stereotype threat, further reinforcing the need for detailed understanding and exploration of the problem (von Hippel et al., 2017).

Problem Statement

Even with the rise of racial diversity in the workplace, African American women remain underrepresented in upper management and organizational leadership positions (Beckwith et al., 2016; Levchak, 2018). African American women continue to be underrepresented at upper management levels in American corporations, making up only 1% of U.S. corporate officers (McDowell & Carter-Francique, 2017). In S&P Fortune 500 companies, African American women in 2016 comprised 0.2% of CEOs (Allen &

Lewis, 2016). Scholars theorize that African American women aspiring to leadership positions in organizations often experience the phenomenon of stereotype threat that can undermine motivation and cause underperformance in organizations (Rosette et al., 2016; Walton et al., 2015). Limited research exists about women middle managers and their experiences with stereotype threat, and particularly among non White women middle managers (Einarsdottir et al., 2018; Hekman et al., 2017). The general problem is that potential consequences of stereotype threat among non White women middle managers may lead to disengagement from pursuing leadership roles (Einarsdottir et al., 2018; Kalokerinos et al., 2014).

Individuals experiencing stereotype threat may perceive they have fewer options for pursuing leadership positions and thus may disengage from their career aspirations (Casad & Bryant, 2016; Godsil et al., 2016). Reduced career aspirations in response to stereotype threat, particularly for women middle managers, may exacerbate the gender gap in organizational leadership (Einarsdottir et al., 2018; Hoyt & Simon, 2017). It remains important to continue using qualitative methods to examine employees' experiences with stereotype threat, particularly across gender and minority groups (Block, Koch, Liberman, Merriweather, & Roberson, 2011; Kenny & Briner, 2014), including African American women who remain unrepresented in scholarly literature (Holder et al., 2015; Sesko & Biernat, 2016). The specific problem is that the connection between African American women middle managers' experiences with stereotype threat and the implications of this for their leadership aspirations are poorly understood. (Einarsdottir et al., 2018; Hekman et al., 2017; von Hippel et al., 2017).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative, narrative inquiry is to gain a deeper understanding of African American women middle managers' daily experiences with stereotype threat and the effect of these experiences on their engagement with leadership aspirations (Einarsdottir et al., 2018; Hekman et al., 2017; von Hippel et al., 2017). To address this gap, a narrative inquiry method was used (Clandinin & Huber, 2010). The narrative approach was born of constructivists such as Gergen (1998), who pointed out that narrative highlights the contextual construction in social relations and daily life experiences (Slembrouck, 2015).

Research Question

How do African American women middle managers narrate their daily experiences with stereotype threat, and what are the implications of these experiences for their engagement with leadership aspirations?

Conceptual Framework

This study is framed by two key concepts that focus on minority group workplace experiences with stereotype threat and the implications of the experiences of this group for their engagement with leadership aspirations: Inzlicht and Kang's (2010) concept of stereotype threat spillover; and Major et al.'s (1998) concept of *psychological disengagement*. The purpose of this qualitative, narrative inquiry study is to gain a deeper understanding of African American women middle managers' daily experiences with stereotype threat and the implications of these experiences for their engagement with leadership aspirations (Einarsdottir et al., 2018; Hekman et al., 2017; von Hippel et al.,

2017). The findings of this empirical investigation are aimed at advancing knowledge on the interface between stereotype threat and leadership disengagement among African American women managers, and contributing original qualitative data to the study's conceptual framework.

Stereotype Threat Spillover

Steele and Aronson (1995) defined stereotype threat as “being at risk of confirming, as self-characteristic, a negative stereotype about one's group” (p. 797) and asserted that the implications of stereotype threat for an individual may include disruptive effects such as internalized inferiority anxiety (Hoyt & Murphy, 2016). One of the most significant career influences is stereotype threat, as it is powerful and pervasive among a diverse and sizable number of employees (Hong, 2018). Applying stereotype threat theory (Steele & Aronson, 1995) to workplace settings with managers from marginalized groups provides a theoretical understanding of how individuals experiencing stereotype threat may perceive that they have fewer options for pursuing leadership positions and thus may disengage from their career aspirations (Casad & Bryant, 2016).

Psychological Disengagement

One coping mechanism often used by individuals discouraged by stereotype threat is to psychologically disengage their self-esteem from domains such as their work role, where they experience performance evaluation (Crocker et al., 1998; Major & Schmader, 1998; Nussbaum & Steele, 2007). The diminishment of someone's self-views, skills, abilities, and performance is what happens when disengagement occurs, which prevents the perception of self-worth from being present when experiencing success or failure

(Major et al., 1998; Steele, 2007). Researchers have noted that disengagement may be especially present among African American female leaders, often the only—or one of a few—African American women in a supervisory position in any organization (Emerson & Murphy, 2015; Lawson, 2018). Recent extensions of stereotype threat theory have suggested that expectations of inferiority among minority groups in a business setting can thwart an individual's motivation or ambition (Deemer, Lin, & Soto, 2016). Stereotype threat can also cause feelings of low self-esteem that can bring leaders to doubt their abilities in the workplace (Deemer et al., 2016, Emerson & Murphy, 2015).

Minority female employees in business settings who experience stereotype threat may cope by cognitively disengaging their abilities from their leadership and career aspirations (Cook & Glass, 2014; Schmalzing & Jones, 2017). Thus far, only a few laboratory studies have explored the influence of acute stereotype threat on leadership engagement (Kalokerinos et al., 2014). To gain a deeper understanding of the phenomenon under study, it is important to continue using qualitative methods to examine employees' experiences with stereotype threat, particularly across gender and minority groups (Block et al., 2011; Kenny & Briner, 2014), including African American women, who remain unrepresented in scholarly literature (Holder et al., 2015; Sesko & Biernat, 2016).

Nature of the Study

The nature of this study is qualitative. It recognizes that quantitative methods of research are outcome based, with a tendency to overlook the impact of experiences, and as such, can lead to ineffective results in their disregard of the significant characteristics

of themes and occurrences (Webster & Mertova, 2007). Qualitative approaches when investigating African American women middle managers' daily experiences with stereotype threat and the implications of these experiences for their engagement with leadership aspirations (Einarsdottir et al., 2018; Hekman et al., 2017; von Hippel et al., 2017) allow for complex human issues to be included in the research data and for further emphasis on presenting rich descriptions rather than focusing on testing a priori hypotheses (Clandinin, 2016). Social constructivists such as Gergen (1998) first wrote that narrative emphasizes the contextual construction in social relations and daily life experiences (Slembrouck, 2015). Narrative inquiry allows for presenting rich participant descriptions through storytelling and can also be a sound research method for developing a detailed understanding of human experiences as they are being lived daily (Clandinin, 2016; Webster & Mertova, 2007).

Polkinghorne (1988) recognized that human beings primarily communicate among themselves via storytelling, and it is the oldest form of influence. Narrative research approach is ideal for this study, as it extends the potential of business research beyond the traditional options and minimizes the boundaries of fields within social sciences. The basic human activities of narrative knowing and storytelling form the basis for narrative research (Moen, 2006). In the narrative inquiry tradition, stories of participants are interesting, rich in information, and able to provide a social context to the researcher. I analyzed the participants' storytelling by understanding the meaning and content of the narrative to answer the research question.

This study is grounded in a hermeneutic approach, which focuses on how human experience is mediated through storytelling (Clandinin, 2016; Clandinin & Huber, 2010). Hermeneutics is based on the deciphering, interpreting, and translating of ideas by examining language, and it considers multiple meanings that include my own perspective. The moving back and forth between perspectives in order to uncover inherent meanings is termed the *hermeneutic circle* (Freeman, 2016). Using this approach increases the likelihood of obtaining findings that can likely become significant research material (Webster & Mertova, 2007).

Narrative inquiry researchers inquire into the what, how, and why of human relationships. Although other qualitative methods exist, such as grounded theory, phenomenology, and case study to gather data based on the participants' experiences (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015) and are often used to communicate common understandings at certain points of the subjects under study, it is also true that these qualitative designs omit the important fundamental stages of critical events (Webster & Mertova, 2007). A narrative inquiry approach permits the researcher to present a general picture of a participant's daily experience, which includes examining complex data of critical events that influence the daily decision-making and reactions to such events (Webster & Mertova, 2007). Unlike other forms of qualitative research such as ethnography, phenomenology, and case study methods, a narrative inquiry approach provides the opportunity to work closely and establish trusting relationships with participants who may express feelings of discomfort when revealing critical events within their organizational setting (Wimberly, 2011). Narrative inquiry creates a space (Clandinin,

2006) that allows the African American women middle manager participants' voices to narrate their daily experiences within their organizational context, while also gathering valuable facts and story configurations (see Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

Using narrative inquiry, I collected critical facts and positions (see Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) through the process of retelling each of seven participants' own perspectives as captured through personal experience, including the individuals' personal and social experiences dealing with others. To provide for an accurate and data-rich narrative study, face-to-face interviews and audio recordings on the life experiences from a purposeful sample of 10 participants with the phenomena under study were conducted, and I kept journal notes (see Connelly & Clandinin, 1990; Webster & Mertova, 2007). The sample population met the following inclusion criteria: female identifying as African American; over the age of 30; employed as a middle manager in a U.S.-based organization for a minimum of 2 years; and able and willing to provide in-depth information on the phenomena under study (see Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). The inclusion criteria of the study's sample replicated sample criteria from other similar studies of middle managers in the United States (see Davis & Maldonado, 2015; Rudman & Glick, 1999).

The first step of the data analysis was the process of *restorying* a narrative data analysis method used by the researcher to gather data, analysis of the story (e.g., time, place, plot, and scene), and then rewriting of the data (see Clandinin, 2016). The critical events approach was the second step of the data analysis, and was key to ensuring accurate recording of those critical experiences by providing details on place, time,

characters, and significant events essential to the study (see Webster & Mertova, 2007). A critical event narrative analysis models the events in narratives in order to investigate human stories and strengthen trustworthiness of data. This approach enhances the illustration of detailed and significant human experiences while incorporating holistic characteristics of the critical event elements through personal experience (Webster & Mertova, 2007). This approach takes place in two stages: (a) interpretation of each story through restorying to provide a description or categories for each event or single case, and (b) cross-checking of each case with the event categories themes for comparative purposes. The goal of this two-stage process is to enable the researcher and participant to co-construct meanings, themes, and images and to produce a participant-guided interpreted transcript (Ollerenshaw & Creswell, 2002). Traditionally, triangulation is used in qualitative research for determining themes; however, Webster and Mertova (2007) have suggested that triangulation is not feasible for critical event narrative inquiry story-based studies, stating that it is “almost impossible to achieve” (p. 91).

Definitions

In order to ensure clarity and precision, definitions of key terms not commonly used will provide comprehensiveness and consistency throughout this research. Definitions are grounded in peer-reviewed literature related to the current design and methodology.

Microaggression: An activity as seen in themes of brief and commonplace expressions of stereotypical actions toward African American women (Block et al., 2011; Holder et al., 2015).

Middle management: A leadership position within the organization that is not high enough to be considered at the top management or executive level but still has influence on decisions made at the highest levels of management (Einarsdottir et al., 2018).

Minority women: A group of racially identified African American women that is smaller in number and less in social power in comparison to other dominant groups (Hekman et al., 2017).

Stereotype threat: The probability that an employee will be judged or perceived on the basis of racial group membership rather than actual performance and potential (Block et al., 2011).

Workplace bias: Risks associated with negative stereotypes within working groups and organizations (Block et al., 2011).

Assumptions

The formulation of qualitative research comes with some level of assumptions associated with the collection and interpretation of research information. Personal account and story narratives, which include a strong foundation of trustworthiness and experience, are essential in this study (see Webster & Mertova, 2007; Wimberly, 2011).

The first assumption is that selected research participants being interviewed will portray their human experiences through an open and in-depth account of their daily experiences, revealing truth-filled critical events within their organizational setting.

The second assumption is that the research participants are well informed on the issue being explored, resulting in valuable facts and story configuration answers to the interview questions as they relate to their career experiences.

The third assumption is that the participants will respond honestly and communicate transparently with strong trustworthiness, providing an accurate and data-rich narrative study.

The fourth assumption is that the researcher can accurately and adequately record, journal, and transcribe the information obtained from face-to-face interviews and audio recordings of participants.

The fifth assumption is that the qualitative data analysis instruments used are effective in determining themes, and the acquisition of qualitative data is the most effective method of data collection to address the purpose of this study and phenomena, yielding the most accurate results.

Scope and Delimitations

This research uses participants' daily experiences, collected through a qualitative narrative approach, to provide a deeper understanding of African American women middle managers' daily experiences with stereotype threat and the effect of these experiences on their engagement with leadership aspirations (Einarsdottir et al., 2018; Hekman et al., 2017; von Hippel et al., 2017) as well as the challenges African American women face while progressing into middle-management positions. The scope of the study includes seven female participants, all from U.S.-based organizations, who share experience with the phenomena under study. The inclusion criteria for the recruitment of

the study population sample were as follows: female identifying as African American; over the age of 30; employed as a middle manager in a U.S.-based organization for a minimum of 2 years; and able and willing to provide in-depth information on the phenomena under study (see Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). The inclusion criteria of the study's sample replicate sample criteria from other similar studies of middle managers in the United States.

The scope of the study excludes the use of classical management theory when developing the conceptual framework, literature review, and the interview protocol, because those theories were developed from research primarily conducted with samples of White males. The conceptual framework of this study and the study's research design are grounded within the scope of Steele and Aronson's (1995) stereotype threat theory. This theoretical foundation was chosen because Steele and Aronson's initial theory and its subsequent extensions were developed through empirical investigations with samples from marginalized populations, including African American participants, to define Inzlicht and Kang's (2010) concept of stereotype threat spillover and Major et al.'s (1998) concept of psychological disengagement. Further extending Steele and Aronson's stereotype threat theory with empirical evidence from a workplace setting with African American women middle managers may provide a renewed theoretical understanding of how individuals experiencing stereotype threat may perceive that they have fewer options for pursuing leadership positions and thus may disengage from their career aspirations (Casad & Bryant, 2016).

Limitations

Limitations are described as possible unforeseen problems within the study identified by the researcher (Hekman et al., 2017). Limitations of this and any interview-based study include potential misrepresentation of events by participants, as there was no way to verify that the information provided by the participants was true. Therefore, there was no systematic way for me to confirm the participants' information regarding their stereotype threat experiences. The participant had to recall bias in relation to events and behaviors that occurred during their experience with stereotype threat. As a means to improve trustworthiness and credibility during the research study, I selected a comfortable phone interview platform setting, in which participants can be encouraged to remain open and honest in their own environment and where they have the autonomy to reveal answers as they deem appropriate (see Hanna, 2012).

My interpretation of Clandinin's (2016) narrative inquiry approach is that interviewing seven African American women in middle-management positions was enough to illustrate their stories, but this method's limitation lies in the fact that individual stories may not represent a consistent narrative of African American women middle managers' daily experiences with stereotype threat and the effect of these experiences on their engagement with leadership aspirations. The successful outcome of this research depended on personal experiences of participants producing an information-rich study while following narrative methodologists' guidelines for establishing credibility of the coded narrative data (see Syed & Nelson, 2015).

Significance of the Study

Significance to Practice

Stereotype threat is preeminent in organizational settings and drives the career aspirations of many employees across industry sectors (Hong, 2018; Kang & Inzlicht, 2014). Individuals experiencing stereotype threat perceive they have fewer options for pursuing leadership positions and thus are disengaged from their career aspirations (Casad & Bryant, 2016; Godsil et al., 2016). This is of great practical significance for organizations, as disengagement from work is associated with negative job attitude, lower job commitment, and loss of valued talent (Rastogi, Pati, Krishnan, & Krishnan, 2018). Casad and Bryant (2016) asserted that stereotype threat is particularly relevant to personnel selection practices, and as such, parties involved in these processes must be aware of the potential negative effects on individuals belonging to the stereotyped group.

This study is significant in practice for both organizational leaders and human resource managers in understanding African American women middle managers' daily experiences with stereotype threat and the implications of these experiences for their engagement with leadership aspirations. This deeper understanding of managerial experience and coping with stereotype threat may help to foster a more diverse and inclusive environment at work. If human resource managers are aware that employees' reactions to stereotype threat can occur in a variety of ways, they may be better able to support employees as they contend with this extensive threat at work targeting marginalized groups (Kalokerinos et al., 2014).

Significance to Theory

The findings of this empirical investigation are aimed at advancing knowledge of African American women middle managers' daily experiences with stereotype threat and the implications of these experiences for their engagement with leadership aspirations, and also contributing original qualitative data to the study's conceptual framework.

Although classical stereotype theory can be applied to improve knowledge of the African American women middle manager experience, a context-rich interpretive approach to meet the purpose of this study can offer distinct extensions to the theory. Extension studies, such as this study, not only provide replication evidence but also extend the results of prior studies in new and significant theoretical directions (see Bonett, 2012).

Applying stereotype threat theory (Steele & Aronson, 1995) to workplace settings with managers from marginalized groups provides a theoretical understanding of how individuals experiencing stereotype threat may perceive that they have fewer options for pursuing leadership positions. Individuals experiencing stereotype threat may disengage from their career aspirations (Casad & Bryant, 2016). This is an important extension of Steele's (1997) original concept and theory. Recent extensions of stereotype threat theory have suggested that more research address experiences of inferiority among women and people of color in a business setting (Block et al., 2011; Freeman, 2017).

Significance for Social Change

Meeting the purpose of the study and collecting data on African American women middle managers' daily experiences with stereotype threat and the implications of these experiences for their engagement with leadership aspirations may help drive social

change by reducing threat experiences of disadvantaged groups across organizations. Although laboratory-based studies help inform future research, it is important that research is conducted in organizations on the insidious practices resulting from stereotype threat, and it is important for researchers to understand the different stereotype threat experiences of disadvantaged groups across organizations. The experiences of stereotype threat across different groups vary, and most of the current research studies women, with scant research on other disadvantaged groups that are more likely to experience negative stereotype threats, such as ethnic minorities; lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) employees; and older employees (Einarsdottir et al., 2018; Kalokerinos et al., 2014).

Summary and Transition

In this chapter, I have examined the daily experiences with stereotype threat of African American women middle managers, outlining the purpose of the study in order to gain a deeper understanding of the effect these experiences have on their engagement with leadership aspirations. Then, using a conceptual framework to ground this study, I presented the stereotype threat spillover theory and the concept of psychological disengagement that further explain the implications of this study for the leadership aspirations of the group being investigated. The nature of the study, assumptions, scope and delimitations, and limitations were also presented, while identifying significance of the study to theory and positive social change.

In Chapter 2, I provide the literature search strategy, along with the conceptual framework upon which the research rests. The presentation of knowledge within a

narrative literature review on topics related to the specific problems concerning African American women middle manager's experiences with stereotype threat includes the unique experiences of African American female managers and implications of this for their leadership aspirations. It recognizes that these topics are, at present, poorly understood (Einarsdottir et al., 2018; Hekman et al., 2017; von Hippel et al., 2017). I will also review extant literature on further challenges related to stereotype threat spillover and psychological disengagement.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The connection between African American women middle managers' experiences with stereotype threat and the implications of this for their leadership aspirations are poorly understood. (Einarsdottir et al., 2018; Hekman et al., 2017; von Hippel et al., 2017). Scholars theorize that African American women aspiring to leadership positions in organizations often experience a phenomenon called stereotype threat that may result in underperformance and disengagement within their management and future leadership roles (Casad & Bryant, 2016; Rosette et al., 2016; Walton et al., 2015). African American female leaders experiencing stereotype threat (Emerson & Murphy, 2015; Lawson, 2018) may be further challenged by stereotype threat spillover, a phenomenon that may have long-term behavioral and psychological effects that continue after employees leave the workplace (Kang & Inzlicht, 2014). It remains important for researchers to continue exploring employees' experiences with stereotype threat, particularly across gender and minority groups (Block et al., 2011; Kenny & Briner, 2014), including African American women, who remain unrepresented in scholarly literature (Holder et al., 2015; Sesko & Biernat, 2016).

In Chapter 2, I provide the literature search strategy along with the conceptual framework upon which the research rests. I present a synthesis of knowledge within a narrative literature review on topics related to the problem and purpose of the study, including the unique experiences of African American female managers. Finally, I offer a critical analysis of the literature in which this study is grounded.

Literature Search Strategy

The literature review process is valuable to research, as it assists with refining research questions and exposing inconsistencies throughout the literature (Cronin, Ryan, & Coughlan, 2008). The literature is consistent with the central topic being analyzed and consists of methodologies across studies while elaborating on the conceptual framework (Cronin et al., 2008). This literature review presents an overview of topics relevant to African American women middle managers that aligns to the central research question. This review consists of several peer-reviewed journal articles in addition to research from the following databases: Walden University Library database, Google Scholar, ProQuest, EBSCOhost, and Business Source Complete.

The keywords used in the searches included *African American middle managers* (190 results), *disengagement in leadership* (174 results), *African American leadership progression* (163 results), *stereotype threat* (15,232), *women barriers into management* (1,321), *minority progression in management* (33), and *African American women in management* (9,856). In addition, combinations of terms were used to yield better results, such as *minority experience in middle management*, *African American women barriers into management*, *invisible barriers for minorities*, *stereotype challenges for women in management*, and *behavioral effects of minority women*. For this conceptual framework, *narrative inquiry*, *stereotype threat*, and *African American women in middle management* were the key search words used.

Academy of Management Journal, International Journal of Social Sciences, Industrial and Organizational Psychology, Journal of Experimental Social Psychology,

American Psychologist, *Social Psychology of Education*, *Journal of Health Care for the Poor and Underserved*, and *The Journal of Values-Based Leadership* were a few of the peer-reviewed and scholarly publications used throughout this study.

In preparation for this literature review, I provided previous inquiries concerning the conceptual framework related to African American women middle managers' experiences with stereotype threat and the implications of this for their leadership aspirations. I also looked at a variety of studies on stereotype threat spillover associated with African American women, disengagement from work that included behavioral and psychological effects, and ways leadership aspirations are poorly understood.

Conceptual Framework

This study is framed by two key concepts that focus on minority group members' workplace experiences with stereotype threat and the implications of these experiences for their engagement with leadership aspirations: Inzlicht and Kang's (2010) concept of stereotype threat spillover and Major et al.'s (1998) concept of psychological disengagement. The purpose of this qualitative, narrative inquiry study is to gain a deeper understanding of African American women middle managers' daily experiences with stereotype threat and the implications of these experiences for their engagement with leadership aspirations (Einarsdottir et al., 2018; Hekman et al., 2017; von Hippel et al., 2017). The current empirical investigation is aimed at advancing knowledge on the interface between stereotype threat and leadership disengagement among African American women managers, and also making a contribution of original qualitative data to the study's conceptual framework.

Stereotype Threat Spillover

Steele and Aronson (1995) defined stereotype threat as “being at risk of confirming, as self-characteristic, a negative stereotype about one's group” (p. 797) and asserted that the implications of stereotype threat on an individual may include disruptive effects such as internalized inferiority anxiety (Hoyt & Murphy, 2016). One of the most significant career influences is stereotype threat—it is a powerful and pervasive influence on a diverse and sizable number of employees (Hong, 2018). Applying stereotype threat theory (Steele & Aronson, 1995) to workplace settings with managers from marginalized groups provides a theoretical understanding of how individuals experiencing stereotype threat may perceive that they have fewer options for pursuing leadership positions and thus may disengage from their career aspirations (Casad & Bryant, 2016).

After several studies over the course of more than a decade, stereotype threat seminal theorists concluded that, due to the stereotypes of Black intellectual inferiority, African American students do not excel during testing, out of worry over reinforcing the stereotype (Steele, 1997, 2007; Steele & Aronson, 1995). Substantial empirical research has been carried out since the introduction of stereotype threat theory several decades ago, which was introduced as part of social psychological literature (e.g., Lewis & Sekaquaptewa, 2016; Spencer, Logel, & Davies, 2016; Wheeler, Jarvis, & Petty, 2001). In the early stages of stereotype threat theory development, studies were conducted almost exclusively on African Americans (Steele & Aronson, 1995). In following years, Steele's (1997) presentation of formal theory began to incorporate gender stereotypes in relation to math and science capabilities (Davies, Spencer, & Steele, 2005). Despite

advances in stereotype threat research on African Americans, there are unresolved issues in the literature on the specific causal mechanism of stereotype threat to African Americans' performance outside of laboratory settings and within actual work settings (Whaley, 2017).

Recent work on the concept of stereotype threat spillover (Inzlicht et al., 2011, Inzlicht & Kang, 2010; Whaley, 2017) suggests that stereotype threat is a larger issue and may have a larger impact on organizational success than previously thought. Stereotype threat in organizations may lead to employee disengagement and discouragement, low job performance, diminishment of career aspirations, and lack of motivation to achieve success, all factors ultimately affecting organizational performance (Kalokerinos et al., 2014). Although there are instances of members of traditionally privileged groups (e.g., White men in the United States) receiving negative stereotypes, those within historically disadvantaged groups (e.g., women, racial and ethnic minorities) have a greater stake in the results of stereotype threat research (Kinias & Sim, 2016).

The research and theory described above suggests that stereotype threat spillover may have significant implications for organizations (Kalokerinos et al., 2014; Kang & Inzlicht, 2014). Stereotype threat spillover has long-term effects that continue to influence behavior after employees leave the workplace. Inzlicht and Kang's (2010) concept of stereotype threat spillover is unique in that the authors specify that it is the *coping* with threat, and not the threat itself, that leads to the spillover effect in other areas of life and work. This is an important extension of Steele's (1997) original concept and theory because Inzlicht and Kang (2010) noted the lingering effects of how people cope

with threat. The long-term effects of stereotype threat challenge the effective control of one's behavior, therefore spilling over into aspects of work-related behavior such as decision-making in the workplace (Inzlicht & Kang, 2010). These conclusions are supported in historical as well as recent studies quantitatively measuring stereotype threat and double-minority status on the test performance of Latino women (Gonzales, Blanton, & Williams, 2002), culture-based stereotypes in the work setting (Hinton, 2017), face recognition invisibility and gender stereotyping of Black women at work (Sesko & Biernat, 2016), and ways women and people of color deal with stereotype threat in organizations (Block et al., 2011; Hekman et al., 2017).

Psychological Disengagement

One coping mechanism often used by individuals discouraged by stereotype threat is psychological disengagement of self-esteem from domains such as work role, where they experience performance evaluation (Crocker et al., 1998; Major & Schmader, 1998; Nussbaum & Steele, 2007). The diminishment of self-views, skills, abilities, and performance is what happens when disengagement occurs, preventing the perception of self-worth on occasions of success or failure (Major, Spencer, Schmader, Wolfe, & Crocker, 1998; Steele, 2003). Researchers have noted that disengagement may be especially present among African American female leaders, who are often the only—or one of a few—African American women in a supervisory position in their organization (Emerson & Murphy, 2015; Lawson, 2018).

Two psychological processes drive disengagement of self-esteem in performance evaluations: *devaluation* and *discounting* (Major & Schmader, 1998). Devaluation is a

process in which performance indicators received in evaluations are considered irrelevant to self-evaluations that have been influenced by negative feedback. Discounting is the process of rejecting performance evaluation feedback so that one dismisses one's abilities to adequately perform tasks (Schmader, Major, & Gramzow, 2001). Research findings have described a situation where Black participants' self-esteem was not affected by negative feedback because they psychologically disengaged their self-concept from their performance on a racially biased test that risked confirming a negative stereotype (Freeman, 2017; Major et al., 1998).

Stereotype-based threats can also reduce the number of African American women pursuing a particular profession, because the effects of these threats lead to their disidentifying within that profession in general (Lawson, 2018). Seminal research by Roberson and Kulik (2007) on African American managers suggests that disengagement occurs in work settings, as these managers who experienced stereotype threat were prone to disregard the performance review comments from their superiors. Minority female employees in business settings who experience stereotype threat may cope by cognitively disengaging their abilities from their leadership and career aspirations (Cook & Glass, 2014; Schmaling & Jones, 2017). Thus far, only a few laboratory studies have explored the influence of acute stereotype threat on leadership engagement (Kalokerinos et al., 2014), and it remains important to continue using qualitative methods to examine employees' experiences with stereotype threat, particularly across gender and minority groups (Block et al., 2011; Kenny & Briner, 2014), including African American women,

who remain unrepresented in scholarly literature (Holder et al., 2015; Sesko & Biernat, 2016).

Literature Review

African American Women: Challenges to Representation in Organizational Leadership

African American women have adapted to and coped with oppression and discrimination for generations while maintaining various roles within corporate America (Holder et al., 2015). In the past few years, diversification within the American workforce has increased, but African American women in leadership positions are still underrepresented (Beckwith et al., 2016). Although women of various ethnic and racial groups are also underrepresented, African American women are disproportionately underrepresented in not only pay, but also in leadership positions (Godsil et al., 2016). Organizational change is occurring, but that change is not reflected equally among African American women within these organizations. Research shows that African American women represent 3.8% of first-line and middle managers and 1.9% of corporate officers in Fortune 500 companies (Allen & Lewis, 2016).

The *glass ceiling* is a quaint term that has increased in popularity over the years, characterizing the oppression of women trying to climb into top leadership positions in corporate America (Hekman et al., 2017). In an attempt to provide an analogy for the increasingly difficult circumstances African American women face in leadership positions, the term *concrete ceiling* has been suggested (Lawson, 2018). It is apparent that one is easier to break than the other, reflecting the increased efforts needed by African American women to break the ceiling in the pursuit of leadership (Beckwith et

al., 2016). Some contributing factors making African American female progression into leadership positions harder to achieve are exclusion and lack of role models, particularly those who share similar experiences (Allan & Lewis, 2016; Kossek, Su, & Wu, 2017; Yates & Rincon, 2017).

Just when African American women are beginning to make great strides in leadership positions, disempowerment in the form of informal exclusion practices has presented itself (Allen & Lewis, 2016). Generally, most women have experienced various forms of exclusion and discrimination simply because of their gender, but unlike White women and African American males, African American women's experiences of exclusion stem from informal networks and career goal preparedness (Beckwith et al., 2016). Connecting with the right people within one's organization is essential to building relationships and organizational success, in either a formal or informal capacity. Inclusion in these networks helps employees gather insight into other positions within their organization and connect with individuals who can assist with career advancement. Exclusion is described as a form of microaggression, and the consequences for African American women include losing out on valuable career and leadership progressions and their organizations not receiving valuable subject matter experts (Holder et al., 2015).

Historically, role models are usually attracted to individuals who look similar to themselves, and due to the lack of African American women role models, this issue becomes increasingly important (McDowell & Carter-Francique, 2017; Yates & Rincon, 2017). Research suggests that role models can reduce the effects of stereotype threat by providing exposure and positive influences to assist in career progression (Hoyt &

Murphy, 2016). If there are not enough essential role models to assist in the career progression of African American women, then building these networks and functionalities will become increasingly difficult. Establishing successful role model relationships helps to increase social belonging within organizations, in addition to inspiring employees creatively and critically (Hoyt & Simon, 2017).

Although understanding the positions of African American women in the workplace is critical to organizational success, the United States highest echelons of academia does not comprise inclusion of race in theory. Although mentioned in prior research, there is fewer scholarly reviews on the African American women experiences on the basis of intersection of race and gender (Lewis & Neville, 2015; Nkomo & Cox, 1996). Holvino (2010) exposed the reconceptualization of the intersections of race and gender as a synchronized process to manage diversity in the workplace. Future research on the inclusion of gender diversification on the organizational and individual levels of management is highly encouraged, and should include cultivating inclusion (Atewologun & Mahalingam, 2018; Nishii, 2013).

Unconscious gender bias is presently excluded in research on the leadership progression of African American women, and focus on their experiences in the workplace setting is needed in order to learn how leadership development occurs in society as a whole (Madsen & Andrade, 2018). The term *minority* is used in context to describe people not in dominant groups, which is generally the category in which African American women in leadership are placed, reducing their visibility and organizational contribution (Hekman et al., 2017). African American women leaders expand across

various industries in leadership, and in order to reach the next generation of leaders, significant research findings are needed on stereotypes and ethnic minorities (Rosette et al., 2016; Sanchez-Hucles & Davis, 2010).

When talking about inequality from a racial perspective, one important component missing from the majority of this research is geographical location of organizations and participants (Curtis, 2017). Various business perspectives and organizational structures are different depending on region of the country, and the same holds true for research participants (Gamble & Turner, 2015). Experiences of stereotype threat differ geographically because the location where an individual grows up or resides results in different perspectives on discrimination and equality.

Gender Bias in Career Opportunities and Stereotype Threat

Gender bias comprises stereotypical views that hinder or exclude women from career opportunities because of their perceived personal responsibilities or shared traits (Kossek et al., 2017). Previous research confirms that gender bias has a significant impact on women's progression within corporate America (Gamble & Turner, 2015).

Historically, workplaces were designed and ruled by men; women entering into the workforce were placed according to administrative job skills and were labeled as secretaries or assistants to the men who ruled, ultimately creating a sense of segregation among genders in the workforce and fostering career inequality. The intention was not to assert that one gender was better than the other, but it was designed to ensure men had primary control of the decisions being made. The current perception is that women and men are equally capable and qualified to be leaders, but some of the U.S. public still

believes the gender leadership gap persists due to gender bias (Kossek & Buzzanell, 2018).

Various types of gender bias occur when subtle forms of prejudice are allowed to exist without repercussions, such as the insinuation that because someone is a woman, she cannot perform strenuous tasks (Casad & Bryant, 2016). Traditionally, these types of bias try to place women in a particular category and imply women are only useful when they are being helpful, sympathetic, or understanding in the workplace (Kossek et al., 2017). Although some of these biases are not as obvious as others, bias still plays a role in limiting women's abilities to perform more constructive tasks. Gender bias plays a significant role in women's leadership, entrepreneurship, and science gender gaps (Casad & Bryant, 2016). This gap further widens when African American women are placed in a state of invisibility, meaning they have little to no representation in any particular social group, leaving them no opportunity for potential progression (Sesko & Biernat, 2016).

Gender stigma heightens the performance pressures placed on African American women, and research supports that stereotype threat affects women's performance by undermining them intellectually and limiting their ability to recognize the illegitimate privileges of White identity (Brown & Day, 2006; Hall, Schmader, Aday, & Croft, 2018; Remedios & Snyder, 2018). Gender-based stereotypes are influential in individual performance, also affecting the psychological well-being of the mainstream American society (Whaley, 2017). For example, the quantitative research completed by Salles, Mueller, and Cohen (2016) asked 384 female surgical residents whether they thought there is an expectation that men are better doctors than women. The women agreeing

with this assumption also reported greater psychological distress than women who disagreed. The study suggested that even awareness of the negative stereotype in a work environment may act as a stressor for women, above and beyond the impact of stereotype threat on performance. The greatest weakness in the study is that it was the first of its kind, and only one institution was included in the research study.

Little is known about the longitudinal dynamics of how stereotype threat unfolds over work–life conflict issues for minority women in the workplace, and studies have evolved as work–life balance issues bring characterizing by significant class and race differences (Williams, Berdahl, & Vandello, 2016). Given the well-established role of stereotype threat in individuals' experiences with racial and other forms of prejudice, it is possible that individuals with family responsibilities who also face prejudice on the basis of race and class may experience stereotype threat at exacerbated levels or distinct forms of stereotype threat in the workplace. However, this issue must be fully explored in future research; a more intersectional examination of stereotype threat in work–life conflict is needed (Miller, 2019).

Stereotype Threat

Stereotype threat has the ability to reduce learning and knowledge sharing and create performance anxiety by undermining the contributions African American women make within the workplace (Kossek et al., 2017). When employees feel they are being stereotyped, it creates a sense of organizational mistrust, leading to lower productivity, negative organizational views, and limitations to the labor force (Emerson & Murphy, 2015). Not all types of gender stereotypes are obvious: Implicit bias in its unconscious

forms has negative valence and consists of social cues created by differentiated workplace experiences (Kossek et al., 2017). Whether stereotype threat is displayed openly or implicitly, research suggests that stereotype threat contributes to the already established gender gap, adding to the theory of stereotype threat in America (Kinias & Sim, 2016).

An associated trigger of stereotype threat is the lack of diversity among gender role models, whether formal or informal (Casad & Bryant, 2016). The lack of adequate role models to help guide African American women through their experiences of stereotype threat could negatively affect overall career performance and self-expression, reducing their courage in relation to expressing themselves (Jean-Marie, Williams, & Sherman, 2009). Emphasizing the differences of individuals in the workplace will likely reduce gender and racial stereotyping by increasing visibility (Sesko & Biernat, 2016).

A commonly unspoken assumption is that ethnic and racial group threats are interchangeable as the source of various stereotype threats (Whaley, 2017). Numerous examples of these assumptions of stereotype threat have appeared within research literature (Godsil et al., 2016). Inzlicht and Kang (2010) presented a multicultural sample of stereotype threat theory consisting of four studies on women and one on a multicultural sample in Canada that displayed evidence of spillover on aggression and hostility stretching across various social identity categories. New research suggests that other variations of identity may aid in the experiences of gender-based stereotype threat (Kenny & Briner, 2014; Remedios & Snyder, 2018). The interconnection of ethnicity or race can be traversed within gender to alter the effects of threat, but this is all dependent

on associated stereotypical traits (Godsil et al., 2016). Difference studies have connected racial identity threat, finding that African American women are more like African American males than they are like White American females (Whaley, 2017).

Hekman et al. (2017) commented that stereotype threat research must be carefully evaluated for reliability issues. In some instances, data within such research were manipulated through diversity-valuing behaviors established through the relation to those experiences. Due to the fear of retaliation, discrimination in the workplace is not easily researchable, because it limits participation by those most affected (Flagg, 2016). This lack of participation has a negative reflection in research outcomes, further limiting proof of threats within the workplace, and it confirms the need for further carefully designed empirical studies on the topic. For example, Tine and Gotlieb (2013) found that racial stereotype threat is statistically more significant than the threat of gender in their performance achievement study. This study has limitations due to the fact that participants in only one program were studied, and the researchers did not collect data on actual achievement. Also, the sample size did not allow use of multivariate analyses to take an intersectional perspective on students who belong to several minority groups. Studying differences in social groups always risks essentializing these differences as similar for all participants of that group. The quantitative approach of Tine and Gotlieb limits the understanding of coping strategies with the conditions experienced in one program while measuring racial stereotype threat (Marsden, Haag, Ebrecht, & Drescher, 2016). Pilotte, Ohland, Lord, Layton, & Orr (2017) commented that the work of Marsden et al. confirms that after conducting a significant quantitative exploration on stereotype

threat, qualitative findings are also needed to gain a deeper understanding of the participants' experiences of racial/gender stereotypes threat.

According to a meta-analytic review, the effects of stereotype threat are greater for African American women than for White American women, with weakened acknowledgment of effects of these threats (Nguyen & Ryan, 2008). Although stereotype threat regarding ethnic and racial identity has been found in non-African American groups, the stereotype threat of ethnic and racial identity is significantly stronger in African American groups than is gender identity stereotype threat (Gonzales et al., 2002; Inzlicht & Kang, 2010; Pietri, Johnson, & Ozgumus, 2018). The combined findings indicate that the effect of ethnicity and race is greater than that of gender, and the phenomenon as it pertains to stereotype threat will have an impact across various social groups (Block et al., 2011). In a follow-up study, Block et al.(2018) commented on the limitations of their previous and present research by saying that, although women's understanding of the discourse about underrepresentation has been identified as a systemic stereotype threat, the researchers had not identified why different women come to understand the dominant discourse differently.

Previous researchers have suggested that both individual and contextual factors that influence women's responses to stereotype threat in the workplace may be informative for future research (Block et al., 2011; Hoyt & Murphy, 2016). For example, individual factors such as gender identity (Bergeron, Block, & Echtenkamp, 2006) and professional identity (Settles, 2006) have been shown to influence responses to gender threatening situations. Neither study by Block et al. (2011, 2018) directly examined

gender or professional identity and how they contribute to systemic stereotype threat; this would be an important avenue for future research (Block et al., 2018; Buchanan & Settles, 2019). More stereotype threat research aligning with the interpretivist framework is needed to gain a deeper understanding of the intersectionality of race and gender effects among African Americans (Whaley, 2017) and African American women (McDowell & Carter-Francique, 2017).

Career Opportunities

In an effort to increase women's career equality, scholars and practitioners have recently transferred their efforts to human resources and organizational initiatives (Kossek & Buzzanell, 2018). There are various levels of complexity triggering the mounting valuation of equality concerning women, and this complexity is also carried across organizations and nations to include economic objectives and equal employment opportunities. Regarding the eligibility of women to hold both corporate and political leadership roles, roughly half of the U.S. population believes the gender leadership gap perseveres due to gender bias and women remaining underleveraged as a source of talent and leadership in nearly all occupations around the globe—including senior managers, CEOs, and even corporate board members (Catalyst, 2017). The World Economic Forum (2016) reported that obstinate gender inequality is a leading hindrance to the global economy, and the inability of nations and employers to fully utilize women's talents is slowing world economic progress.

Equality in women's career opportunities has stalled most notably in the United States, which used to be a leader but is now ranked at 45th in the world (World Economic

Forum, 2016). Although women's labor force participation has grown over the last few decades, it peaked in the United States in 1999 and has declined globally between 1995 and 2015, from 52.4 to 49.6% (Catalyst, 2017). Women face inequality of resources as well as lack of opportunities for career advancement, rewards, salary, and retention. The concept of the ideal worker and leader was originally designed for men with no caregiving responsibilities in corporations (Eagly & Karau, 2002). Models such as this are insufficient to support many women's (and men's) aspirations in today's workplace (Kossek & Buzzanell, 2018). Career researchers and practitioners state that despite the credentials and ambition that women managers and professionals possess, they are forced to function within sociocultural spaces of marginalization (Kossek et al., 2017). These workplaces within which women are often forced to function can be restricted by national cultural values and policies about gender, often thwarting women's employability, leadership, career aspirations, and engagement (Aisenbrey & Fasang, 2017; Glass & Cook, 2017).

At any given point in their career, African American women will encounter some form of sexism, discrimination, and exclusion, and these circumstances can lead to the lack of career advancement opportunities (Beckwith et al., 2016). Although women sometimes have more education and perform at higher levels compared to men, it is known that women are often offered opportunities that are less desirable than those offered to their male counterparts (Kossek et al., 2017; O'Brien, McAbee, Hebl, & Rodgers, 2016). There are times when gender bias plays a role in the exclusion of African

American women from work-related meetings and career opportunities that could lead to leadership advancement opportunities (Holder et al., 2015).

African American women have reported being questioned by White colleagues about their abilities to perform certain job functions, based on preconceived stereotypical views (Dickens & Chavez, 2017). These authors used a phenomenological design to examine shifting racial, gender, and class identities among early-career U.S. Black women working in predominantly White environments. Drawing on seven semistructured interviews with college-educated Black women, data were analyzed with an interpretative phenomenological method. The results revealed two major themes: (a) benefits of identity shifting and (b) the costs of identity shifting: Black women vacillate between the benefits and costs of identity shifting, altering their dialect and behavior to meet social norms. One limitation of this study is that the sample of 10 women was nonrepresentative and perhaps, therefore, not generalizable.

Trustworthiness of data analysis may also have been involved, as the authors stated they did not conduct member checking of the transcript with participants. The authors also did not seem to have proper control over the data collection environment; they stated that certain participants were distracted during interviewing by other mobile devices and television watching on breaks. Some strategies for navigating the workplace for early-career Black women may include remaining culturally grounded in identifying with one's own sense of self and speaking up strategically with an understanding of the political stakes involved rather than remaining silent although further research is warranted. Researchers have also noted the limitations of studying

women of color as a monolithic category, and called for organizational scholars to consider the role of intersectionality in shaping workplace outcomes, including work–life balance issues (Rosette, de Leon, Koval, & Harrison, 2019).

In their advancement into leadership, women experience everything from gender discrimination to unfair pay practices, but notably, women of color are also faced with discriminatory practices based on skin color, which puts them into the category of *double marginalization* (Dickens & Chavez, 2017). Double marginalization is when someone such as an African American woman is faced with racism and sexism in her pursuit of career success. Women are commonly placed in a category of inferiority to men, and adding race to an already difficult situation further affects confidence and delays progression into advanced career opportunities. Although specific types of career barriers may be different across racial/ethnic groups, they all have adverse effects on career progression (Kim & O’Brien, 2018).

There are various forms of discrimination, some overt and others subtle, and they can each be present in the hiring process, during promotional evaluations, or in daily workplace settings, adding additional stresses and creating negative psychological outcomes (O’Brien et al., 2016). An African American person could be discriminated against due to having an ethnic name, causing them to be eliminated from an interview process. An African American woman may seem less than adequate when being considered for a promotional opportunity, even though she may have the skills and degree deserving of promotion. African American women in corporate positions have reported being excluded from internal or external networking functions because it is

perceived that they do not fit in because of gender, race, or both. Studies suggest that an essential component of career success for African American women is having a mentor, someone who can relate to the struggles of stereotype threat and other bias (Dickens & Chavez, 2017). Workplace discrimination is not new, and it is important to connect with someone who can assist in making stereotypical actions obvious and in building the skills for handling oneself in those situations. Organizational or self-assigned mentoring, consulting with someone perceived to be like a role model, can help to reduce the effects of stereotype threat and gain career success (Stoker, Velde, & Lammers, 2011).

The Nature of Stereotype Threat Spillover

It has been particularly contended that the underappreciation of women may lead to the existence of stereotypical threat in American organizations (Kenny & Briner, 2014). When stereotype threats exist, stereotype threat spillover is a negative effect hampering the decision and determination of the group being stereotyped (Casad & Bryant, 2016). Although those under stereotype threat can perform the same as those who are not, the affected individuals believe they have more to prove, resulting in their having to work harder than those who are not subject to stereotype threat (Inzlicht & Kang, 2010). African American women are more often subjected to the phenomenon of stereotype threat spillover, believing they must work harder and be more educated than those of others races and genders to move forward in the workplace (Casad & Bryant, 2016; Steele & Aronson, 1995).

Inzlicht and Kang's (2010) concept of stereotype threat spillover is unique in that the authors specify that it is the *coping* with threat, and not the threat itself, that leads to

the spillover effect in other areas of life and work. This is an important extension of Steele's (1997) original concept and theory because Inzlicht and Kang noted the lingering effects of how people cope with threat. Research suggests that the influence that stereotype threat spillover has on organizations is more significant than originally thought (Inzlicht & Kang, 2010; Inzlicht, Tullett, Legault, & Kang, 2011). Stereotype threat is the undesirable stereotype about a particular group that emphasizes the consequences of threat in relation to overall performance, while stereotype threat spillover is unrelated to performance and focuses on the processes people use to cope with this type of social identity threat. Coping with negative stereotype threat spillover increases fatigue and alters motivational priorities away from responsibilities requiring self-control (Inzlicht & Kang, 2010). Coping with stereotype threat requires self-control resources, and the stereotype threat spillover model contends that strenuous coping leads to mental fatigue, diminishing motivation to control behaviors related to success-relevant tasks (Inzlicht, Schmeichel, & Macrae, 2014). As a result, stereotype threat can spill over into areas where self-control is mandatory, regardless of whether the area is connected to the originally challenged stereotype (Kang & Inzlicht, 2014).

Self-control is essential in a workplace setting, but when stereotype threat spillover is present, maintaining self-control can interfere with work performance and career goals (Kang & Inzlicht, 2014). Coping with stereotype threat is a challenging task; even if individuals can sustain work performance goals, they are not invulnerable to the effects of the impending threat. Stereotype threats can spill over from work settings and into the personal lives of those affected. Individuals who are employed within stereotype-

threatening environments can still succeed within their work environment. However, the extra effort these individuals sometimes put forth to succeed in work life and overcome stereotype biases can negatively impact other aspects of their lives (Casad & Bryant, 2016).

The significance of stereotype threat and stereotype threat spillover for minority women managers should not be underestimated, as stereotype threat can be extensive, likely spilling over into other areas, personal and professional, requiring continual complete self-control (Kang & Inzlicht, 2014). Researchers have noted that stereotype threat spillover and the stress produced by this reaction can contribute to heightened anxiety and work underperformance. Recent work on the concept of stereotype threat spillover (Inzlicht et al., 2011; Whaley, 2017), suggests that stereotype threat may have a larger impact on organizational success than previously thought (Inzlicht & Kang, 2010; Inzlicht et al., 2011).

Stereotype threat spillover has long-term effects that continue to influence behavior after employees leave the workplace. The long-term effects of stereotype threat challenge the effective control of one's behavior and therefore spill over into aspects of work-related behavior such as a decision-making in the workplace (Inzlicht & Kang, 2010; Whaley, 2017). These conclusions were supported by recent studies investigating culture-based stereotypes in the work setting (Hinton, 2017) and face recognition invisibility and gender stereotyping of Black women at work (Sesko & Biernat, 2016), and also in conceptual papers regarding how women and people of color deal with stereotype threat in organizations (Block et al., 2011; Hekman et al., 2017). Further

research is needed on stereotype threat and stereotype threat spillover in the workplace, particularly among those employees confronting stereotype biases due to gender and race (Casad & Bryant, 2016; Whaley, 2017)

Understanding Challenges to Leadership Aspirations of African American Women

When individuals are placed in positions where stereotype threat plays a part in their career, they begin to feel self-doubt and stress, and their performance is negatively affected, sometimes resulting in decreased desire to aspire into leadership roles (Freeman, 2017). Too often women are classified as too emotional or “sweet,” and particularly African American women are labeled as angry or unaware (Allen & Lewis, 2016). It can be an intimidating or frustrating experience to work in an industry that allows stereotypical labels, mainly when those biases are unconscious and hard to prove. The connection between diminished leadership aspirations among women who experience stereotype threat is also the reason African American women are vastly underrepresented in leadership positions (Kalokerinos et al., 2014).

In addition to stereotype threat, African American women face unforeseen challenges of prejudice, management style, and family responsibilities while progressing into leadership positions (Einarsdottir et al., 2018). Conversations surrounding discrimination among African American women in the workplace are not limited to co-worker relationships but are also found in higher levels of management. Multidimensional discrimination is discrimination from superiors to subordinates and also subordinates to superiors (Allen & Lewis, 2016). Longitudinal research distinctly

aligns stereotype threat and career aspirations and is helpful in comprehending the workplace challenges faced at all levels (Kalokerinos et al., 2014).

African American leaders in social justice have exposed their own accounts of rejections and career progression barriers in order to empower those currently experiencing workplace and career challenges (Curtis, 2017). Women consistently recount examples in which men are considered more efficient at handling complicated situations (Gresky, Eyck, Lord, & McIntyre, 2005). Performance-impairing situations result in stereotype threat across various types of organizations and tasks (Kalokerinos et al., 2014). Transforming the mindset of those placed in the position of feeling less than adequate to lead in complicated work conditions could increase productivity and performance. Conjunctions of social roles of both genders will undoubtedly increase achievement of leadership positions (Eagly & Karau, 2002).

It has been suggested by von Hippel et al. (2017) that women are more susceptible to stereotype threat and contrary views concerning family-friendly policies. Traditionally, women carry the bulk of the responsibility in the family dynamic, resulting in difficulty and sometimes inability to pursue leadership positions. An indispensable component of women's success in attaining and being successful in any leadership position is the support from management, colleagues, and family, in addition to a career plan (Holton & Dent, 2016). Family-friendly policies are imperative for women to address work–family conflict—they assist with reducing the potential of stereotyping among women as caregivers, which could further increase stereotype threat (Kalokerinos et al., 2014). In addition, enforcement of these types of policies calls into question

employee devotion to their job, as if they need to choose between their career and family, causing colleagues who do not benefit from these family-friendly policies to resent those who do (Rudman & Mescher, 2013).

In addition to gender prejudice, racial prejudice is also present in the workplace, usually displayed in chronic experiences of stereotype threat (Kalokerinos et al., 2014). Racial prejudice and discrimination are not new to American culture. Over several decades, lawmakers have reiterated that there is no place for racism and discrimination in the United States, including the American workplace. African American women face what research calls *double jeopardy*, which means they are faced with both gender and racial prejudice in their progression into leadership positions (Hoyt & Simon, 2017).

The presence of double jeopardy creates significant problems in the workplace, as sexual harassment is more present among women than men, African Americans experience more racial prejudice than Whites, and African American women experience more harassment overall than African American men (Berdahl & Moore, 2006). These types of experiences are communicated among African American women, but they have been neglected, undervalued, and misunderstood for many years, which translates as acceptance of the disparate treatment of these women in the workplace (Jean-Marie et al., 2009).

Even when African American women progress into their desired leadership positions, they still face inequality of treatment from those they are assigned to lead, making those positions harder to sustain successfully (Allen & Lewis, 2016). They have to ensure that they remain nonthreatening or nonintimidating, accept the actions that

other nonminority leaders do not accept, and know when to hold back in their behavior to ensure they do not appear aggressive, all while trying to lead in the best interests of the organization (Kalokerinos et al., 2014). African American women leaders must also be cautious when vocally expressing ways to help create a diverse and valuing environment because some organizations see this approach as threatening and intimidating to the organizational structure (Hekman et al., 2017). There is a present low approval rating between male and female leadership roles, creating a further gap in the demographic groups (Joshi, Son, & Roh, 2015). *Double bubble* is a term used by researchers (Curtis, 2017) to describe the differences in leading as a male versus as a female, illustrating that style and practice have to be different between the genders.

Some weaknesses in the research on African American women's progression into leadership roles are explained by researchers throughout the literature. Consistently, one of the most popular limitations to the research is the lack of African American female participants in leadership positions, which limits substantial in-depth studies, regardless of whether that literature is qualitative or quantitative (Beckwith et al., 2016). Another limiting component in this type of research is purposive sampling, given that the majority of this research was conducted in relation to the African American female perspective on treatment, instead of gathering the perspectives of all those who may have other views of what has taken place within organizations (Flagg, 2016). This type of sampling makes it easier for participants and researchers to relate, as there is no segregation in their mindset or experiences. Their ability to relate creates potential bias among the researcher and participants, further influencing the research results.

Psychological Disengagement of the African American Woman From Leadership

Stereotype threat spillover also affects the way African American women view their career successes, sometimes leading to discouragement and disengagement (Casad & Bryant, 2016). Disengagement from career aspirations is an important issue for organizational leaders to reflect upon, as disengagement from work is associated with negative job attitude, lower job commitment, and loss of valued talent (Rastogi, Pati, Krishnan, & Krishnan, 2018). For several decades, women have been leaders in earning more college degrees than males, but still are stereotyped as not being as smart as their male counterparts. This type of stereotype sometimes causes African American women to not pursue higher forms of education, which is a form of psychological disengagement (Casad & Bryant, 2016). Psychological disengagement is when someone's self-view is diminished, resulting in devaluing and discontinuing and thereby reducing the desire to keep trying to achieve a particular goal because of the obstacles and self-doubt placed in their path (Block et al., 2011). Another form of psychological disengagement occurs because women are more likely than men to receive negative feedback during evaluations (Emerson & Murphy, 2015). The reduction of self-esteem in African American women who have already overcome the odds by receiving an education and obtaining a career can sometimes destroy future progression into leadership roles. Studies suggest this type of disengagement can have negative impacts on the organization, as those employees may develop negative job attitudes and lower job satisfaction and commitment (Kalokerinos et al., 2014).

There is a one-sided perspective when discussions arise on how African American women fit into the workplace, particularly leadership roles, because workplace practices, policies, and leadership progression models were historically developed by White males, with little to no knowledge of the interests of this minority group (Beckwith et al., 2016). There is even a gender gap present when organizations and leaders initiate organizational talent pools, as various perceptions of stereotypical threat may exclude certain groups of individuals (Kinias & Sim, 2016). Although leaders may presume employees are not aware of these special hand-picked groups, most employees know about and refer to those individuals as “preferred candidates,” further discouraging African American women from working hard to obtain leadership positions to become a decision-maker and further diminishing employee morale and productivity (Rastogi et al., 2018). Outdated policies and procedures by which organizations are governed play a significant role in psychological disengagement, as some of them contain stereotypical threats hindering leadership advancement among African American women, making the antidiscrimination and advancement system largely ineffective (Curtis, 2017; Roberts, 2016).

Feelings of disengagement can minimize the trait of the high self-efficacy level indispensable for African American females to succeed in spite of stereotypes and barriers (Beckwith et al., 2016). Adequate performance is further hindered by stereotype threat, which causes prolonged disengagement that disturbs the psychological well-being of groups experiencing this threat (Beasley & Fischer, 2012; Sherman et al., 2013). Repeat experiences of stereotype threat increase the development of disgruntled employee attitudes, further reducing productivity and efficiency. Psychological and

performance-based harm is individualized to employee experiences and the role they play in the group being stereotyped (Roberts, 2016).

Disengagement is often thought of as a defensive strategy to protect self-esteem against the stereotype threats faced within workplace settings (Emerson & Murphy, 2014). Avoiding the disappointments that come along with workplace discrimination as a result of stereotype threat further hinders the progression of African American women into management. In an attempt to avoid the humiliation that comes along with being discriminated against, this particular group may instead not pursue advancement, continuing to work in minimal-exposure positions that do not lead to positions of leadership. This is a defensive strategy and a sign of disengagement used to protect their self-esteem from what they feel is inevitable if they chase advancement and leadership opportunities; it allows them to maintain their current level of self-esteem and positive attitude (Silvia, 2018).

There are significant adverse effects on businesses and organizations when psychological disengagement among African American woman occurs (Rastogi et al., 2018). Although someone within one of the groups experiencing stereotype threat may be the most highly educated and skilled, if that person is not seeking to utilize those talents to further personal and organizational advancement, both the employee and the organization lose. Stereotype threat places limits on not just those being affected by the negative action, but also on organizations that could be advancing their objectives with the affected employees' skill sets and knowledge (Beasley & Fischer, 2012).

Research on Management of Stereotype Threat Disengagement in the Workplace

Historically, African American women have been stereotyped as being angry, promiscuous, and tough. Due to these false but established stereotypes, this minority group experiences the subtlest and most microaggressive forms of discrimination (Dickens & Chavez, 2017). It is vital that human resources and every level of management identify the presence of stereotype threat disengagement within the workplace (Kossek et al., 2017). An organization's ability to identify and address stereotype threat is essential in rectifying the issue. The teaching of emotional intelligence is used in some organizations to help employees identify and change their way of thinking, but this does not necessarily fix the stereotype threat issue (Holder et al., 2015).

Emotional intelligence is an individual's ability to acknowledge their feelings and emotions in order to empathize with other employees, which has been proven to be beneficial because it reduces employee stress levels and increases change and growth among employees (Gamble & Turner, 2015). Implementation and management of diverse workplace practices such as the recognition and encouragement of emotional intelligence is essential to overall organizational health, growth, and success, but transformation will not happen until the problem of stereotype threat is recognized and addressed. There is a need for organizations to embed initiatives to combat biases toward African American women, while generating performance connections between both groups (Kossek et al., 2017).

Managing diversity within any workplace is indispensable to a company's operational health, growth, and success, but understanding and having empathy for stereotype threat is the only way for organizations to launch long-term prosperity (Flanagan, 2015). Walton et al. (2015) illustrated the urgency for managers and human resources to take the initiative to improve workplace climates by changing processes and policies that are not inclusive of all types of employees. Having women overpopulated in particular job areas such as human resources and administrative roles further delays their career progression, because those are roles that are harder to get promoted within due to the number of people currently in those positions (Kossek et al., 2017). This form of stereotype demonstrates the importance of understanding each element of how organizations are expected to treat employees equally and not predetermine what type of person should be in any particular job. Although the updating of policy and procedure efforts can be rather costly to organizations, there is evidence of promising outcomes for sustaining employee engagement if the efforts are implemented properly (Hoyt & Murchy, 2016).

A study conducted by Laurin (2017) illustrates that the more women experience a stereotypical threat, the more likely they are to feel they are not as competent as their male counterparts, further encouraging disengagement. Dismissal of various forms of stereotype threat is the route some managers take—they ignore the problem and do not take necessary but costly and time-consuming actions to prevent current and future occurrences, drastically affecting overall organization success (von Hippel et al., 2005). Stereotype threat is a result of a flawed system that is intended to encourage

disengagement from leadership positions among certain employees, but in turn causes disengagement within every aspect of the organization, sometimes resulting in separation from the company (Block et al., 2018).

In a contrasting interpretation of the research of Block et al. (2011, 2018) on stereotype threat and disengagement at the workplace, Pennington, Helm, Levy, and Larkin (2016) conducted a systematic literature review to critically evaluate the mediating variables of stereotype threat. A bibliographic search was conducted across electronic databases between 1995 and 2015. The search identified 45 experiments from 38 articles and 17 unique proposed mediators, which were then categorized into affective/subjective ($n = 6$), cognitive ($n = 7$) and motivational mechanisms ($n = 4$). Empirical support was accrued for mediators such as anxiety, negative thinking, and being under stereotype threat. Other research points to the assertion that stereotype-threatened individuals may be motivated to disconfirm negative stereotypes, which can have the paradoxical effect of hampering performance (Kinias & Zim, 2016). However, stereotype threat appears to affect diverse social groups in different ways, with no one mediator providing unequivocal empirical support. Further research on stereotype threat and its consequences must also be conducted in locations with greater socioeconomic diversity for stronger generalizability of study results (Pennington et al., 2016; Plante, O'Keefe, Aronson, Fréchette-Simard, & Goulet, 2019).

Researchers have noted an effect on an employee's decision to stay and even progress into leadership positions when organizational leaders advocate for minority women managers (Wilkins-Yel, Hyman, & Zounlome, 2018). The implementation of

advocacy programs offers encouragement and feelings of empowerment for those employees and even managers experiencing stereotype threat . Although the application of such advocacy programs is costly and takes a significant amount of time to implement, the program could save organizations even more time and money by avoiding lawsuits that arise as a result of exerting no actions against these types of threats (Roberts, 2016; Wilkins-Yel et al., 2018). Integrating controls, while assisting to reduce occurrences of stereotypical threat, gives employees control over their career and satisfaction that organizations are taking action to assist them at achieving success (von Hippel et al., 2017).

The physiological effects of stereotype threat are known to be significant among women who show interest in the most challenging tasks and individuals who are a perceived threat to the organization or people within the organization (Cadaret, Hartung, Subich, & Weigold, 2017). When stereotyped in a sexist manner, a woman employee can cope by employing *stigma consciousness*, which significantly alters the intellectual performance of the person being stereotyped. Women employees experiencing stigma consciousness and social identity threat may find themselves in a state of emotional exhaustion and job burnout (Hall et al., 2019). Sexism targeting African American women is different from sexism targeting White women because of the additional stereotypical attribute of race as an adjudicating factor (McBride, Hebson, & Holgate, 2014). Most organizations have established policies to prevent or eliminate obvious forms of racism and sexism. The issue comes to the fore when stereotypical actions of racism and sexism happen routinely and these policies are not negatively sanctioned. This

inaction creates a culture of acceptability, and racism and sexism become harder to prove because they have become part of the workplace environment. When employees see organizations not instituting repercussions for acts of stereotype aggression, social identity threat presents itself, leading to moral outrage and ultimately to psychological imbalance (Silvia, 2018).

Actions of stereotype threat have the ability to increase organizational bias and employee disengagement, and although these actions are unethical and immoral, stereotype-related conduct is not always taken seriously by management (Fida et al., 2018). *Organizational narcissism* occurs when an organization does not take into consideration issues such as stereotype threat that employees are facing because they are consumed with company missions and not the mental well-being of their employees (Gamble & Turner, 2015). More specifically, when African American women are placed in circumstances of occupational stereotyping, *structural intersectionality* occurs because their experiences are different, given that they are already classified as a double minority within the group (McBride et al., 2014; McDowell & Carter-Francique, 2017).

Stereotyping creates hostile work environments that can affect African American women and men in addition to White women. Research shows that African American women report significantly more stereotyped remarks in regard to race and gender than any other group (Clancy, Lee, Rodgers, & Richey, 2017). Eliminating hostile work environments requires a permanent change in workplace behaviors, diversity, and the implementation of cultural awareness training, in addition to leadership follow-up to ensure those outcomes and actions are present (Norman, Isler, Oluseyia, Morrison,

Simpson, & Trouille, 2013). Another contributor to hostile work environments is division, due to the lack of cultivation of diversity. Managing diversity is a crucial part of making workplace growth accessible by helping others to learn and respect one another for who they are and the positive elements they can bring into the organization. In science and technology, positive developments are required for organizations to remain ahead of competitors; this same concept should also be applied to the advancement of diversity and cultural science (Clancy et al., 2017).

Research shows that leadership implementation of an identity-safe context can be used to reduce the occurrence of discrimination and stereotype threat in the next generation of employees (Hoyt & Murphy, 2016). Although fixing the problem in the present generation of the workforce is essential, future development of these practices ensures stereotype threats are taken seriously and are at the forefront of respectful workplaces. Some solutions for resolving issues of stereotype threat include taking immediate action when discrimination occurs, regardless of the level of management; training faculty on the identification of stereotype threat; and providing updates and feedback on the importance of the acknowledgment of discriminatory practices (Burgess, Joseph, van Ryn, & Carnes, 2012). Management's implementation of practices such as *bias interrupters* brings about quick awareness and ensures that stereotype threats are handled swiftly (Hoyt & Murphy, 2016).

There is an established connection between advocacy and empowerment when African American women are faced with stereotypical threats of adversity, resulting in community and social awareness (Wilkins-Yel et al., 2018). The implementation of

leadership mentoring programs where African American women can meet with peers with similar stories about stereotype struggles and build strategies to overcome stereotype threat can significantly reduce disengagement (Flagg, 2016). The development of internal support systems is not costly and does not require much time to start up, as it merely involves reaching out to the organization for solicitation of participation. According to Wilkins-Yel et al., this type of support has a positive effect on psychological and emotional well-being through support from peers who face the same issues.

Organizational development of such groups acknowledges the fact that African American women do experience stereotype threat and demonstrates the organization's willingness to take action to improve the work relationships, diversity, and the overall work environment (Stoker et al., 2011).

African American Women Management, Stereotype Threat, and Career Aspirations: Identifying Gaps in the Literature

Even with the rise of racial diversity in the workplace, African American women remain underrepresented in upper management and corporate leadership positions (Beckwith et al., 2016; Levchak, 2018). African American women aspiring to leadership positions in organizations often experience a phenomenon called stereotype threat that can undermine career aspirations and cause underperformance in the workplace (Rosette et al., 2016; Walton et al., 2015). Limited research exists about women middle managers and their experiences with stereotype threat, and particularly among non White women middle managers (Hekman et al., 2017). The consequences of stereotype threat among non White women middle managers may lead to disengagement from pursuing leadership roles (Einarsdottir et al., 2018; Kalokerinos et al., 2014).

Individuals experiencing stereotype threat may perceive they have fewer options for pursuing leadership positions and thus may disengage from their career aspirations (Casad & Bryant, 2016; Godsil et al., 2016). Reduced career aspirations in response to stereotype threat, particularly for women middle managers, may exacerbate the gender gap in organizational leadership (Einarsdottir et al., 2018; Hoyt & Simon, 2017). The more these gender gaps exist, the less diverse organizations become, jeopardizing the diversity needed for organizations to sustain maximum profitability and overall success (Gamble & Turner, 2015). It remains important to continue using qualitative methods to examine employees' experiences with stereotype threat, particularly across gender and minority groups (Block et al., 2011; Kenny & Briner, 2014), including African American women, who remain unrepresented in scholarly literature (Holder et al., 2015; Sesko & Biernat, 2016). African American women middle managers' experiences with stereotype threat and the implications of this for their leadership aspirations remain poorly understood in the extant literature (Einarsdottir et al., 2018; Hekman et al., 2017; von Hippel et al., 2017). Specific examples of stereotype challenges and experiences of African American women will bring some reality and truth to the concern, and an advanced awareness that will drive the need for social change (von Hippel et al., 2017).

It is inevitable that everyone will experience some undesirable perceptions within the workforce, as it is a general phenomenon, but those from negatively stereotyped groups are more likely to experience stereotype threats (Kalokerinos et al., 2014; Walton et al., 2015). African American women belong to two of those traditionally negatively stereotyped groups, according to their race and gender. Stereotype bias often comes in the

form of lower salaries and the holding of unappreciated positions, resulting in lower self-confidence and self-expectations (Einarsodttir et al., 2018). Although stereotype threat is situational in nature, a need to address the negative implications is always present for minority employees (Walton et al., 2015)

Inaccurate stereotypes continue to occur and may not necessarily be related to an experience, but rather to a perceived misinterpretation of a particular group (Gamble & Turner, 2015). A level of multidimensional stereotype discriminations exists when African American women pursue leadership roles, discrimination such as the lack of respect from both subordinates and higher-level managers (Allen & Lewis, 2016). The consequences of this multidimensional stereotypical discrimination drastically weaken the motivation and engagement for those already holding leadership positions (Hoyt & Murphy, 2016). If these types of actions are not exposed and addressed, the number of African American women in leadership roles will likely not experience significant change (Gamble & Turner, 2015).

Substantial empirical research has occurred since the introduction of stereotype threat theory several decades ago as part of social psychological literature (Lewis & Sekaquaptewa, 2016; Spencer et al., 2016; Wheeler et al., 2001). In the early stages of stereotype threat theory development, studies were conducted almost exclusively on African Americans (Steele & Aronson, 1995). In succeeding years, Steele's (1997) presentation of formal theory began to incorporate gender stereotypes in relation to math and science capabilities (Davies, Spencer, & Steele, 2005). Despite advances in stereotype threat research on African Americans, there are unresolved issues in the

literature on the specific causal mechanism of stereotype threat to African Americans' performance outside of laboratory settings and within actual work settings (Whaley, 2017).

Despite ambition and the education to support their drive, African American women middle managers will experience some type of stereotype threat within their career (Einarsdottir et al., 2018). Due to the limited research in regard to middle managers, richer data is needed to address barriers and bias (Einarsdottir et al., 2018). Some studies have stated that educated women are stereotyped as having a masculine management approach, and those with less education are said to have a feminine management style (Gable & Turner, 2015). Education level should not necessarily determine how an individual manages, just as gender should not define a person's management style. It has been found that African American women who are able to obtain and maintain successful leadership positions generally must have earned higher education credentials and possess substantial amounts of experience prior to being considered for those positions (Allen & Lewis, 2016).

Stereotype threat can lead to stigmatization and may cause some to distance themselves from a job task that is to be evaluated, leading to poor performance and low self-worth (Pietri et al., 2018; Quinn, 2017). Recent extensions of stereotype threat theory have suggested that expectations of inferiority among minority groups in a business setting can thwart an individual's motivation or ambition (Deemer et al., 2016).

Stereotype threat can also cause feelings of low self-esteem that can bring leaders to doubt their abilities in the workplace (Deemer et al., 2016, Emerson & Murphy, 2015).

The restriction of cultural expression can lead to feelings of low self-esteem, which are often intensified by the lack of diverse images and cultural expression within corporate literature (Emerson & Murphy, 2015). The division, distrust, and defensiveness these practices unintentionally produce in African American female leaders further intensifies stereotypical perceptions (Emerson & Murphy, 2015; Hoyt & Murphy, 2016).

Detailed understanding, through lived experiences, of the challenges African American women face is vital to a complete understanding of what it will take to aid minority women's progression into middle-management positions (Einarsdottir et al., 2018). Block et al. (2011) asserted that stereotype threats, workplace bias, and microaggression are more likely to happen to individuals who are considered a minority within the particular group. Additionally, these types of threats likely happen more commonly than reported (Walton et al., 2015). Although African American professionals are more likely to experience stereotype threats, they are least likely to report these actions, out of fear of retaliation or being viewed as insecure (Walton et al., 2015).

One coping strategy often used by individuals discouraged by stereotype threat is psychological disengagement, which affects employee self-esteem when they experience bias in performance evaluations (Crocker et al., 1998; Major & Schmader, 1998; Nussbaum & Steele, 2007). Decline in self-views, skills, abilities, and performance when presented with success or failure is a direct effect of disengagement (Major et al., 1998; Steele, 2007). Disengagement exists among African American female leaders, who are often referenced as the only—or one of a few—African American women in a supervisory position (Emerson & Murphy, 2015; Lawson, 2018). Thus far, only a few

laboratory studies have explored the influence of acute stereotype threat on leadership engagement (Kalokerinos et al., 2014). It remains important for researchers to continue exploring employees' experiences with stereotype threat, particularly across gender and minority groups (Block et al., 2011; Kenny & Briner, 2014), including African American women, who remain unrepresented in scholarly literature (Holder et al., 2015; Sesko & Biernat, 2016).

Even with all the discrepancies on how previous research could negatively manipulate findings of stereotypical threats, information of why this type of research is needed far exceeds those contradictions. For generations, speaking up on the topic of discrimination, regardless of one's race or ethnicity, requires definitive proof of those accusations to those who are not directly affected by discrimination. This research will expound upon and bring those limitations to the forefront, while further evolving individual and organization knowledge of the unconscious bias and microaggressions that otherwise may not be properly addressed (Curtis, 2017).

Summary and Conclusions

In this chapter, I reviewed and critically analyzed the literature surrounding stereotype threat, its implications for African American women managers, and ways these threats affect their progression into leadership positions. There is a gap in the literature on the experiences of this group of individuals, which needs to be filled with the understanding of how experiences of stereotype threat affect engagement with leadership aspirations for African American women. Research indicates that African American women's experience with stereotype threat, through stereotype threat spillover and

psychological disengagement, influences their career progression and aspirations, but little has been done to document those individuals' social and daily experiences. The narrative literature review embodies a conceptual framework on topics of African American women middle managers' experiences with stereotype threat and the implications of this for their leadership aspirations. This conceptual framework recognizes the concepts of stereotype threat spillover and psychological disengagement. The purpose of the literature review for the current qualitative, narrative inquiry is to gain a deeper understanding of African American women middle managers' daily experiences with stereotype threat and the implications of these experiences for their engagement with leadership aspirations. Stereotype threat spillover is the foundation for the perception of Black intellectual inferiority, which leads into psychological disengagement. These issues are critically reviewed in this chapter and are supported by the extant literature.

In Chapter 3, the research method for this qualitative, narrative study will be discussed. The procedures for recruitment, participation, and data collection will be presented. The data analysis plan will be addressed as well as issues of trustworthiness in the study.

Chapter 3: Research Method

The purpose of this qualitative, narrative inquiry study is to gain a deeper understanding of African American women middle managers' daily experiences with stereotype threat and the effect of these experiences on their engagement with leadership aspirations (see Einarsdottir et al., 2018; Hekman et al., 2017; von Hipell et al., 2017). To address this gap, and consistent with the qualitative paradigm, a narrative inquiry method was used to meet the purpose of the study and collect data through storytelling by African American women middle managers about their daily business experiences (Clandinin, 2013; Webster & Mertova, 2007). Narrative inquiry allows for presenting rich participant descriptions through storytelling to construct a detailed understanding of African American women participants' voices as they narrate stories relating to their daily experiences in the workplace with stereotype threat and stereotype threat spillover into their leadership aspirations (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

In this chapter, I provide detailed information on the research method and rationale for utilizing the narrative inquiry approach for the purpose of the study and data that answers the critical research question. I also present a rationale for the participant selection strategy, data collection strategies and data analysis, the role of the researcher, evaluation methods for the trustworthiness of data, ethical considerations, and a chapter summary.

Research Design and Rationale

Narrative inquiry is a qualitative research design based on capturing the stories of participants to gain a deeper understanding of their lived experiences (Webster & Mertova, 2007). This research method promotes the connection of human experiences through storytelling of daily lived experiences (Clandinin, 2016). Researching the stereotype threat experiences of African American women middle managers contributes to needed awareness of their experiences and how these experiences affect their attainment of and engagement in leadership positions within U.S.-based organizations. In aligning with the purpose of this study, the central research question is as follows:

How do African American women middle managers narrate their daily experiences with stereotype threat, and what are the implications of these experiences for their engagement with leadership aspirations?

Previous research is qualitative in nature and indicates that African American professionals are more likely than their White counterparts to experience some form of stereotype threat (Walton et al., 2015). However, the extant literature does not have sufficient information on how stereotype threat affects the overall performance and career aspirations of African American women in the workplace (Kalokerinos et al., 2014). To align the central research question in this qualitative study with its outlined purpose, these narrative experiences will provide more information on how to cope with encounters with stereotype threat.

Other research methods besides narrative inquiry were considered: case study, phenomenology, and even grounded theory. Phenomenology was not selected because

the intent of this study is not to develop a phenomenon, but rather to explore the lived experiences of those whose phenomenological outlook is already established (Freeman, 2017). Case study was the second choice but was not chosen because the analysis of already established cases was not relevant to the exploration of these specific, daily lived experiences (Nelson, 2013).

In grounded theory, the exposure of critical events is omitted in order to bring about a broad understanding of a particular topic (Lal, Suto, & Ungar, 2012). Conversely, a narrative approach is a direct reflection of a precise method for identifying critical events that are gathered during the data collection process (Webster & Mertova, 2007). Narrative inquiry was therefore the closest methodological match in terms of gathering data through storytelling. The data collection process of this qualitative research approach will aid in a significant collection of data by allowing the researcher to connect and develop a trusting relationship with participants, permitting the uncovering of significant critical live events (Webster & Mertova, 2007).

Narrative inquiry is used to understand and inquire about the lived experiences of research participants, using temporality, sociality, and places to serve as specific guidelines in forming the conceptual framework (Clandinin & Huber, 2010). It is necessary that qualitative analysis of the experiences of African American women be identified to shift themes and expose the patterns that can alter societal dialect and behavior to meet social norms (Dickens & Chavez, 2017). The highlighted differences and views that a narrative inquiry can provide will expand the knowledge of the

experiences of African American women while shaping the thoughts and actions of entire generations (Clandinin & Huber, 2010).

Role of the Researcher

My role as a researcher was to interview African American women about their experiences as they relate to the central research question. The research investigated only the responses to the study questions, meaning that the researcher was not an accessory in any other role throughout this research. Participants did not have personal relationships with the researcher, and the researcher does not possess any form of power and control over the participants. To ensure trustworthiness and reduce the likelihood of research biases, field journal notes were used (Flagg, 2016). Personal biases were formed, but they were clearly stated when results were being analyzed and did not influence the direction of the stories (see Wilkins-Yel et al., 2018). The interviews were used to gather the stories of African American female managers to document their experiences while progressing into management.

The process of conducting interviews and interacting with participants required extensive collaboration, but never presented ethical issues (see Webster & Mertova, 2007). To build understanding and trust, which aided the participants in being comfortable enough to share their full and honest experiences, ethical issues were presented. In an attempt to obtain the most accurate data, trust is vital to qualitative research interviews (Wilkins-Yel et al., 2018). Mutual trust between the interviewer and the participant is critical to the overall success of any narrative research study, as participants shared deeply personal experiences to help satisfy the purposes of the

researcher. The exposure of these experiences shed a negative light on various groups and organizations and also individuals, which is why participant privacy and trust was kept in the utmost regard throughout the interview and writing process (Flagg, 2016).

Incentives or bribes were not be used to gain participation. There were minimal control barriers between the participants and researcher, neither of whom were known to one another before the study. Participants would have been allowed, If requested, to exit from the study, even if this would have resulted in incomplete research objectives.

Methodology

A narrative inquiry study allowed the researcher to explore African American women middle managers' daily life experiences through storytelling of their detailed accounts of experiences as they progress into leadership positions (Clandinin, 2016; Webster & Mertova, 2007). Narrative inquiry was sufficient for this study because it is the process by which, through the storytelling of African American women middle managers, we will gain significant understanding of the daily challenges they face in their progression into middle-management positions (see Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Meier & Stremmel, 2010). The narrative inquiry approach is the foundation of this study because it is a subset of the epistemological premise, which is the use of human story structures to make sense of experiences (De Fina & Georgakopoulou, 2019; Duff & Bell, 2002). Stories are formed by lifelong personal and community narratives, which is how this study sheds light on events that exist in the stories of the research participants (Webster & Mertova, 2007). The narrative inquiry permitted the researcher to illustrate the stories of African American women middle managers in all their convolutions and

fullness (Nolan, Hendricks, Williamson, & Ferguson, 2018). Communicated experiences were not reconstructed, but rather interpretations were made of how the women perceive their experiences (Webster & Mertova, 2007).

Narrative inquiry research studies investigate how individuals experience the world around them by recollecting life experiences that lead to a holistic representation and offer insight into human understanding (Webster & Mertova, 2007). When sharing experiences, individuals construct and reconstruct stories to highlight human-centric issues of complexity. These are mostly evoked in the form of recollection of critical events, which serves as an instrument to communicate important occurrences to listeners (Webster & Merlova, 2007). Narrative inquiry research is mainly used to explore participants' stories within their particular social contexts by interchanges between researcher and participants' storytelling (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006) and to corroborate individuals' life environment (Clandinin, 2016).

This study is grounded in a hermeneutic approach, which focuses on how human experience is mediated through stories and understood through language (Clandinin, 2016; Clandinin & Huber, 2010). In its modern form, hermeneutics is based in the deciphering, interpreting, and translating of ideas by examining language as a text in any form, and considers multiple meanings that include the researcher's own perspective. The moving back and forth between perspectives in order to uncover inherent meanings is termed the hermeneutic circle (Freeman, 2016). Using this approach increases the likelihood of obtaining findings that can likely become significant research material (Webster & Mertova, 2007).

Polkinghorne (1988) recognized that human beings communicate among themselves primarily via storytelling, and it is the oldest form of influence. Narrative research approach is ideal for this study, as it extends the potential of business research beyond the traditional options and minimizes the boundaries of fields within social sciences. The basic human activities of narrative knowing and storytelling form the basis for narrative research (Moen, 2006). In the narrative inquiry tradition, stories of participants were interesting and rich in information, and they provided a social context to the researcher. I analyzed the participants' storytelling by efforts to understand the meaning and content of the narrative to answer the research question.

Polkinghorne (1998) contended that reliability is not a stable measurement technique; rather, that is dependability of the narrative data collected. This called for the researcher to readjust validation and reliability measures used for narrative instead of applying the prior criteria of more traditional approaches. Reframing validity and reliability for narrative studies means redefining and formulating measures to establish trustworthiness of data to include access, honesty, verisimilitude, authenticity, familiarity, transferability, and economy (Huberman, 1995). Qualitative data collection, or any other part of the study, began after approval from the Walden IRB Review Board.

The primary data regarding participants' stories of experiences were collected via open-ended queries. Underlying causal patterns across the collected data of participants' stories were pinpointed, examined, and recorded by *thematic analysis* (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006). A frequently used method for organizing and processing data in narrative studies is thematic analysis (Clandinin, 2013). Themes were identified as ideas,

directions, notions, and characteristic that surfaced from the data. Thematic analysis in narrative research has two meanings. They are analysis of narratives, and narrative analysis for non narrative texts used as data (Clandinin, 2016). For analysis of narratives, I engaged my participants in storytelling and used specific methods to find patterns of themes to build one or more narratives (see Polkinghorne, 1995).

Perception is essential to narrative inquiry because it shows how participants reminisce and how the researcher interprets those stories (Hunter, 2010). Members of a particular culture subscribe to the world view that perception is reality, formulating assumptions and concepts within that particular group (Webster & Mertova, 2007). These formulated perceptions are why narrative inquiry is significant, as it will capture and share the culture of the participants and interpret the meaning of their stories (Nolan et al., 2018). With this awareness, the researcher pursued the opportunity to discover and uncover the challenges of stereotype threat that African American women experience in their journey to leadership positions.

The plan is to conduct face-to-face, recorded, in-depth interviews with 10 African American women currently in middle-management positions in U.S.-based organizations, while maintaining journal notes (see Connelly & Clandinin, 1990; Webster & Mertova, 2007). The open-ended, semistructured interviews will aid in obtaining detailed descriptions of narratives provided by the women leaders (see Patton, 2015). Conducting open-ended interviews gives the researcher descriptive understanding of participant experiences while allowing her to open up an avenue for further inquiry and elaboration (Brinkmann, 2015; Merriam & Grenier, 2019). The personal interface, in conjunction

with an open-ended interview, allows the researcher to capture philosophical journal notes and subjective observations (Webster & Mertova, 2007).

A critical events narrative analysis approach was used to ensure the trustworthiness of the data collected. The critical event approach uses descriptive locations, occasions, and characteristics that emphasize the expressive experiences within the stories (Webster & Mertova, 2007). Using critical events within the data collection process provides a well-rounded view of the research, placing a significant emphasis on details of occurrences that are sometimes overlooked when using traditional research methods. Webster and Mertova's critical events analysis approach follows Polkinghorne's recommendations on using hermeneutic techniques for noting underlying patterns across examples of stories (Polkinghorne, 1988). Hermeneutics, the art and science of interpretation, expands on the notions of epistemology and truth in providing a broader framework from which we can view participants' truths as they relate to current research issues.

When a critical event significantly impacts an individual's life decisions, the best way to identify that event is through narrative questions that encompass three-dimensional narrative inquiry (Webster & Mertova, 2007). The understanding of participant experiences and how they affect their relationships through a social and personal perspective is the goal of the three-dimensional space narrative approach (Wang, 2017; Wang & Geale, 2015). Ignoring the important impacts of these experiences can lead to weak results. In an effort to determine if the experiences of participants will occur again, a critical events narrative analysis was conducted on the interview data (Webster &

Mertova, 2007). Specifics associated with the types of U.S.-based organizations and regions in which these women work were important because they gave additional validity and clarification to the women's experiences. The researcher gathered themes and details associated with the participant's accounts of their personal experiences (see Wang, 2017; Wang & Geale, 2015). Although not required for story-based studies, multiple data sources were used to ensure trustworthiness of the research (see Goodell, Stage, & Cooke, 2016; Webster & Mertova, 2007).

Participant Selection Logic

Population. This qualitative study, applying a narrative inquiry, intends to generate a deeper understanding of the daily experiences of African American women while progressing into management within U.S.-based organizations. In the United States, African American women still have to overcome gendered racism, leading to issues associated with double jeopardy (Jean-Marie et al., 2009). The female pursuit of leadership positions is a continual struggle, with women representing only 7.9% of top spots; only 2% are CEOs in Fortune 500 companies (Gamble & Turner, 2015). Doubled stereotypical limitations maybe the reason only 1% of African American women hold these same top positions and only 1.9% hold board of directors positions within Fortune 500 companies (Allen & Lewis, 2016). The United States lacks research that relates these statistics on African American women leaders to a study of the ways their experiences affect their behaviors. Scholars theorize that African American women aspiring to leadership positions in organizations often experience actions of stereotype threat that can limit these aspirations and cause underperformance (Rosette et al., 2016; Walton et al.,

2015). Limited research exists about women middle managers and their experiences with stereotype threat, particularly for non White women middle managers, which is what this research will uncover (Einarsdottir et al., 2018; Hekman et al., 2017).

Criterion and snowball sampling. Participants for this study were selected using criterion sampling to assist in understanding these information-rich cases (see Emerson, 2015; Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2015). Criterion sampling is a process of using participants to aid in the collection of target populations, often called *snowball sampling* (Merriam & Grenier, 2019). Snowball sampling uses instances of occurrences that are built upon until the initial target sample size is attained (Heckathorn & Cameron, 2017).

The goal of qualitative research is to reach a level of saturation by systematically obtaining the best possible sample size to reach this level in the research (Robinson, 2013). The participants for this narrative inquiry study were a purposeful sample of seven females, all from U.S.-based organizations, who share an experience in the phenomena within this study. After a thorough investigation of sampling size, the decision to use seven participants was made based on the qualitative structure of the narrative inquiry (Kuzel, 1999; Hickson, 2015). Research suggests that the objective and expectations of the study must be consistent with the anticipated outcome when collecting stories for research sampling (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2015; Guetterman, 2015).

The unit of analysis for this study was African American female managers in U.S.-based organizations. Purposeful selection allowed for established experience directly related to the research topic in addition to providing sufficient research data, principally through network and snowball sampling (Merriam & Grenier, 2019). The

inclusion criteria of the study's sample replicated sample criteria from other similar studies of middle managers in the United States (Davis & Maldonado, 2015; Rudman & Glick, 1999). The minimum age of 30 was chosen because it was assumed this would allow each participant to have had adequate time to establish maturity and career experience. These criteria for participant selection assumed that U.S.-based middle managers who have been in their organization for a minimum of 2 years can provide in-depth information on the phenomena under study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015).

To ensure participants possessed the knowledge and experience needed to support the research topic, prospective candidates were prescreened according to the participant criteria. In addition to knowledge and expertise, participants had the ability to willingly articulate their daily experiences within U.S.-based organizations. Participants who did not fit the inclusion criteria for age range or management experience time frame were part of the exclusion measures and were not incorporated into the study. The critical events approach within the narrative inquiry methodology aided in the exploration of beliefs and mindsets of participants through the illustrations of their lived experiences. The presentation of holistically rich experiences aided in the collection of valuable data that could go unnoticed within the traditional empirical methodology (Webster & Mertova, 2007).

Before beginning the research, agreement from six to eight participants was obtained, and if needed to aid in reaching saturation, others were solicited for participation through snowball sampling. Utilizing participant experiences through qualitative narrative research, stories were expounded upon and elaborated to ensure

topics were properly articulated (see Trahar, 2009). For a qualitative study, the larger sample size limits access; therefore, the typical sample size of six to eight participants is a recommended (Guest, Bunce, & Johnson, 2006; Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2015; Schram, 2006). Network and snowball sampling was used to minimize sampling bias and increase the quality of the results by increasing transparency and uncovering viable information and resources (see Heckathorn & Cameron, 2017). In addition to snowball sampling recommendations from active participants, other participants were solicited from professional, U.S.-based networks (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2015).

Once an adequate level of saturation was attained, the precise number of participants was determined (see Sutton & Austin, 2015). Data saturation was reached at seven completed interviews when there were no new discoverable data; therefore, redundancy occurred (Fusch & Ness, 2015). Contingent on the population size, data saturation was obtained with a limited number of interviews, with a minimum of six (see Guest et al., 2006). Qualitative inquiries are more captive and influenced by the quality of data, unlike the effects of population size. Rich data is more important than the population or sample size in qualitative studies (Mason, 2010). The data collection ceased after data saturation was reached, at seven completed participant interviews.

In qualitative data collection, interviews are considered a suitable technique for reaching data saturation (Fusch & Ness, 2015). An essential method to ensure saturation is reached is to ask participants the same questions, providing these participants have not been participants in similar research studies (Bernard & Bernard, 2012; Guest et al., 2006). The *shaman effect* occurs when research is altered by participants who specialize

in the topical area, which could result in weak data collections because of the information provided (Bernard & Bernard, 2012). This researcher did not engage in such practices, and if this had been discovered, that information would not have been incorporated, as it would have been altered and not authentic. Scholarly recommendations abided by and communicated to participants to aid in strengthening data collection (Fusch & Ness, 2015).

Instrumentation

The most efficient methodological instrument for researchers is the one-on-one interview due to the qualitative research collection and reporting tools used (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2015). Qualitative researchers sometimes consider themselves an instrument in data collection, resulting in the researcher and participants both being essential to the storytelling process (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). As shown in Appendix C, an interview script was used to ensure an orderly interview process. This script aided in the researcher gathering the facts through the participants' storytelling and semistructured interviews (see Webster & Mertova, 2007).

Narrative analysis methodologists recommend the use of semistructured interviews to aid in reducing the influence the researcher may have on participants (Georgakopoulou, 2014; Webster & Mertova, 2007). Exploratory research, combined with the semistructured interview, gives participants the ability to illustrate their own stories without coercion or other stimuli. This constructionist view through storytelling allows the research to take part while not actually participating. A participant's story is

co-constructed by the storyteller and the researcher, while being conducted in a conversational style with both trust and flexibility (Clandinin, 2016).

The instrument I used in this study was a semistructured interview protocol developed by Prof. Kumea Shorter-Gooden (2004) in a seminal study conducted in the United States on African American women, bias, and stereotyping. Shorter-Gooden piloted and standardized the interview protocol with a sample of 333 women in her groundbreaking African American Women's Voices Project, a qualitative study of African American women's experiences and perceptions of racial and gender stereotypes, bias, and discrimination (Jones & Shorter-Gooden, 2004). The aim of her questionnaire study was to learn about African American women's experiences of racism and sexism through an inductive, phenomenological approach to data gathering, where the women's own voices and constructions of their experiences were the focus. Women were asked to talk about their awareness of negative stereotypes of Black women and their experiences of racial and gender discrimination. The interview questions can be viewed in Appendix C and have been adapted with permission to address the sample group of this study of African American women middle managers.

Shorter-Gooden's (2004) purpose in developing the instrument was to enable qualitative researchers to explore similar experiences of stereotyping, bias, and racism among different subgroups of African American women using an inductive approach. In her seminal paper, Shorter-Gooden recommended that future research be conducted using her research design for different types of oppressive situations to provide a richer and more textured portrait of stereotyping and racism experienced by African American

women. Permission to use Shorter-Gooden's interview protocol for my study can be found in Appendix D. I also kept a reflective journal and recorded all pertinent information, observations, and situations within African American women middle managers' daily experiences with stereotype threat and the effect of these experiences on their engagement with leadership aspirations.

Shorter-Gooden's (2004) 10 open-ended questions were designed to encourage in-depth participant feedback through significant stories, leading to further data collection, analysis, and synthesis of information gathered. Probing questions were used, as needed, to expose vital details throughout the conversation-style interview, as a question and answer session may not allow the ability to expose those essential details. The researcher maintained an open form of communication and transparency throughout the interview, actively listening and participating when appropriate, to maintain a constant flow of information (see Clandinin, 2016).

The researcher questioned the meaning of narratives to ensure information was interpreted correctly, further adding to the validity of the research (Hoyt, Warbasse, & Chu, 2006). In the examination of qualitative data, the uncovering of trends, patterns, and relationships is critical to successful evaluation of information. Because qualitative research does not involve a predetermined hypothesis, a narrative inquiry analysis paradigm is imperative and must be properly constructed to display consistency and trustworthiness (Clandinin, 2016). The authenticity and substance of the stories was maintained through narrative analysis techniques (see Webster & Mertova, 2007) to gain deeper understanding of African American women middle managers' daily experiences

with stereotype threat and the effect of these experiences on their engagement with leadership aspirations.

Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection

To support this narrative inquiry, between six and 10 African American women managers in U.S.-based organizations were selected from the LinkedIn professional platform using network and criterion sampling. The study began with six participants in the hope of achieving saturation, but because saturation was not reached, the snowball effect was used to gather the remaining participant, with seven being the maximum number. Telephone interviews and journal notes were used to collect data. Using snowball sampling, data collection proceeded until saturation was achieved, with participant selection being no fewer than six and not to exceed seven (Fusch & Ness, 2015). The determination of saturation was made when participant stories and encounters were similar in nature (see Fusch & Ness, 2015; Hennink, Kaiser, & Marconi, 2017).

Questions were probing and open-ended and specifically related to the particular group of participants explored throughout the study. This allowed participants the opportunity to absorb and reply in a storytelling fashion while maintaining participant narrative integrity (see Connelly & Clandinin, 1990; De Fina & Georgakopoulou, 2019). Follow-up questions were used throughout the interviews for further elaboration and clarification. Data collection was observed while documenting questions and responses to ensure validity and consistency throughout the progression of the interviews. Biases were monitored in the hope that they would not influence the outcome of the study (see Clandinin, 2016; Webster & Mertova, 2007).

Open-ended interviews are traditional forms of narrative inquiry (Clandinin, 2013). If needed, additional time for participants to tell their stories can be requested and scheduled accordingly. The expectation was that data collection interviews would take anywhere from 60 to 90 minutes while being recorded digitally and manually transcribed. Each interview consisted of a minimum allocated time of 60 minutes, with no expectation for interviews to end sooner than the minimum time. Audio recordings were used to aid in transcribing interviews and linking information to journal notes, ensuring validation of information from the interview. Member checking was used to aid in ensuring data collected were related to what participant stories illustrated (see Morse, 2015; Thomas, 2016). In the member check process, participants had the opportunity to review a summary of the interview with the option to revise their ideas to ensure clarity and accuracy. Significant changes were only incorporated if an additional interview was deemed necessary, to ensure validity of the information recorded during the initial interview (see Loh, 2013).

Disengagement is one of the potential negative features of narrative inquiry. In Webster and Mertova's (2007) research, their goal was to use critical events within structured methodologies of the narrative inquiry approach to offset disengagement by exploring research alternatives that would stretch throughout various research interests. The qualitative data collection within narrative inquiry research is often fruitful (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2015; Stake, 1995). When conducting research within a concentrated audience, the critical event approach is extremely effective in meeting the needs of the

qualitative study because of the considerable amount of data being generated (Layne & Lipponen, 2016; Mertova & Webster, 2012).

Critical events methods are detailed and unique and are more significantly framed than gathered face to face or through videoconferencing (Layne & Lipponen, 2016; Mertova & Webster, 2012; Nehls, Smith, & Schneider, 2015). Emerging themes will arise within the data when critical events within stories are characterized as *critical*, *like*, and *other* (Mertova & Webster, 2012). Upon completion of qualitative data collection, interviews were transcribed, followed by member checking, which included a scene, plot, character, and event review to further confirm the accuracy of critical events (Webster & Mertova, 2007). Before the interviews began, and an additional time, participants received a guarantee that this information would be used only for research purposes and their identities kept completely confidential, followed up by the destruction of data collection materials after 7 years.

Data Analysis Plan

The themes of human-centeredness and the complexity of human experience are the two main factors that drive data collection in the narrative inquiry methodology. The methodology comprises four essential parts: research processes, negotiation occurrences, potential risks, and results preparation and auditing (Webster & Mertova, 2007). The intent of this rigorous data collection method in this study was to gain a true-to-life insight into participants' stories. After the data was collected, I analyzed the data and created a written detailed narrative of participants' stories and narratives.

The first step of the data analysis was the process of restorying, which is a narrative data analysis method to gather data, analyze the story (e.g., time, place, plot, and scene), and then rewrite the data (see Clandinin, 2016). Narrative analyses give the researcher a window into the “critical moments” in the participant’s life; three-dimensional narrative inquiry examines events that caused an individual’s life to change (Webster & Mertova, 2007). When the researcher retells the story of the participant, the themes and all rich details of the setting are included to share the context of the interview about the participant’s personal experiences (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Webster & Mertova, 2007).

The critical events approach is key to the recognition of critical events and description of those experiences by providing details on place, time, characters, and significant events essential to the study (Webster & Mertova, 2007). The second step of the data analysis used a critical event narrative analysis to model the events in the narratives, which were distinguished as *critical*, *like*, or *other*. A critical event has a major impact on people involved and is characterized as an event that has a unique illustrative and confirmatory nature. Critical events can be identified only after the event and happen in an unplanned and unstructured manner (Webster & Mertova, 2007). A like event is comparable and similar to a critical event, but it does not have the same unique effect as the critical event. A situation that is somewhat similar possibly highlights or confirms the critical event. Like events are different, and not as profound as critical events. Any other information, such as background, that is not related to critical or like

events is often considered other in critical event analysis and is usually just descriptive of the critical or like event.

This two-step approach to narrative analysis provides an all-inclusive view of the research examination, allowing the research to be categorized and cataloged into incidences of critical events that are essential to the significance of the research. This hermeneutic narrative approach was used to explicate meaning within stories, even when these stories were not sequential or when the data were incapable of being removed from a context to become ordered and measurable as a singular piece of information in its own right (see Polkinghorne, 1988). The hermeneutic circle of moving between the parts and the whole will provide a deeper understanding of the participants (Freeman, 2016). When the narratives are well crafted, it permits insights, deepens empathy and sympathy, and aids in the understanding of the subjective world of the participants (Freeman, 2016; Webster & Mertova, 2007). In traditional pragmatic methods, critical and supporting events may never be synced, risking the loss of significant findings. Applying the critical events data analysis method to the primary data allowed the challenges of African American women in management positions within U.S.-based organizations to emerge in the study results (see De Fina & Georgakopoulou, 2019; Webster & Mertova, 2007).

Issues of Trustworthiness

This study implemented strategies to ensure that trustworthiness and credibility were reflected in the data, such as avoiding research bias, incorporating the use of member checking, and obtaining saturation. A holistic view of the research is also an essential element that was used in analyzing the credibility of the data (see Billups,

2014). Critical event narratives strengthen the credibility of research. These narratives incorporate careful observations of potential biases, thorough assessment of participant perspectives, and participant review of data to aid in ensuring saturation is reached (Billups, 2014; Morse, 2015).

The audiotaped face-to-face interviews and the use of journal notes assisted in the validity and verification of the responses and avoided reflectivity and researcher bias. The research was concluded when similar data were obtained, reaching saturation (see Sutton & Austin, 2015). I have established credibility of research conducted by ensuring that a well-referenced trail is available for readers to access the results and data collected. I interpreted the context and environment by referring to time, place, and events across participants stories to identify divergent and convergent data across narratives to provide an informative background for the research (see Clandinin, 2016).

Transferability

Transferability is the ability of the context from a specific study to be transferred to another if there is an appropriate fit within the research (Foster and Urquhart, 2012). Disagreement in the area of external validity is at the forefront of the systematic method of assessing and rejecting qualitative studies (Flagg, 2016). This qualitative research aimed to generate rich, in-depth data by providing detailed accounts of African American female experiences within management positions that can be used in future research. The open-ended questions and the specific sample of research participants were designed in such a way as to gather other information and data for future studies.

Dependability

Dependability is when research strategies can be compared and reused over time and remain stable enough to provide an adequate research outcome (Billups, 2014; Korstjens & Moser, 2018). Being able to collect data in a way that an audit trail can be established to display transparent research phases in the development of research findings is essential to dependability (Houghton, Casey, Shaw, & Murphy, 2013; Korstjens & Moser, 2018). Throughout this research and data collection process, all recordings, transcriptions, and journal notes clearly articulated the process and provided optimal transparency.

Confirmability

To get valuable feedback and responses from research participants, an established rapport must be developed so they are comfortable sharing the most critical events in their stories without the use of any bribery or monetary offerings. I have examined my study's data to notice convergence and divergence of results with explicit and implicit assumptions within the theoretical foundations of my conceptual framework, a process adding credibility to my study results, the explicit and implicit assumptions, and my preconceptions and values (see Merriam & Grenier, 2019). After the interview, I transcribed participants' responses and made them available for their verification as a member check procedure. This information was later confirmed through review of the methods used to collect the research (see Kornbluh, 2015).

Ethical Procedures

This research encompassed human experiences and avenues of documented ethical procedures. The explanations were generated by connections to the influence of opinions and their evaluations and reliable data from participants, to include various encounters and human experiences and undertakings, resulting in a combination of all these elements to reflect the actual state of the women participants (see Madichie & Gbadamosi, 2017). When studies involve human participants, Walden University policies require that researchers receive documented permission from the Walden University Institutional Review Board (IRB) before research can begin. The IRB protects participants from detrimental encounters during or after the study (Jacob & Ferguson, 2012).

Conducting research without receiving permission from the Walden University IRB goes against school policy and results in research being deemed as unacceptable. Gaining prior approval aids in the validity and trustworthiness of the study (Madichie & Gbadamosi, 2017). The completion of the IRB application (Approval No. 05-29-19-0310-870) was used as a tool to solicit research participants. No access to participants, data collection, or ethical procedures were conducted until formal approval from the IRB was received. In an effort to reduce bias and produce an accurate research outcome, data collection activities of any type are not conducted until Walden University's IRB approval is received. To maintain the ethics of this research, human relationships and interactions with prospective participants were expressly avoided (see Schram, 2006).

Throughout the course of the research, stories and connections evolved, and the participant and researcher mutually agreed on the contributions and experiences being made to the study (see Stake, 2010). When circumstances requiring ethical monitoring present themselves, professionalism and positive character values from the researcher are required (Poulis, Poulis, & Yamin, 2013). I safeguarded any recorded and documented information at all times, in addition to maintaining the privacy and confidentiality of research participants (see Salami, 2013). A platform of free speech and supportive involvement was granted to all participants, in addition to their ability to rescind their participation at any time, for any reason, during the course of the study.

A traditional means of acquiring acceptance for the interview a formal meeting invitation, which included a special identification number that was used throughout the interview recording as well as for journal notes and additional interview methods (see Poulis et al., 2013). Through this meeting acceptance, participants received interview protocols and rules that were agreed to before beginning. The consent form in Appendix B details minimum expectations for participation that were established by the researcher, in addition to IRB expectations and guidelines.

The IRB requires the researcher to ensure the safety, confidentiality, and privacy of all participants, in addition to carefully handling all data without error (Salami, 2013). Initially assigned identification numbers will further aid in the confidentiality of participants throughout the study (Poulis et al., 2013). Evaluation of all data collection activities was reviewed by the IRB; therefore, all actions had IRB-approved controls in place to protect participants and data. Organized interview exercises were not used in this

study in an effort to ensure confidentiality of research participants (see Schram, 2006). To guarantee participant information was not inadvertently disseminated, no other individuals or agencies knew which individuals were being interviewed for the purpose of this study. When considering study of a sensitive topic, IRB review and permission is required, with an in-depth analysis of the proposed research and associated risks. This narrative inquiry study has the ability to influence the way African American women approach their acceptance and experiences into leadership positions. It has the potential to aid in building their knowledge and confidence, resulting in additional women successfully transitioning into these positions (see Salami, 2013).

No persuasion, compensation, or any form of obligation was used to solicit voluntary participation in this study, and any decision to participate was up to the participant. If at any time a participant decided to rescind her participation, there was no sort of threat or penalty associated. In the event a participant removed herself from the study, a replacement would have been recruited using the previously established recruiting methods. Documents containing participant personal identifiable information were secured on a locked and password-protected device, cloud location, or document, with all codes adequately maintained by the researcher only. Written documents and journal notes are secured on a password-protected iPad, also controlled by the researcher. Devices used for the duration of this study are devices owned and used only by the researcher, with no other approved operators. Only those authorized Walden University faculty members with the need to know, such as dissertation chairperson, committee member, or university research reviewer, are privy to any research information. The data

will be saved as a secured electronic document for 7 years and then deleted from the computer, cloud drives, and other devices. Hard copies are locked in a security cabinet and will be burned after 7 years.

Summary

In this chapter, a summary of the research design and justification, the researcher position, and methodology were given. The rationale for participant selection and instrumentation was presented, including recruitment, participation, and data collection practices. Lastly, credibility, transferability, dependability, confirmability, and ethical procedures were presented as the study's means to ensure that issues of possible trustworthiness were addressed. In Chapter 4, research results are presented.

Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of this qualitative, narrative inquiry is to gain a deeper understanding of African American women middle managers' daily experiences with stereotype threat and the effect of these experiences on their engagement with leadership aspirations. The central research question guiding this study was as follows:

How do African American women middle managers narrate their daily experiences with stereotype threat, and what are the implications of these experiences for their engagement with leadership aspirations?

I designed this question after an exhaustive review of the extant literature to identify literature gaps associated with the experiences of African American women middle managers with stereotype threat and psychological engagement with leadership aspirations. To address these gaps, I used a narrative inquiry design to collect data from the personal narratives of seven African American women middle managers.

By sharing their stories, these African American women participants allowed me to gain valuable insight into the realities of their daily work agency and their entrepreneurial context through a two-step data analysis process. The first step of the data analysis was the process of restorying, a narrative data analysis method used by the researcher to gather data, analyze the story (e.g., time, place, plot, and scene), and then rewrite the data (Clandinin, 2016). The second step in a critical events approach was key for me in identifying participants' significant life experiences and description of those experiences by providing details on place, time, characters, and significant events essential to the study (see Webster & Mertova, 2007). This two-step approach to

narrative analysis allowed me to categorize and catalog incidences of critical events that were essential to the significance of the research. I used this hermeneutic narrative approach to capture the meaning within participants' stories (see Polkinghorne, 1988). Applying the critical events data analysis method to the primary data allowed the daily work experiences of African American women in management positions within U.S.-based organizations to emerge in the study results (see De Fina & Georgakopoulou, 2019; Webster & Mertova, 2007).

The study results presented in this chapter reveal the personal and workplace experiences of African American women middle managers with stereotype threat and psychological engagement with leadership aspirations. In this chapter, I also present significant details of the research setting, demographic data, data collection and analysis procedures, evidence of trustworthiness of the qualitative data, and finally, a composite of the study results.

Research Setting

In order to perform this narrative inquiry study and gather data, the semistructured interviews were conducted on seven African American women middle managers. Each of the seven interviews was conducted through a recorded telephone call. The initial request for participant solicitation was sent out through LinkedIn. The request for participation included the research inclusion criteria and purpose of the study. From the initial post, four participants reached out expressing interest, and the remaining three were obtained through the network and snowball sampling technique (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). After interest was identified, I requested their email address and sent the IRB consent email.

When their email reply containing acknowledgment of consent was received containing their telephone numbers, mutually acceptable appointments were scheduled.

Demographics

Each of the seven African American women participants were from the eastern sector of the United States. The participants met the study's inclusion criteria, were knowledgeable, had experience directly related to the research topic, and provided valuable in-depth research data. Their experience in middle management roles ranged from 2 to 17 years, in industry sectors in nonprofit, government, education, and compliance. None of the participants knew one another personally. All participants were graduates of higher education institutions, each having a minimum of a bachelor's degree.

The demographic of the data collected included participants' age, years in their present position, industry and position, workplace setting, and education. African American ethnicity was a given because it was part of the criteria for participation. The given pseudonyms were in an XY format, such that X was the generic letter P standing for *participant*, and Y was the number identifier assigned to each participant. The full demographics are shown in Table 1.

Table 1

Participants' Demographics and Characteristics

Participant	Age	Ethnic group	Yrs. at present position	Industry/ position	Marital status	Work setting	Education level
Participant 1	30s	African American	6	Manager in nonprofit	M	Few Blacks	Master's
Participant 2	40s	African American	17	Manager in government	W	Racially mixed	Master's
Participant 3	40s	African American	12	Manager in nonprofit	M	Few Blacks	Master's
Participant 4	40s	African American	7	Manager in education	M	Racially mixed	Master's
Participant 5	30s	African American	6	Manager in compliance	M	Racially mixed	Master's
Participant 6	40s	African American	14	Manager in government	M	Racially mixed	B.Sc.
Participant 7	30s	African American	2	Manager in nonprofit	M	Racially mixed	B.Sc.

Data Collection

Once IRB approval was received, data collection began and continued until saturation was achieved. Data saturation is achieved when similar stories and themes emerge during participant stories and interviews, presenting no new data (Fusch & Ness, 2015; Hennink et al., 2017). The semistructured interviews were designed to ask the same questions to each participant, sustaining the ability to further align interviews and stay within the research topic. In addition, none of the participants had participated in any research related to this topic, nor did they have specialized experience in the topic area

(see Bernard & Bernard, 2012). Concise communication was used with each individual participant, and saturation was effectively achieved with seven participants (see Fusch & Ness, 2015). After each recorded interview, a transcription was developed and distributed to participants.

Themes that emerged within the interviews, such as the participant's resilience in the face of stereotype threats, further supported the evidence of data saturation. These themes appeared as participants reflected on how they advanced their education and looked for personal development avenues to contradict the stereotypes they faced in their work environments. In these narratives of African American women middle managers, the stereotypes set before them did not reflect disengagement from further career aspirations. The Study Results section will further detail the saturation process and what was exposed during participant interviews.

I set aside time each day for 2 consecutive weeks to recruit participants, conduct participant interviews, submit recordings for transcriptions, review transcriptions for accuracy, and member check those transcription and interview summaries. All participants concurred with transcriptions and summaries, with no additional information added or taken from the interview. The data collection process consisted of seven telephone interviews, all recorded, and email exchange as follow-up of information provided. The interviews were conducted over a 2- week period beginning June 2, 2019 and were completed on June 16, 2019.

Field notes were taken throughout the duration of these interviews, which included my thoughts, interpretations, and reflections on the data being communicated

during each interview. Interviews were recorded using a mobile application on my iPhone called TapeACall Pro. Some participants were reluctant to participate in this research because they were from a small town and were afraid their responses would pinpoint them as a participant, further classifying them in a specific stereotype. Although I assured them that their name and specific story would not be used, some participants declined participation in this study.

During each interview, participants described their experiences as African American women in middle management. The participants were eager to contribute and had the education and experience to fully understand the questions being asked. The questions explored their experiences with stereotype threat within their organizations, how negative stereotypes affect their job, the challenges they face as an African American woman in middle management, prejudice or discrimination they experienced because they were African American or women, future career aspirations and ways negative experiences might play a part in that, and additional insight into experiences as an African American woman.

Initial Contact

Participant recruitment was done by publishing a request on LinkedIn. Recruitment criteria were as follows: female identifying as African American; over the age of 30; employed as a middle manager in a U.S.-based organization for a minimum of 2 years; and able and willing to provide in-depth information on the phenomena under study. The request for participation included the research inclusion criteria and purpose of the study; this information was also emailed to participants with the IRB consent form.

Interviews

After interest was established in response to the LinkedIn invitation, I requested each participant's email address and sent the IRB consent email. Within the reply with acknowledgment of consent email, their telephone numbers were provided and mutually acceptable appointments were scheduled. The interviews were all collected via telephone calls. Each time, both I and the participants were in our homes, which allowed for a quiet and tranquil atmosphere. I began each interview with a printed copy of the questions from Appendix C, using the back page of those questions to journal any noted information and asking all question in the order they were presented. There were some moments where follow-up questions were necessary, but there were no difficulties presented by these additional questions.

Reflective Field Notes and Journaling

Reflective journaling and recording all pertinent information, observations, and situations ensures validation of information from the interview while ensuring trustworthiness and reducing the likelihood of research biases (Flagg, 2016). The personal interface, in conjunction with an open-ended interview, will allow the researcher to capture philosophical journal notes and subjective observations, also allowing the researcher to not have additional information influence the analysis of the data (Webster & Mertova, 2007). The journals I kept contain my immediate thoughts on the information being provided and the emotions I felt when hearing the stories of the participants.

Journaling allowed me the ability to critically think about the information being relayed by participants, while gaining a deeper understanding for their experiences.

During the interview, I took time to listen to what the participants were saying and even followed up with questions to ensure clarification was received. The complete recruitment process was documented, and through the journaling process it was apparent each participant had passion about their shared experiences.

Member Checking

Member checking was used to ensure data collected were related to what participant stories illustrated and were trustworthy (see Morse, 2015; Thomas, 2016). Each participant had the opportunity to review the transcript of our phone interview, in addition to the summary of the interview (see Billups, 2014). This information was emailed to them at least 5 days after the conclusion of their interview, providing them the opportunity to make any additions or changes to their initial responses. No changes were made. Participants were pleased with the way the process was conducted and expressed their excitement over seeing what these results will bring.

Data Analysis

Critical moments of participant life events are vital to the narrative data analysis of participants' stories, and when developed into a three-dimensional narrative inquiry, can have the outcome of changing the individual's life (Webster & Mertova, 2007). Semistructured interviews were used to gather narrative experience data from participants. To achieve accuracy, Boyatzis (1998) supported using diverse or flexible approaches. Given the versatility that thematic analysis presents, various standards for the research analysis were formed. Theory-driven, inductive, and prior research-driven codes are some of the coding methods involved in this approach. Theory-driven codes are

obtained from either the researcher or existing theories in other research; inductive codes are acquired from the bottom to the top from the researcher's interpretation of the data, to include prior research-driven codes. The thematic approach is one of the easiest and more convenient methodologies of qualitative research because it allows exclusion from theoretical stricture (Miller, 2019). Uncovering of themes and process of analysis were used to expound on research intentions (Boyatzis, 1998).

After the data were collected, I analyzed the data and created a written, detailed narrative of participants' stories and narratives. The first step of the narrative data analysis methodology for the data collected in this study was based on Clandinin and Connelly's (2000) restorying and thematic analysis process. Thematic coding as applied to restoried data is a two-stage process: production and description and then cross-referencing, categorizing, and thematic linking for comparative purposes (Clandinin, 2016). In the process of retelling, individuals share their vulnerabilities and uncertainties. Thematic analysis of interview transcripts revealed patterns that were combined into five conceptual categories for answering the central research question. The structural analysis of the narrative data enabled the focused material to be seen clearly in the text (Saleh, Menon, & Clandinin, 2014). By taking this approach, I was able to reconfirm the subthemes and five major categories. The five conceptual categories grounded in the conceptual framework and 18 reformulated themes forming the foundation for interpretation in answering the central research question are as follows:

Conceptual Category: Specific Types of Stereotype Threat

Themes: (a) diminishing self-worth; (b) diminishing work performance; (c) using gender and racial bias to diminish career aspirations.

Conceptual Category: Impact of Stereotype Threat Spillover

Themes: (a) minimal impact to career aspirations; (b) daily stress to prove one's worth; (c) internalized resentment of unfair work practices; (d) identity shifting.

Conceptual Category: Disengagement from Leadership and Career Aspirations

Themes: (a) minimal disengagement from career aspirations; (b) persistence in working for leadership positions; (c) resilience in the face of stereotype threats.

Conceptual Category: Stereotyping of Black women in the Workplace

Themes: (a) the angry Black woman archetype; (b) the aggressive Black woman; (c) Black woman with a negative attitude.

Conceptual Category: Challenges Facing Black Women in Management

Themes: (a) wage discrimination; (b) punitive consequences for assertiveness; (c) lack of fairness in promotion; (d) feeling devalued as a professional; (e) maintaining professional image while facing marginalization.

In the second step of the data analysis, I used a critical event narrative analysis to model the events in narratives and categorize these events as critical, like, or other. A critical event has a major impact on people involved and is characterized as an event that has a unique illustrative and confirmatory nature. Critical events can be identified only after the event and happen in an unplanned and unstructured manner (Webster & Mertova, 2007). A like event is comparable and similar to a critical event, but it does not have the same

unique effect as the critical event. A situation that is somewhat similar possibly highlights or confirms the critical event. Like events are different, and not as profound as critical events. Any other information, such as background, that is not related to critical or like events is often considered other in critical event analysis and is usually just descriptive of the critical or like event.

I used a hermeneutic narrative approach to explicate meaning within stories, even when these stories were not sequential or when the data could not be considered as singular pieces of information in their own right (see Polkinghorne, 1988). The hermeneutic circle of moving between the parts helped me craft narratives that provided a deeper understanding of the subjective world of the participants (see Freeman, 2016; Webster & Mertova, 2007). Applying the critical events data analysis method to the primary data supported my data analysis process so that the challenges of African American women in management positions within U.S.-based organizations could emerge in the study results (see De Fina & Georgakopoulou, 2019; Webster & Mertova, 2007).

Table 2 shows how the themes that shared similar characteristics were combined into a single category. The interpretations and themes were verified continually during data collection, and the five conceptual categories were determined based on the conceptual frameworks of Inzlicht and Kang's (2010) concept of stereotype threat spillover and Major et al.'s (1998) concept of psychological disengagement. The critical event approach for data analysis itself satisfies the trustworthiness of data because of its inherent characteristics of openness and transparency in emphasizing, capturing, and

describing events contained in stories of experience (see Webster & Mertova, 2007). This feature is demonstrated through a coconstruction of meanings, themes, and images (with participants), which eventually guided the interpretations of texts. The data analysis is visually represented in Table 2 in coding and theme examples taken from the 18 reformulated themes gleaned from the critical events data analysis and categorized by conceptual category to answer the study's central research questions. These reformulated themes are supported by interview excerpts from participants' narratives. Usually, qualitative researchers draw on triangulation for this purpose. Webster and Mertova, however, indicate that triangulation is not feasible in story-based studies.

Table 2

Coding and Theme Examples

Participant	Interview excerpt from participant narratives	Conceptual category	Reformulated theme
Participant 1	"I believe there are stereotypes when it comes to women and Black women particularly. We have to work twice as hard to get to the same level as our counterparts. We are viewed as less than or not as educated, but just based on appearance. I am the first Black woman in my position at my organization. I literally had to write a memo expressing why I deserved another position or a specific position or a raise, anything to advance myself whether it was acknowledged by them verbally, I still had to express it to get it. It was never just given to me because I was doing my job. Even with the position, they did not even pay me comparable pay even though I	Challenges facing Black women in management	a) wage discrimination; b) punitive consequences for assertiveness; c) lack of fairness in promotion; d) feeling devalued as a professional; e) maintaining professional image while facing marginalization

(table continues)

	was doing everything and all my [performance] reviews were great.”		
Participant 2	<p>“In my first management role, I unfortunately ran into some racial disparities...because I chose not to want to have to eat lunch with [a particular group of ladies] every day. So there was another opening that became available for the next level which was a supervisor's position, and when I applied for it, I was told that I was 3 months short of the time, in terms of experience that I needed to get for that role. And so when I questioned it, basically I was told, well, there was another person that was going to get it because they had 3 months more experience than I had. The young lady that got it was Caucasian, and the other young lady was Caucasian as well. So that was one of the examples of, unfortunately I would think, a racial disparity.”</p>	Impact of stereotype threat spillover	<p>a) minimal impact to career aspirations; b) daily stress to prove one's worth; c) internalized resentment of unfair work practices; d) identity shifting</p>
Participant 3	<p>“I landed a leadership role position, and I received a lot of pushback from not just men in the workforce, but I also received a lot of pushback from other African American women. I received pushback from White women as well. And the pushback was because I was an African American woman who was in this role, and nobody else had ever been in this leadership ... No other African American woman or woman, period, had been in this leadership role. I dealt with a lot of adversity where I had to really, really dig deep, and I think that was a turning point for me in my professional career, learning how to deal with adversity under very difficult situations. I have gotten paid less than the male, mostly I have come behind White men. My contracts have been very minimal, at best, in terms of other</p>	Disengagement from leadership and career aspirations	<p>a) minimal disengagement from career aspirations; b) persistence in working for leadership positions; c) resilience in the face of stereotype threats</p>

(table continues)

	types of benefits that my previous person held. And so I have continued to deal with that to this day, getting less than what the male has received; in most cases, it's been a White male. And so I know that it has a lot to do with being an African American female, but it still doesn't stop me from continuing to pursue these roles because my ultimate goal is to one day be able to be in a position where I can help other young African American women.”		
Participant 4	<p>“Just on how I talk. Sometimes you have to... being an African American, it's not a good thing to get told, “People talk Black. People talk White.” But, just some of the verbiage I use when I am around certain employers or employees, I have to make sure that I am saying it in a different way. Versus, if I am with some African American counterparts, I can pretty much just say it how I feel. But when I am around them... And sometimes they're looking at me like, “what we are talking about.” I have seen it in our group when we are doing any type of professional development. You have to kind of know when to turn it on and know when to turn it off, as far as the verbiage, the way you act... you have to turn it on and turn it off. I do not know if we should adapt to them, but I guess because of being a minority in both aspects, Black and female, I just do it. It's just so many stressors involved, and because I consider myself to be a strong woman, I am not a quitter of any sort. But it makes you rethink... Are these stressors worth my health, or are these stressors worth the possibility of me having a stroke or a heart attack and dying from being stressed to the</p>	Specific types of stereotype threat	<p>a) diminishing self-worth; b) diminishing work performance; c) using gender and racial bias to diminish career aspirations</p>

(table continues)

	max? You have to put all of those things into perspective.”		
Participant 5	<p>“I think that there are some stereotypes within management, and in the corporate world, with African American women. One, to be particular, is it seems as if one of the stereotypes is Black women, or African American women, seem to be more vocal, and it can come across as being what they call, "The angry Black woman." I do know a lot of times, African American women, we tend to be passionate about subjects that ... or anything that we are trying to get across, and it can come across in a derogatory way. No matter what your tone is, it still can come across that way. I have been in my position for some time now, and whenever I speak, I have to always choose my tone, I have to choose my words wisely. Where everyone else can freely just talk, I have to ensure that mine is the most professional, and that I am keeping my body language and my tone a certain way. So that they can hear my message, and not automatically think, ‘Oh, here's the angry Black woman.’ I feel like I have been personally affected because in my current role I was in a different department within the same company, and I was always, like I said before I even had a nickname that one of the managers gave me as [demeaning name]. Because whenever we had certain assignments, I would always ask questions for better understanding and for clarity. But it would always come across as being combative or argumentative, but that was never my intention.”</p>	Stereotyping of Black women in the workplace	<p>a) the angry Black woman archetype; b) the aggressive Black woman; c) Black woman with a negative attitude</p>

(table continues)

Participant 6	<p>“14 people reporting to me, and issues that dealt with my people, personally, I may know about it first-hand. When it came down to move forward and meet on the issue, come to find out, that they've already met, because they felt like I was going to present the Black girl's syndrome. I had that happen to me a couple times. I have a strong opinion, but I am not an angry Black woman. I just let you know how I feel about it and I try to be as professional as I can about it, but some people, and I am saying White people in the workplace, they cannot handle that. Because what they do, they like the kind of people who go softly behind someone's back and say stuff. Whereas, I just go ahead and, sometimes it's best not to say anything, but you know, that's how they perceive you as an angry Black woman when you have a strong opinion about how things should go.”</p>	Stereotyping of Black women in the workplace	<p>a) the angry Black woman archetype; b) the aggressive Black woman; c) Black woman with a negative attitude</p>
Participant 7	<p>“My job is mostly dealing around women, but one side of my job, I would say I am one of few Black, African American women who work there. And I would say, it's nothing I would take offense to, but you know how you pick up on things like conversations that are held or things that are talked about with people of the other, of another color or of another background. They'll ask questions that sometimes if you're not in check and in tune within yourself and what you're doing, somebody else might find it offensive or, you know, might be offended by it, but because I feel like I am aware of that, I always try to not take offense to it or unless it's like blatantly disrespect. The</p>	Challenges facing Black women in management	<p>a) wage discrimination; b) punitive consequences for assertiveness; c) lack of fairness in promotion; d) feeling devalued as a professional; e) maintaining professional image while facing marginalization</p>

(table continues)

conversations about things that can be seen as race, you know, it needs to be like borderline White, Hispanic race. I get to events that were meetings or conferences and things of that nature, like I feel like, right now I have my hair in [an ethnic style] now, and I feel like, not comfortable sometimes with it, like this event I went to earlier this week. I feel like I wish I had my hair a different way. I wish, you know, I wish I could change it this way or, 'Do I wear my nails this color in coffin shapes? Should I get them cut down shorter? Should I wear this? Can I wear that?' So, it's sad to say but sometimes I feel like, you know, you have to dress a certain way, look a certain way, dim down, you know, calm down a little bit in order to fit in or not to be looked at as an outcast or like you're doing too much."

Evidence of Trustworthiness

Credibility

Strategies such as member checking and conscious efforts to avoid research bias by staying on task with the questions at hand and not offering personal assumptions aided in the credibility of this data (see Billups, 2014). Each participant interview was done over the phone, ranged from 30 to 60 minutes, and was free from distractions and obstructions. Participant responses were audio recorded and journaling was kept for additional validation and observations. Transcriptions of the recorded interviews were made and distributed to participants to conduct their member check. Critical event narratives shared during this study strengthened the credibility of research. Saturation

was reached by using the holistic view of the data collected, which is an essential element in analyzing the credibility of the data (see Billups, 2014). I have established credibility of research conducted by ensuring a well-referenced trail available for readers to access the results and data collected. The research was concluded when similar data was obtained, reaching saturation and proving validity (see Sutton & Austin, 2015).

Transferability

Transferability is the ability of the context from a specific study to be transferred to another if there is an appropriate fit within the research (Foster and Urquhart, 2012). Careful documentation of research steps used throughout this study aided in the progression of the research findings. The detailed accounts of African American female experiences within management positions presented in this research can be used in future research review and analysis. The open-ended questions and the precise sample of research participants were designed in such a way as to gather other information and data for the progression of future studies.

Dependability

Dependability is when research strategies can be compared and reused over time and remain stable enough to provide an adequate research outcome (Billups, 2014; Korstjens & Moser, 2018). The data were collected in a such way that an audit trail can be established to display transparent research phases in the development of current and future research findings (see Houghton et al., 2013; Korstjens & Moser, 2018). Throughout this research and data collection process, all recordings, transcriptions, and

journal notes clearly articulated the process and provided optimal transparency for the data collection process.

Confirmability

To get valuable feedback and responses from research participants, a positive rapport was developed so they were comfortable sharing their narratives without the use of any bribery or monetary offerings. I have examined my study's data to notice convergence and divergence of results with explicit and implicit assumptions within the theoretical foundations of my conceptual framework, a process adding credibility to my study results, the explicit and implicit assumptions, and my preconceptions and values (see Merriam & Grenier, 2019). After each interview, participant responses were transcribed and made available for their verification in a member check procedure. This information was later confirmed through emailed responses sent to each participant for their review and confirmation (see Kornbluh, 2015).

Study Results

The research question was designed to provide substantial data and reinforce theory by use of the narrative inquiry design. Current extension studies like this one not only provide additional substantiation but also support the results of previous studies in a narrative theoretical direction (see Bonett, 2012). The narrative inquiry method was used to establish a purpose for the study and to collect data through the storytelling experiences of African American women in middle-management positions within U.S.-based organizations. To ensure trustworthiness of the data, member checking and the critical event approach for data analysis were used. I utilized the critical event approach

for data analysis because of its inherent characteristics of openness and transparency in thoroughly emphasizing, highlighting, capturing, and describing events emerging from participants' stories of daily experiences. This approach allowed me to expose: (a) specific types of stereotype threat; (b) impact of stereotype threat spillover; (c) disengagement from leadership and career aspirations; (d) stereotyping of Black women in the workplace; and (e) challenges facing Black women in management. Detailed narratives were developed to aid in the analysis of participant responses, using scene, plot, character, and events (see Webster & Mertova, 2007). Restorying was used to analyze the time, place, plot, and scene of the narratives, in addition to collecting and amending the data (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990, 2006). Next, the critical events narrative analysis was used to aid in the analysis of the data (Webster & Mertova, 2007). Themes began to emerge as critical events narratives from each participant were exposed, producing specific information within the setting and configuration of those specific experiences (see Clandinin, 2006; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Webster & Mertova, 2007).

This chapter presents the study results on how African American women middle managers in U.S.-based organizations have been presented with the opportunity to illustrate their personal experiences with stereotype threat, which is still needed in scholarly literature. Through the recorded narratives of these African American women, a better understanding has evolved of their experiences with stereotype threat in their progression into leadership. The scene and plot display the essential components of their daily experiences, major experiences, and the individuals within their organizations who

play a vital role in their progression into current or previous leadership positions (see Clandinin, 2016; Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). The human interaction exemplified in the critical events and stories told created essential narratives that conveyed depth and reality to participant stories (see Clandinin, 2016; Webster & Mertova, 2007).

Reinforced by the essential knowledge from the in-depth interviews, the following themes are presented, combined with the participant storytelling voices in response to the central research question.

Diminishing Self-Worth

Narratives from research participants revealed diminishment of self-worth through stereotypes placed on African American women in middle management positions. Participants had the tendency to take the way people treated them personally, and those perceived threats made them doubt their ability and overall self-worth.

To reflect a lot in the past 2 years, just trying to see, was there something that I could have done differently? What lessons to gain or learn from those experiences? And to stop beating myself down, because a lot of times you feel like you gave your all, but yet, this is where you are. And I went through that period, especially after losing loved ones that were so close to me, thinking about the time, the sweat, the tears, the effort that I had put into my job that, should I have put that more into those family members? But then also, recognizing, because I am a woman of faith, that everything was already ordered and preordained. And so, with that said, just continuing to strive to do better, to be better, to take those life lessons from my journey and do things a little bit

differently, and if I come across some of those lessons that appear to be resurfacing, to see if I have learned them, kind of stepping back and kind of taking emotion out of it and really problem solving and analyzing it, and seeing how could I do things a little bit differently. (Participant #2)

According to Participant 4,

So, it's just so many disadvantages to being a woman. First of all, you have to prove to everyone else that you can actually do the job because you're a woman. On top of that, being an African American woman, that's just a whole other job within itself, proving that you can stand your own and do what you have to do in the management role.

Participant 7 stated,

Sometimes I feel in the area where I stay in, I may be in other areas or bigger areas or different areas that may not be that way, but I feel like in order to meet my career aspirations that I do have to sometimes not wear my hair a certain type of way or dress a certain type of way or talk a certain type of way. You know you kind of have to change up to be able to fit in or you have to have two different...you have to be yourself and also have to be like professional.

Diminishing Work Performance

Narratives illustrated by research participants revealed that while working in their roles, they experienced lack of support from managers at a higher level and pressures that took a toll on their mental health. The lack of support further hinders progression and

opportunities for career advancement and from obtaining support and resources for the teams they manage.

I ended up moving to another area of the organization in a supervisory role.

Started off really well in that position, the majority of the staff was, I think, a ratio of one to five: one African American young lady, five non-African Americans, and then myself. And they were all younger, I would say in the ages of maybe 20 to 40. And one of the one young ladies within that area, I found out later, had apparently applied for the same supervisory position and felt like she should have gotten it, so that right there was a challenge trying to bring her on board to be in the team, and not feel like she was excluded because she felt like she should have been doing the role that I was doing. And so, over time the work environment became toxic. They started, and when I say they, the employees basically would go to upper management, and say to upper management, "Well, if I was her," meaning me, then they would not do things the way that I was doing them, however, they did not realize that what I was doing was being sent to me from a top-down perspective, in terms of my management responsibilities. (Participant #2)

Participant 3 stated,

So it is taking those shots at me, undercutting and stuff with me. I continued to deal with that on a daily basis and address it in a manner that a lot of times is absorbing it, understanding it, not really reacting to it in a negative way, always

remaining professional, but I am human too, so it does ... It does affect me in a manner of mental tiredness, like you know, you become mentally tired.

According to Participant 6,

Various experience pose a negative impact. It stops you from wanting to progress in those roles. I am in a position now and I have been asked every time I get a performance review, "What can we do for you, what can we," "Is there anything else you want to do, one year?" I would like to rotate into another position and do something else, because I have been in a similar role for over 20 years. "Okay, we will work on it." They never would. So, I had to actually get a mentor out of my organization to help me get into another department, and other assignments. Now I am progressing, but I had to get others to talk to the top manager to get me over in other departments because they weren't going to do nothing.

Using Gender and Racial Bias to Diminish Career Aspirations

Narratives illustrated by research participants revealed that being an African American women in middle management has the potential to alter one's overall career goals because of the lack of support received from other levels of management. In addition, the adverse effect causes doubt in accepting roles when it is obvious African American women are not always chosen based on their ability to perform, but rather from an organization's need to meet a certain ratio of diversity, further demeaning their ability and efforts.

It's my goal to ultimately not work for anyone, because you work harder when you work for yourself, but to not have those limitations placed on you or have

those prejudices placed on you like on a day-to-day basis. It is there in the world because of the diversity that exists in the world, but as far as for a company that has been my driving goal, because it has honestly been so much anxiety and I just would rather not have that anxiety from that aspect of life if I could not have it. My goal is to ultimately work for myself and depend on my own income.

(Participant #1)

According to Participant 2,

But instead, it was to me, as if I was being accused of being unfair, unjust, when I simply was doing my job, and then only for them to be told, "Well, guess what, you still have to do what she says to do." But I had to be demeaned and belittled, in my opinion, because think about it, if you're sitting like you're on the jury stand and you're being accused by people who are underneath you of, "Well, you're not doing this and you're not doing that, and you're not doing this, and you're not doing that," only to be told, "Well, yes, she was doing exactly what we said for her to do." I just think it could've been handled a little bit differently.

Participant 5 stated,

I think that the opportunity would be there, and then the funny part about it is because our company is big on diversity, sometimes it can come across as if you step into a position because you are an African American woman. So there can be negative impacts of it, but there's also positive impacts because I feel like that I have been a recipient of it at times where I feel like sometimes I may have gotten the role because there are no African American women, and because it has to be

diverse, not because I do not deserve the job, or that I do not do a great job. I just feel like sometimes it is easier for me to get the job because I am an African American woman.

Minimal Impact to Career Aspirations

Narratives illustrated by research participants revealed that regardless of the barriers and struggles faced, participants strive to progress in their education and career, seeking to break barriers and overcome the stereotype to help themselves and others.

I have strived to seek opportunities outside of state government and corporate America, in teaching. I have three master's now, I have a master's in special ed, I have a master's in organizational management with a concentration in nonprofit organization management, and then I have the master's in philosophy that I recently received earlier this year. And then of course, I will have this doctoral degree in management. (Participant #2)

According to Participant 3,

So I worked hard over the last 20 years and moved up and my goal eventually and I am taking a new job and running the largest industry in my state. But after that part of my life, I really want to work either in public policy from the standpoint of working for the federal government or being an elected official working at the state level. State laws are so critical. With my state in particular, I run up against so many barriers when it comes to things that we want to do that other states have done that are so successful, but then my state law stops us. So it isn't the local

municipalities, it's the state laws that really prohibit us from moving the needle, especially when it comes to affordable and workforce lodging.

Participant 5 stated,

My aspiration is to continue education to also become licensed as a customs broker. And perhaps move into a more manager role, because currently I am a supervisor, and the next role would be a manager. And I really feel like I can be groomed to do that, just not necessarily sure if it would be within the company that I am currently within.

Daily Stress to Prove One's Worth

Narratives illustrated by research participants revealed that even with the stress of being a manager, African American middle managers have the additional stress of ensuring they do not portray the negative stereotypes in their actions. The inability to be who you are or say how you feel is an additional stressor that those who are not placed under this stereotype may not otherwise understand. They face criticisms and pushback that other groups of individuals may not experience.

So while I deal with some of the ignorance that comes with people saying things of fear or out of just being hurtful, I do not take it personal, I just address it and deal with it, and I do tell people that I am not going to, I am going to treat you like somebody, I need for you to treat me like I am also somebody. We are going to be respectful back and forth. If I cannot get through to them that way, then I will say, "Look, I am going to hang the phone up," or "I am going to end this conversation. We can talk later whenever you feel like you are calm enough to be able to talk to

me in a professional manner without saying derogatory or racial statements." So long story short, I get it from both aspects, from staff internally, people externally. (Participant #3).

According to Participant 5,

It makes me want to go harder, it makes me want to show you not only myself, it also wants me to show them, look, I can do this just like you can, and I actually can do it maybe even better than you can. So it pushes me, and it makes my drive even harder because I want to do it to better myself, but I also just want to put on that image, that look, because I am an African American woman, I can still do this, I can still do that, and I can even excel and do it better than you if I really want to. So that's where that pushes me.

Participant 7 stated,

Sometimes, I am self-conscious about not portraying that I am an angry Black woman or I am not mad or jealous, or anything like that, even sometimes when you have had a bad day, sometimes all you want to do is cry or you want to mope around, and that is the way that you would fight through these things. Normally I find myself trying to be a stronger leader or to be that stronger person in authority. I found myself like maybe going to the bathroom to get it together or going to my car or riding around basically to get myself together because I do not want to be stereotyped as that or I do not want to portray myself as not being able to handle positions or, you know, having no negative, you know, negative stereotype because of that, "Oh, she is a young Black girl, let me, you know, this is what we

think of her.” You know what I am saying? I never had anybody to say anything to me to that extent at this position, but I find myself within myself being self-conscious about those things.

Internalized Resentment of Unfair Work Practices

Narratives illustrated by research participants revealed there are internal and external threats. Maintaining focus on the goals at hand and the surrounding environment aids in internalizing the unfairness confronted. Even if it means placing a great emphasis on their actions or conversations, they must always keep those partial biases in their mind.

And now that I think again, just not allowing me the opportunity to even apply for the new position. I was told that they were not going to fill it; however, they did fill it, and it was not advertised where someone could apply, so the young lady just kind of all of a sudden showed up, if you will. And I think that was unfair, I think if it was supposed to be an equal opportunity, then it should have been posted like every other job. There should have been an opportunity for me to submit a resume, but I cannot make someone interview me (Participant #2).

According to Participant 3,

I have been called racist words at public meetings in front of everybody. I have been called a racist word over the phone. I have been cursed out a million times over the phone and called all kinds of stuff, but one of the things I realize is that I am working for and understand where I work. So while I deal with some of the ignorance that comes with people saying things out of fear or just being hurtful, I

do not take it personal, I just address it and deal with it, and I do tell people that I am not going to, I am going to treat you like somebody, I need for you to treat me like I am also somebody.

Participant 7 stated,

I know for me sometimes I feel like I have to practice how I talk, practice how I speak, practice how I say certain words, because you want to be the best of the best. You've got to work harder than the next person to be the best of the best. That's unfortunate and unfair, but I do feel like we are making strides to do differently and to do better in that nature. Outside of that, I think, you know, that's pretty much it.

Identity Shifting

Narratives illustrated by research participants revealed that African American women are not afforded the opportunity to openly be themselves and express their opinion. This group of managers have taken additional precautions with what they say and do to ensure they maintain a consistent composure, not to expose any associated stereotypes.

I believe everyone in a professional setting acts accordingly, but I have always felt like I had to do extra to make sure that I did not. There are certain things that I do not say or do at work. I am not free to just be liberal and talk, because religion and politics are some of the things you're supposed to keep out of the office, but some people feel the need to express their opinions. However, I have never been that person because of how it may appear. I work in a predominantly conservative

environment, and it was always something that I just kept to myself, my opinions on most things, because you have to be able to acclimate to the climate that you are in, rather than giving an opinion. (Participant #1)

According to Participant 3,

You know, I think I have changed a lot about me and the way I handle situations, which ultimately results in the way that I act, and I have done so not for ... not to be accepted but to be understood and to also think more from a perspective of being inclusive and having an understanding of diversity, and having an understanding of diversity is understanding where people come from, understanding their frame of reference. And the more experiences I have in my life, I am better able to be a better manager, a better leader, a better teammate to the people that I work with every day. And so I look at it as growth, maturity, and being able just to be a better all-around person with keeping diversity and inclusion at the forefront.

Participant 4 stated,

Being an African American, it is not a good thing to get told, "People talk Black. People talk White." But just some of the verbiage I use when I am around certain employers or employees, I have to make sure that I am saying it in a different way. Versus, if I am with some African American counterparts, I can pretty much just say it how I feel. But when I am around them... And sometimes they're looking at me like, "What we are talking about." I have seen it in our group when we are doing any type of professional development. You have to kind of know

when to turn it on and know when to turn it off, as far as the verbiage, the way you act... you have to turn it on and turn it off. You have to code switch I guess is what you call it.

Minimal Disengagement From Career Aspirations

Narratives of research participants show they take pride in being able to aid in inclusion and diversification. Their experience in this arena will allow them to pave the way for others facing the same barriers.

And so I know that it has a lot to do with being an African American female, but it still doesn't stop me from continuing to pursue these roles because my ultimate goal is to one day be able to be in a position where I can help other young African American women. I can be able to help boards who are looking to hire executives be able to hire in a manner that is inclusive and that they have a thought process of being very diverse, and that they are intentional about taking away all the stereotypes that might be embedded in their fabric whether they know it or not, to do more to negotiate with a very qualified woman of color, to be able to pay her and compensate her in a manner that she should be compensated, making it fair and making it equal across the board without relaying that it is an African American female. And I have really perfected my mannerisms when I am communicating with people, because I know that as an African American woman, you can raise your hand. (Participant #3)

Persistence in Working for Leadership Positions

Narratives by research participants illustrate that African American women in leadership positions have to prove their ability to perform, not just being accepted because they deserve the opportunity. They work and manage environments where they are the minority, but are expected to administer special treatment from other African American women in lower positions.

Due to our race, as well as being a female, a lot of times people do not hold our positions as they would any other race or, particularly, a White man. So, it's just so many disadvantages to being a woman. First of all, you have to prove to everyone else that you can actually do the job because you're a woman. On top of that, being an African American woman, that's just a whole other job within itself, proving that you can stand your own and do what you have to do in the management role. (Participant #4)

According to Participant 5,

The major difficulties I face is there is more White men in the area that I work now, and most of the White men are friends. So there's only, within the department that I work right now, I am the only African American woman. I was the only African American woman in my previous department, in a management role. So that can be strenuous at some points, because like I said before, I feel like I have to always make sure that I conduct myself and speak a certain way when I am in a room full of them. The other part is not only do I feel like I face it with the management staff perceiving me a certain way, or perceiving African

American women a certain way, is also on the flip side with my administrative staff, most of them as entry level African American younger females. Sometimes I feel like the negative part of that is because I look like them, they expect me to give them certain type of treatment, or expect me to act like a big sister as opposed to their management.

Resilience in the Face of Stereotype Threats

Narratives by research participants show that even when African American women in middle management positions are being mistreated and stereotyped against, they maintain professionalism and progression in their careers. Taking the high road is something they have become accustomed to in order to ensure those preconceived stereotypes are not confirmed.

I deal with a lot of passive aggressive people who have turned their stereotype mentality into being passive aggressive. Like right now, just plain and simple, I have a chairperson who, if it was in the 60s and 70s, might say something that was pretty ignorant or blatant in terms of being disrespectful to a female because he's a little misogynistic, you know, chauvinistic, that kind of mentality. But because it's 2019 and he's in a world where you have to be very careful about how you communicate to people, then he does it in a passive aggressive way. So it's taking those shots at me, undercutting and stuff with me. I continued to deal with that on a daily basis and address it in a manner that a lot of times is absorbing it, understanding it, not really reacting to it in a negative way, always remaining

professional, but I am human too, so it does ... It does affect me in a manner of mental tiredness, like you know, you become mentally tired. (Participant #3)

According to Participant 4,

I always have to watch my tone when I am in any kind of situation, as far as in my position. So, making sure that I try to stay monotone so that my tone does not rise, because of the various stereotypes of African American women. Even in regular meetings with stakeholders, whether it's just to have a conference or just regular conversation, you have to be very mindful of your tone and your presentation with any stakeholder.

Participant 7 stated,

I would say I am one of a few Black, African American women who work there. And I would say, it's nothing I would take offense to, but you know how you pick up on things like conversations that are held or things that are talked about with people of the other, of another color or of another background. They will ask questions that sometimes if you are not in check and in tune within yourself and what you are doing, somebody else might find it offensive or, you know, might be offended by it, but because I feel like I am aware of that, I always try to not take offense to it or unless it's like blatantly disrespect. The conversations about things that can be seen as race, you know, it needs to be like borderline White, Hispanic race. You know, those type of things that, like I feel like you have to have yourself prepared for, in order for you not to take offense to it

The Angry Black Woman Archetype

Narratives by research participants illustrate how they feel they cannot be themselves in their positions out of fear of being stereotyped as an angry Black woman. In addition, they feel they have to work harder or be smarter to obtain or maintain a position that someone of another race will get with less effort. There is a constant battle to prove they deserve the job or deserve to be treated right, while adding the stresses of defying the angry Black woman stereotype cast upon them.

I believe that there are stereotypes when it comes to women and Black women particularly. We have to work twice as hard to get to the same level as our counterparts. We are viewed as less than or not as educated, but just based on appearance. And levels of Black women as well, because a light-skinned woman fares better than I do. (Participant #1)

According to Participant 5,

I think that there are some stereotypes within management, and in the corporate world, with African American women. One, to be particular, is it seems as if one of the stereotypes is Black women, or African American women, seem to be more vocal, and it can come across as being what they call the angry Black woman. I do know a lot of times African American women we tend to be passionate about subjects that ... or anything that we are trying to get across, and it can come.

So that's one of the stereotypes that I have noticed in my workplace. Like I said, I have been in my position for some time now, and whenever I speak, I have to always choose my tone, I have to choose my words wisely. Where everyone else

can freely just talk, I have to ensure that mine is the most professional, and that I am keeping my body language and my tone a certain way. So that they can hear my message, and not automatically think, "Oh, here's the angry Black woman."

Participant 6 stated,

I have a strong opinion, but I am not an angry Black woman. I just let you know how I feel about it and I try to be as professional as I can about it, but some people, and I am saying White people in the workplace, they cannot handle that. Because what they do, they like the kind of go behind, softly behind someone's back and say stuff. Whereas, I just go ahead and, sometimes it is best not to say anything, but you know, that is how they perceive you as an angry Black woman when you have a strong opinion about how things should go. So, if I am left out of the loop or something, that irritates me, so to me that is a negative condemnation of me. Like I cannot handle it, or he will deal with it, we will deal with it and we will let her deal with it on the back end.

The Aggressive Black Woman

Narratives by research participants show that external stereotypes have the ability to have a negative effect on the perception of African American women's ability to manage. The passion displayed for the work they perform is often interpreted with a negative connotation, such as being aggressive.

Historically, African American women have not been portrayed in the mainstream media or in our, just in our communities as being in leadership roles and having the ability to lead. Our stereotypical images are mostly that we are aggressive,

that we are very confrontational, and for a female in general and then an African American female to be aggressive and confrontational, it sort of kind of translates in the business world as not having the ability to lead. And that stereotype is plastered on all African American women, in general. (Participant #3)

According to Participant 4,

I always have to watch my tone when I am in any kind of situation, as far as in my position. So, making sure that I try to stay monotone so that my tone does not rise, because of the various stereotypes of African American women.

Participant 5 stated,

Whenever we had certain assignments, I would always ask questions for better understanding and for clarity, but it would always come across as being combative or argumentative, but that was never my intention.

Black Woman With a Negative Attitude

Narratives by research participants show the perceived negative attitude is another stereotype used against African American women in management, even in their personal lives. They often are fearful of expressing their true feelings to try and avoid confirmation of this stereotype.

You have got to make sure that you are not moving your neck around or looking at people or stretching your eyes. And so I have literally developed this poker face in all of my communication so as to not portray any sign of aggression or any sign of being a part of what they feel is stereotypical of an African American woman. (Participant #3).

According to Participant 4,

I do think that there are stereotypes. A lot of times, I think that Black women are viewed as the angry Black woman. As far as our personalities, people think that we are very overbearing. I think that's one of the main stereotypes of an African American in the management position.

Participant 7 stated,

I am trying to say there are negative experiences or negative perspectives of Black women, or African American women, in management positions. I would say one because you have a reputation of having bad attitudes. Black women and women in general have a stereotype of being emotional and sometimes being seen as not being able to handle positions of power or authority because of that. Those are my only reasons, that's what, two of the reasons why I feel that way.

Wage Discrimination

Narratives by research participants show there is a significant difference between African American women's salaries and others, but the work scope and requirements are at the same level of expectancy or, in most cases, higher. Even with their education and skill set, they were given more work scope, but the opportunity to make more money was not a natural progression and sometimes was denied.

I started as an administrative assistant, I started with a temp agency, and I was doing the bookkeeping and so naturally I knew what the salary and the money looked like and how much they were paying the temp company as opposed to what they were paying me, but when I got hired on permanent, they did not even

pay me what they were paying the temp company, and it was a little disturbing and I was doing everything, all my reviews were great and still for whatever reason, I did not get the chance to grow within the company until we had some changeover in the CEO. (Participant #1)

According to Participant 2,

Within those 2 years my supervisor unfortunately passed and I ended up kind of doing a dual role where I was doing my position as chief of staff or co-director and also serving as the interim director, and I did that for about 9 months, and within those 9 months I inquired with upper management if there would possibly be an opportunity for me to either be detailed into that position until they made some decisions around if they wanted to fill it, or if they wanted to reorganize, and if I would be given an opportunity to apply for the position.

Was told that they would get back with me, but 2 months later found out that they had actually hired someone else to come in and take over that role and so, as a result, I basically was informed that my position was no longer needed and was going to be taken out of the organizational structure, and that's basically what happened.

Participant 4 stated,

But just showing the inequities of race. Actually, there's another person in the same field, zero years as the leader, and they make probably six or seven thousand more than I do. And that is a White male

Punitive Consequences for Assertiveness

Narratives by research participants show that African American women in middle-management positions do not have to change who they are because of the stereotypes, but they acknowledge there are stereotypes placed on them which are presented and passed along throughout the organization. These stereotypes alter the actions they take within their organizations. Personalities are often times perceived as negative when they are sampling managing based on their experiences and abilities.

They were friends, and so basically what they wanted was for us to go to lunch together every day, and it wasn't that it was a problem in terms of us getting together sometimes, but if you were asking me to work with you 8, 10 hours a day, including my lunch, then basically I was going to never have any down time for myself, we were going to constantly be working around the clock from the time we were, you know, stepped into the building to the time we left. When I questioned that, I kind of got some negative responses, and basically there was a meeting that was held with the staff and it was almost as if I was ousted because I chose not to want to have to eat lunch with them every day. So that was one of the examples of, unfortunately I would think, a racial disparity. The young lady that got it was Caucasian, and the other young lady was Caucasian as well, and so where I tried to argue the fact that I had been there longer, that I had the opportunity to be trained by the agency on new research-based materials that we were coming back and training others on across the state, that I had been there and gotten more training and experience that I could bring to the table, it was thought

that that person would have been a better suit because of their demeanor, and so it was almost as if it was told to me that I was coming off more as I was trying to split the team. Which I was not trying to do. So I ended up moving to another area of the organization in a supervisory role. (Participant #2).

According to Participant 5,

Personally, I have been affected because in my current role I was in a different department within the same company, and I was always, like I said before I even had a nickname that one of the managers gave me. Because whenever we had certain assignments, I would always ask questions for better understanding and for clarity. But it would always come across as being combative or argumentative, but that was never my intention. So the negative effect was when I tried to go to a different department for the same type of job that I was already in, I was beat out by somebody that was an administrative employee. And I feel like the negative impact was, it's a possibility, all of this is not factual, but it's a possibility that managers spoke among each other and it was given that I could be that type of person, when really that was never my intention. Long story short is I always have positive results in everything that I do. But it's always perceived and taken a certain way by certain types of people, I should put not everybody, but just certain types of people take me a certain way.

Participant 6 stated,

I have a strong opinion, but I am not an angry Black woman. I just let you know how I feel about it and I try to be as professional as I can about it, but some

people, and I am saying White people in the workplace, they cannot handle that. Because what they do, they like the kind of go behind, softly behind someone's back and say stuff. Whereas, I just go ahead and, sometimes it's best not to say anything, but you know, that's how they perceive you as an angry Black woman when you have a strong opinion about how things should go. So, if I am left out of the loop or something, that irritates me, so to me that's a negative condemnation of me. Like I cannot handle it, or he'll deal with it, we'll deal with it and we'll let her deal with it on the back end.

Lack of Fairness in Promotion

Narratives by research participants show the visible barriers intentionally presented to assign specific individuals for the role, even though those affected are qualified and have performed the job function. These African American women were sometimes overlooked and bypassed so individuals with less experience and of another race are considered and promoted.

I am the first Black woman in my position at my organization. I literally had to write a memo expressing why I deserved another position or a specific position or a raise, anything to advance myself whether it was acknowledged by them verbally, I still had to express it to get it, it was never just given to me because I was doing my job. (Participant #1)

According to Participant 3,

I had the opportunity to be in a leadership role, and the first time an opportunity presented itself, I applied for the job. The job had been vacated by a boss of mine

who was a White male, and when he left, I was assuming some of his responsibilities and served as backup for him when he was employed at the agency. Well, when he left, I immediately, when he announced his resignation, I went to my boss and I said, "Hey, I'd like the opportunity to apply for his job." Well, I immediately made my boss aware of wanting to apply for this job, then they decided that I could have the responsibilities but not the job title and that they were going to go in a different direction and not advertise the job at all. In fact, they went in and added a different criterion requiring that you have a master's degree, and at that time I had a bachelor's degree. And so that was the first barrier, roadblock.

Participant 4 stated,

Currently I am dealing with an issue with a person that was actually under me when I became one of the leaders in education. That particular person who is of a different ethnicity, race, they actually worked under me for 4 years, and their salary is almost commensurate of what I make. I have been in this leadership role for 7 years. This person has 0 years' experience, and that within itself is somewhat discriminatory based on race, based on being female.

Feeling Devalued as a Professional

Narratives by research participants show they are good enough to do a job but not good enough to hold the positions. They are overlooked for further progression into roles they are qualified for, as they have done the assignments.

I ended up kind of doing a dual role where I was doing my position as chief of staff or co-director and also serving as the interim director, and I did that for about 9 months, and within those 9 months I inquired with upper management if there would possibly be an opportunity for me to either be detailed into that position until they made some decisions around if they wanted to fill it, or if they wanted to reorganize, and if I would be given an opportunity to apply for the position. Was told that they would get back with me, but 2 months later found out that they had actually hired someone else to come in and take over that role and so, as a result, I basically was informed that my position was no longer needed and was going to be taken out of the organizational structure, and that's basically what happened. (Participant #2)

According to Participant 3,

I went back to school and got my master's degree, and then they decided that they still wanted to go in a different direction, that they did not want to fill the position but still give me the responsibility. And they changed my job title a little bit, gave me about a few thousand dollars raise, and I said okay. I continued to do my job, and I said the first daylight experience that I receive, I am up out of here, you know, because this is not a place that will ever consider an African American female in a leadership role.

Participant 6 stated,

Same thing happened with the other position that I applied. They picked this guy, and even one of the guys on the panel, this was a White guy on the panel, and

when I saw him at the leadership meeting, he said, "I told them they need you. You did a great job on your interview. I told them they better hire that young lady and promote her over here, because she is good." Cause he listened to everything that I have done and the role that I was in and everything like that, but they picked somebody that they like and that they knew, knew their wife, and that guy is not doing good.

Maintaining Professional Image While Facing Marginalization

Narratives by research participants show that even when granted a position they are qualified for; they are not respected by those they are in charge of overseeing.

So the second experience I had actually left there and landed a leadership role position, and I received a lot of pushback from not just men in the workforce, but I also received a lot of pushback from other African American women. I received pushback from White women as well. And the pushback was because I was an African American woman who was in this role, and nobody else had ever been in this leadership ... No other African American woman or woman, period, had been in this leadership role. And so it was almost to the point where I dealt with a lot of adversity where I had to really, really dig deep, and I think that was a turning point for me in my professional career, learning how to deal with adversity under very difficult situations. And to this day I think about, you know, where did I get that strength from? It was just, it was such a difficult situation, but I had a young, White female in this job that I asked her to perform a duty to me in a diplomatic way. I wasn't raising my voice; I was talking to her just like I am talking to you

right now. She stood up over me, and she told me she wouldn't. She pointed her finger in my face, you know. And at that time, I was very young. I was young, and I do not know if I had the tools or was mature enough to handle the situation, but for some reason I handled it very appropriately. And I left there in tears that evening, because I was like, oh my God, I cannot believe that this just happened to me. And most importantly, I cannot believe how I professionally handled it. So I was actually crying out of happiness that I did not allow her to change the trajectory of my life because had I reacted in a manner in which Black women are already stereotyped as, then I wouldn't be where I am today. It would have literally changed the trajectory of my career. (Participant #3)

According to Participant 5,

I just want to leave by saying that there are challenges within the operation that I am in, and within the industry that I am, there are challenges. I cannot say that there is not by being an African American amongst a bunch of White men, and women, but mostly White men. But I always stay true to myself. I am always sure to stay fair, consistent, respectful about policy so that way I cannot be targeted for any reason. Because at times I already feel like I am a target, because I am an African American woman. Again, that could just be my feelings, but it does seem that way. But I always try to make sure that I stay consistent, and I stay fair, and I try my best to stay educated, and always better myself so there won't be any room or any way for you to say what I am not doing. I always have some type of leverage to say that I do not leave any room for you to pinpoint me.

Participant 7 stated,

African American women are sometimes labeled as the bottom of the barrel, we have to fight harder, we have to try harder, we have to do things a little bit different than anybody else, or not anybody else; or I would say brown women, have to, you know, go a little bit harder and do things a little bit different more so than anybody else. Sometimes I feel like we are looked at differently because of that. My appearance can be a good thing, it can be a bad thing, depending on where you are at, what position you are in, what career aspirations you are in, but I do feel like we are one of probably many ethnicities, races, backgrounds that have to consider all of that when applying for a job, when going in for an interview, when talking to a supervisor, when going into a different environment.

Summary

In this chapter, I presented the overall study and data analysis results with a total of seven participants. The results of this qualitative study provided answers for the central research question:

How do African American women middle managers narrate their daily experiences with stereotype threat, and what are the implications of these experiences for their engagement with leadership aspirations?

Based on the findings of this narrative inquiry study, a total of five conceptual categories used for coding and grounded in the conceptual framework and 18 reformulated themes gleaned from the critical events data analysis were identified, leading to in-depth, rich stories used as data to answer the central research question. The

conceptual categories were as follows: (a) specific types of stereotype threat, (b) impact of stereotype threat spillover, (c) disengagement from leadership and career aspirations, (d) stereotyping of Black women in the workplace, and (e) challenges facing Black women in management. The 18 themes are as follows: diminishing self-worth, diminishing work performance, using gender and racial bias to diminish career aspirations, minimal impact to career aspirations, daily stress to prove one's worth, internalized resentment of unfair work practices, identity shifting, minimal disengagement from career aspirations, persistence in working for leadership positions, resilience in the face of stereotype threats, the angry Black woman archetype, the aggressive Black woman, Black woman with a negative attitude, wage discrimination, punitive consequences for assertiveness, lack of fairness in promotion, feeling devalued as a professional, maintaining professional image while facing marginalization.

The issue of trustworthiness in narrative research is based on having reliable access to the participants' stories by adhering to a seminal methodologist's recommendation for data collection. I used the critical event approach for data analysis because of its inherent characteristics of openness and transparency in thoroughly emphasizing, highlighting, capturing, and describing events emerging from participants' stories of daily experiences. The issue of trustworthiness in my qualitative study was examined through the criteria of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

In Chapter 5, I further interpret the study findings in terms of how they compare and contrast to the literature presented in Chapter 2. I also describe how future scholarly

research can examine African American women middle managers' daily experiences with stereotype threat and the effect of these experiences on their engagement with leadership aspirations.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

The purpose of this qualitative, narrative inquiry is to gain a deeper understanding of African American women middle managers' daily experiences with stereotype threat and the effect of these experiences on their engagement with leadership aspirations.

Researchers use qualitative methods to explore real-world issues (Merriam & Grenier, 2019). Webster and Mertova (2007) paraphrased Jean-Paul Sartre:

People are always tellers of tales. They live surrounded by their stories and the stories of others; they see everything that happens to them through those stories.

And they try to live their lives as if they were recounting them. (p. 1)

This narrative inquiry research study documented through storytelling the daily work experiences of African American women middle managers with interface between their leadership aspiration and their exposure to stereotype threats. The narrative inquiry research method allowed me to collect data from long, in-depth conversations with the seven participants regarding their work experiences, and the complexity of human understanding and experience (Clandinin, 2013; Webster & Mertova, 2007).

This study is framed by two key concepts that focus on minority group members' workplace experiences with stereotype threat and the implications of these experiences for their engagement with leadership aspirations: Inzlicht and Kang's (2010) concept of stereotype threat spillover and Major et al.'s (1998) concept of psychological disengagement. A critical events analysis of seven participants' narratives revealed the following 18 prominent themes: diminishing self-worth, diminishing work performance, using gender and racial bias to diminish career aspirations, minimal impact to career

aspirations, daily stress to prove one's worth, internalized resentment of unfair work practices, identity shifting, minimal disengagement from career aspirations, persistence in working for leadership positions, resilience in the face of stereotype threats, the angry Black woman archetype, the aggressive Black woman, Black woman with a negative attitude, wage discrimination, punitive consequences for assertiveness, lack of fairness in promotion, feeling devalued as a professional, and maintaining professional image while facing marginalization.

Interpretation of Findings

Most findings in this narrative inquiry study confirm or extend existing knowledge, and each narrative presents issues confirming findings in the extant, reviewed literature in Chapter 2. During the critical events data analysis process, I observed no discrepant data contradicting the themes and theoretical suppositions presented within the conceptual framework or the extant scholarly literature. In this section, I present and review the findings by the five finalized conceptual categories from my study results study as emerging from the data analysis. In each subsection below, I compare my findings with seminal authors' postulates stated in the conceptual framework and from my critical review of the extant scholarly literature (Inzlicht and Kang, 2010; Major et al., 1998). I provide evidence of how the study findings confirm and possibly extend such existing knowledge from within the study areas of minority women, gender, diversity, stereotype threat, and inclusion within management in organizations. Extension studies such as my empirical investigation provide replication evidence and extend the results of previous studies in new theoretical directions (see Bonett, 2012).

Specific Types of Stereotype Threat

Stereotype threats were thoroughly explored through this study of African American women middle managers' experiences with stereotype threat and confirms the implications of their leadership aspirations (see Einarsdottir et al., 2018; Hekman et al., 2017; von Hipell et al., 2017). These research findings support and extend prior research by indicating specific types of stereotypes African American women middle managers face in their careers, which includes diminishing self-worth, diminishing work performance, and using gender and racial bias to diminish career aspirations. This empirical investigation advances the knowledge on the interface between stereotype threat and leadership disengagement among African American women managers, and also makes a contribution of original qualitative data to the study's conceptual framework.

Narratives throughout this research illustrated expectations of inferiority among these minority women in their business settings, further impeding their motivation or ambition (see Deemer et al., 2016). Decades of studies concluded that due to the stereotypes of Black intellectual inferiority, African American students do not excel, out of worry over reinforcing the stereotype, such as diminishing self-worth and work performance (Steele, 1997, 2007; Steele & Aronson, 1995). In some narratives, participants described how they would not speak up on topics they could add value to, out of these same fears. Members of traditionally privileged groups in America, such as White men, do experience instances of negative stereotypes, but the participants in this research experienced stereotype threat more often than any other groups of individuals

within their organizations. There were narratives of isolation and disconnection due to status as the only minority and being viewed as the least efficient, although the skills level and management position indicated otherwise. These are just a few of the coping strategies often used by individuals discouraged by stereotype threat, which lead to psychological disengagement (see Crocker et al., 1998; Major & Schmader, 1998; Nussbaum & Steele, 2007).

Impact of Stereotype Threat Spillover

Previous research confirms that gender bias has a significant impact on women's progression within corporate America (Gamble & Turner, 2015). This research presents some important themes illustrating that although there are impacts of stereotype threat spillover, those impacts are minimal in African American women middle managers' career aspirations. However, negative impacts do exist in other areas, such as daily stresses to prove one's worth, internalized resentment of unfair work practices, and identity shifting. Self-control is essential in any workplace setting, but when stereotype threat spillover is present, maintaining self-control can interfere with work performance and career goals (Kang & Inzlicht, 2014). This research further elaborated on how these negative stereotypes fueled participants' drive to pursue advanced education and entrepreneurial endeavors, or to go higher up in the management ladder. The circumstances and experiences of stereotype threat are certainly unfair, but the drive of the participants to continue in their careers in spite of the roadblocks is evident, as well as to ensure progression into better positions and circumstances. Their actions confirm

Inzlicht and Kang's (2010) concept of stereotype threat spillover in that the authors specify that it is the *coping* with threat, and not the threat itself.

My research extended prior research by elaborating on stereotype threat and double-minority status (Gonzales et al., 2002), in addition to culture-based stereotypes in the work setting (Hinton, 2017) and gender stereotyping of Black women at work (Sesko & Biernat, 2016). African American women managers must critically think of what they will say and do, even about the simplest tasks that seem commonplace to most individuals. Although those under stereotype threat can perform the same as those who are not, this research confirms the notion that individuals affected have more to prove, resulting in their having to work harder than those who are not subject to stereotype threat (Inzlicht & Kang, 2010). African American women in leadership positions must consciously prepare themselves in order to prevent solidification of stereotype threats. This means they feel the need to talk and dress a certain way, resulting in their inability to be themselves in the workplace settings out of fear of being stereotyped.

Disengagement From Leadership and Career Aspirations

Stereotype threat in organizations leads to employee disengagement, low job performance, diminishment of career aspirations, and lack of motivation to achieve success (Kalokerinos et al., 2014). This conceptual framework recognizes the concepts of stereotype threat spillover and psychological disengagement. While conducting this research, addressing the challenges faced by African American women middle managers allowed for a full understanding of the minimal career disengagement, persistence in working for leadership positions, and resilience in the face of stereotype threats. This

research confirms that African American women middle managers are aware of the stereotypes they face and use that awareness as a tool to prepare themselves and prevent them from being a casualty to a broken culture.

In order to prevent and eliminate stereotype threat occurrences in future workplace behaviors, diversity and cultural awareness are essential (Norman et al., 2013). The diminishment of self-views, skills, abilities, and performance is the result of disengagement, preventing the perception of self-worth on occasions of success or failure (Major et al., 1998; Steele, 2003). By not disengaging from their career aspirations, African American women middle managers are allowed the opportunity to further develop themselves and pave the way for awareness and understanding for future generations of minority women seeking a career in leadership. They know their experiences reflect unfair treatment, but in order for change to occur, these African American middle managers feel they have to endure hardships and less-than-satisfactory circumstances to become the change they would like to see. All of these factors lead to further diminishment of self-views, skills, abilities, and performance, preventing the perception of self-worth on occasions of success or failure (Major, et al., 1998; Steele, 2003).

Stereotyping of Black Women in the Workplace

The two best known stereotype associations confirmed throughout this research were the aggressive and angry Black woman archetype and the stereotype that African American women have negative attitudes. This analysis further aligns with previous research by confirming African American women are negatively stereotyped as being

angry and unaware (Allen & Lewis, 2016). In some narratives presented throughout this research, information was being communicated in the same way, but by people of a different race, and it was perceived negatively only when being communicated by African American women. Even in using the positive critical thinking skill of having a questioning attitude, when a question comes from an African American woman who happens to be a middle manager, it is perceived as a negative instead of a positive and is therefore not taken seriously.

Longitudinal research distinctly aligns stereotype threat and career aspirations and is helpful in comprehending the workplace challenges faced at all levels (Kalokerinos et al., 2014). In several of these narratives, the stereotype threats came from peers in management, in addition to subordinates, making it hard for African American women middle managers to perform at optimum capacity. In prior research, African American leaders in social justice gave their own accounts of rejections and career progression barriers, much like those illustrated throughout this research (Curtis, 2017). There is limited research in regard to middle managers, but this data is rich in narrative and exposes the barriers and bias African American women middle managers face in their career progression (Einarsdottir et al., 2018).

Challenges Facing Black Women in Management

In addition to stereotype threat, African American women face unforeseen challenges of prejudice, management style, and family responsibilities while progressing into leadership positions (Einarsdottir et al., 2018). Some challenges seen throughout this research are wage discrimination, punitive consequences for assertiveness, lack of

fairness in promotion, feeling devalued as a professional, and maintaining a professional image while facing marginalization. The many challenges are largely associated with the African American woman experiencing double marginalization as a result of being faced with racism and sexism in her pursuit of career success. This double marginalization is largely attributed to wage discrimination, being devalued, and lack of fairness in promotions. Some of the participants discussed being overlooked for jobs when a White woman received the job they had wanted, although that person had very little experience. Other narratives described being talked down to by a White counterpart with no negative consequences or repercussions for that individual. These African American women were expected to deal with whatever happened and make the best out of their current opportunities.

The narratives in this research illustrate the experiences African American women leaders face in their careers and barriers to their progression, and can empower those who are currently experiencing workplace and career challenges (Curtis, 2017). These narratives bring reality and truth to the concern, and an advanced awareness that will drive social change (von Hippel et al., 2017). The detailed understanding this research supplies, through lived experiences, of the challenges African American women face will help to understand minority women's progression into middle-management positions (Einarsdottir et al., 2018; Block et al., 2011). Coping with stereotype threat is a challenging task; even if individuals can sustain work performance goals, they are not invulnerable to the effects of the impending threat. One very positive aspect of the current research is the communication of coping strategies—these women never gave up.

They are maintaining their positive composure and are an integral part of the change that is needed, which will help the next generation of African American women pursuing leadership positions.

Limitations of the Study

Limitations are defined by the researcher and have the ability to affect the trustworthiness of a qualitative study (Hekman et al., 2017). One significant limitation to this study was the potential misrepresentation of events by participants, as with any interview-based study, because there is no systematic way to verify that the information provided by the participants is true. In an effort to help participants recall bias in relation to events and behaviors that occurred during their experience with stereotype threat, and to improve trustworthiness and credibility during the research study, a comfortable phone interview platform was selected. This platform allowed participants to remain open and honest, in their own environment, with the autonomy to reveal answers as they deem appropriate (Hanna, 2012). Each participant was open to the interview platform and was able to communicate detailed accounts of her experiences during the interview process.

The second limitation of the study lies in the narrative inquiry research method. My goal in using Clandinin's (2016) narrative inquiry approach was to interview seven African American women in middle-management positions and share their stories, but this method's limitation lies in the fact that individual stories may not represent a consistent narrative of African American women middle managers' daily experiences with stereotype threat and the effect of these experiences on their engagement with leadership aspirations. As the researcher, my interpretation of the information

communicated and the ability to follow along with the narrative was a significant factor in interpreting the data. The personal experiences of participants are essential, as they provide substance for an information-rich study while following narrative guidelines for establishing credibility of the coded narrative data (Syed & Nelson, 2015). As the researcher, my responsibility was to collect and interpret the data, while ensuring transferability in order to reach saturation. These efforts were performed and extended throughout the analysis of participant narratives and were solidified at the best level possible, in spite of the described limitations.

Recommendations

This research has offered insight into the leadership behaviors of African American women middle managers in relation to stereotype threat, and the implications for their leadership aspirations. Findings from this research showed that African American women middle managers face various forms of stereotype threat in their work progression and while maintaining leadership positions. Future research should encourage further investigation of African American women in leadership positions in order to create new possibilities for better work environments, and in which the multiplicity of their experiences are captured and circulated. This investigative study and the findings it yielded provide opportunities for both qualitative duplication and quantitative justification for future research.

Methodological Recommendation 1: Qualitative Duplication

My research data was compiled from various participant locations across the United States. There is the need to reproduce this narrative inquiry study in other specific

geographical locations because experiences of stereotype threat are likely to be different in various regions of the country, allowing for different perspectives on discrimination and equality (Curtis, 2017). Stereotype threat appears to affect diverse social groups in different ways, resulting in the need for further research on stereotype threat and its consequences in locations with greater socioeconomic diversity for stronger generalizability of study results (Pennington et al., 2016; Plante et al., 2019). This recommendation is supported by participants' referencing specific circumstances such as labels of stereotypes and gender-based challenges in their workplace settings. Several of the participants recounted types of wage discrimination and lack of promotional fairness in relation to counterparts of another gender and ethnicity while doing the same jobs in the same locations.

Particular circumstances of specific types of stereotype threats lead to the following three themes: (a) resilience in the face of stereotype threats (Participant #3 mentioned how a White chairman acted toward her in a board meeting—almost as if it were the 60s or 70s. His comments and gestures would have been more blatant and direct during that era, but the actions were still present, just not as openly displayed); (b) identity shifting (five of the seven participants mentioned having to act, talk, and handle situations in a certain manner that they would not have to do if stereotype threats did not exist; Participant #4 recounted having to “talk White” and use specific verbiage when being around certain employees because that is how the organization's culture is established); and (c) diminishing self-worth (Participant #7 explained how in the area she

works she has to wear her hair a particular way and always dress the part to ensure she is taken seriously and not looked down upon).

Supplementary investigations of narrative inquiry studies containing participants from other geographic locations will likely enhance the existing knowledge on the stereotype threats African American women in middle management are facing. Researchers could discover that African American women middle managers could attribute to the known stereotypes presented within this research. Their past and present experiences could attribute to the known stereotypes, various types of discrimination, and devalued career progression, while fostering questions from organization which will assist in their understanding and enacting internal changes to fix these behaviors. These are real-time experiences that require first-hand knowledge to understand and provide a resolution.

I believe it is important for future research to explore whether or not the negative outcomes associated with disengagement are particularly likely among current employees in certain business structures or entities (see Emerson & Murphy, 2015). Stereotype threat research needs to be extended to explore organizations that have a mission to retain their talent and help employees reach their potential, regardless of their race, sex, or nationality (Kalokerinos et al., 2014). Applying stereotype threat theory (Steele & Aronson, 1995) to workplace settings with managers from marginalized groups provides a theoretical understanding of how individuals experiencing stereotype threat may perceive that they have fewer options for pursuing leadership positions and thus may disengage from their career aspirations (Casad & Bryant, 2016). For example, Participant

#1 stated that she was the first African American woman to hold her current leadership position within her organization. Although she was first to hold the position, she had to express the interest before even being considered for the position. She further stated that she “literally had to write a memo expressing why I deserved another position or a specific position or a raise, anything to advance myself whether it was acknowledged by them verbally, I still had to express it to get it.” Also, Participant #6 had to seek a mentor and obtain buy-in from other people within the organization to advance any further in her career. Excelling in her current job tasks and taking on more was not enough to get her noticed by her management team.

Future research should also investigate why employees who are thriving in their current company decide to leave the organization or change careers completely. In many cases, employees leave the organization because the organization is not doing enough to promote their talents, even as they watch others around them get the promotion and recognition they feel they also deserve. An example of this is the story of Participant #4, in which a person of another race and gender was promoted ahead of her into a better position that offered more money, even though that person had the least amount of experience. The recommendation to challenge the stereotype threats African American women face is based on data on an organization’s structure and culture. For example, Participant 5 noted, “I would always ask questions for better understanding and for clarity, but it would always come across as being combative or argumentative, but that was never my intention.”

Methodological Recommendation 2: Quantitative Validation Through Mixed Methods

A quantitative research method such as a survey may provide additional insight into African American women middle managers' experiences with stereotype threat. Although several portions of my study provided highly detailed results that support the views of all the participants, the strength of their voices may change based on workplace settings and locations. Supporting research states that individuals within stereotype-threatening environments can still succeed; however, extra effort is essential to maintain work life and overcome stereotype biases, which can negatively impact other aspects of life (Casad & Bryant, 2016). A quantitative study may reveal inconsistencies and similarities not displayed through qualitative research and may generate recommendations for future studies (Cadaret et al., 2017).

Certainly, there is more than one approach to doing research, and although qualitative research dominates this field of study, quantitatively measuring stereotype threat has the ability to add value and validity to the exploration of stereotype threat (Gonzales et al., 2002). Stereotype issues are raised by methodologists in the study of women in management roles and based on similar data produced in this study, There issues are specifically related to the themes of managing stereotype threat spillover, racial and gender leadership, and disengagement from leadership. I would advocate that a quantitative methodology be part of a mixed methods study to offer an aspect of generalizability to results not attained with qualitative research designs currently used to study African American women middle managers' experiences with stereotype threat and the implications of their leadership aspirations. Qualitative research designs do have

limitations, but incorporating a constructivist/interpretive paradigm with any quantitative components from the positivist approach may shed further light on the absence of women in leadership positions, and aid in answering questions of denial of discourse among the stereotype threats of African American women middle managers (Hong, 2018; Nelson, 2013).

Recommendations for Future Research

Some themes originated from this study provide an opportunity for future research that will allow for a more contextual analysis of leadership practices related to African American women middle managers. The results could lead to additional exploration and understanding of stereotype threats African American women in middle management face, ultimately resulting in positive performance connections and promotions for all groups involved, as well as organizational successes. Based on the findings of this study, I have suggested pertinent recommendations for further research in three areas in particular, as they relate to the stereotyping of African American women in the workplace and the possible effects.

Stereotype threat in work–life conflict. An examination of work–life conflict is needed in future research in order to provide an intersectional examination of stereotype threat (Miller, 2019). Commonly, women place a higher importance on the topic of work–life balance, and the more positive their occupational environment, the better their balance (Kossek et al., 2017). Work–life may have a significant impact on whether or not African American women are willing to tolerate the stereotypical threats in the workplace, as it will likely trickle down into their personal dynamic. An employee’s

ability to acknowledge and adopt strategies that make the workplace environment more effective will likely have an impact on the decisions African American women middle managers make when progressing in their particular professions. As my study revealed, there is an issue with stereotype threat among African American women in leadership roles, and a work–family conflict analysis could reduce the potential of stereotyping among women as caregivers, which could further aid in mitigating stereotype threat (see Kalokerinos et al., 2014).

Consequences of stereotype threats. Further research on the consequences of stereotype threat to organizations is vital to a full understanding of why these study results are so important. Even with the rise of racial diversity in the workplace, African American women remain underrepresented in upper management and corporate leadership positions (Beckwith et al., 2016; Levchak, 2018). This underrepresentation leads to the failure of organizations to receive valuable subject matter experts and the loss of valuable career and leadership progressions (Holder et al., 2015). Diversity management in any organization or setting is a crucial part of making workplace growth accessible, fostering growth, and promoting understanding. My study has revealed the stereotype threats faced by African American women in middle-management roles, but it is equally important to evaluate how the consequences of not exploring and exposing such wrongdoing could affect the organizations who are micro-aggressively fostering these types of environments.

Gender diversification. Future research on the inclusion of gender diversification is highly encouraged, at the organizational and individual levels of management, and

should include cultivating inclusion (Atewologun & Mahalingam, 2018; Nishii, 2013). Some studies have suggested that gender diversity leads to increased value for stakeholders (Emerson & Murphy, 2015). If organizations were more diverse in gender, that would lessen some of the stereotypes faced by African American women. Although this group of women would still be considered a double minority, more women would be included, which would reduce the double minority spectrum. Holvino (2010) exposed the intersections of race and gender as a harmonized process to manage diversity in the workplace. Additionally, historical analyses can reveal the structural role that organizations play in the shaping of women's experiences and the role women play in evolving organizations.

Implications

Positive Social Change

An important finding from my study is that the experiences of African American women in middle management must be addressed, as there are serious impacts, such as stereotype threat spillover. Internalized resentment of unfair work practices is one aspect of this discrimination and is consistently significant in addressing inequity among African American women in leadership roles in various organizations. Many women resort to identity shifting in order to deal with the resentment of unfair work practices and the double standard they are held against. In light of this information, positive social change is necessary and offers a recommendation for practice and policy to cultivate a better work environment for this group of individuals. Also, researchers can give African

American women middle managers a voice, formulated from their distinct experiences with stereotype threat in U.S. based organizations, cultivating power and influence (Jean-Marie et al., 2009).

This study gave a sample of African American women in middle-management positions a voice to illustrate their experiences concerning stereotype threats in the workplace, an area that remains poorly documented (see Kalokerinos et al., 2014). Understanding the behavior modifications made by African American women in middle-management positions also contributes to social change by helping reduce stereotype threat experiences of disadvantaged groups across organizations. This research has the ability to become a catalyst for social change by exposing and bringing realization to stereotype threats faced in traditional work settings and across organizations, ultimately promoting diversity and equality.

Policy Implications

This study has critical implications for policymakers in that African American women middle managers feel there is currently little acknowledgment of the stereotype threats within their organizations. Instead, they observe organizations placing them in positions to meet a quota in order for the organization to look diverse. For example, Participant 5 stated, “Our company is big on diversity; sometimes it can come across as if you step into a position because you are an African American woman...there can be negative impacts of it, because I feel like I've been a recipient of it at times, like I may have gotten the role because there are no other African American women.” Diversity management, stereotype threat guidelines, and even organizational strategies to counter

microaggression are necessary to develop a connection between policymakers and scholars to develop organizational initiatives (Kossek & Buzzanell, 2018). It is important to note that any conversation pertaining to diversity and inequality is a delicate one, as emotions and personal views are often attached to the conversation. Offering policies and service solely for African American women may be done with good intentions and hope for positive outcomes, but it could unintentionally perpetuate further discrimination by peers and organizational leaders. Researchers note the limitations of studying women of color as a monolithic category and call for organizational scholars to consider the role of intersectionality in shaping workplace outcomes, including work–life balance issues (Rosette et al., 2019).

Institutional Implications

Recent work on the concept of stereotype threat spillover (Inzlicht et al., 2011; Whaley, 2017) suggests that stereotype threat may have a larger impact on organizational success than previously thought. Addressing it is essential to the overall organizational health, growth, and success, but transformation will not happen until the problem of stereotype threat is recognized and addressed (Inzlicht & Kang, 2010; Inzlicht et al., 2011). Although most organizations have strategies on how to meet social responsibility for diversity management requirements, there is still a gender gap when organizations and leaders initiate organizational talent pools, as various perceptions of stereotypical threat may exclude certain groups of individuals (Kinias and Sim, 2016). From a practical perspective, the results of studies on African American women leaders can also provide important information on how institutional environments affect women's

career progression and work–life balance, thus improving their lives overall and leading to organizational success and social development (Inzlicht et al., 2011, Inzlicht & Kang, 2010; Whaley, 2017).

Scholars recognize the importance of different approaches that African American women leaders need to take, and organizational or self-assigned mentoring is one of those strategies. Mentoring, that is, consulting with someone perceived to be like a role model, can help to reduce the effects of stereotype threat and gain career success (Stoker et al., 2011). The need for a greater understanding of the absence of African American women in leadership roles within U.S.-based organizations should encourage future researchers to uncover more data within this area.. My study sheds light on the leadership journeys of African American women who have maintained a middle-management role for at least 2 years, despite the stereotype threats they face within their organization. In order for organizations to remain ahead of competitors, positive developments are required; this same concept should also be applied to the advancement of diversity and cultural science (Clancy et al., 2017).

My findings clearly indicate that stereotype threat among African American women is present in the workplace, and they are using self-developed strategies to cope with the negative ramifications. African American women have adapted to and coped with oppression and discrimination for generations while maintaining various roles within corporate America (Holder et al., 2015). This research also shows minimal disengagement from career aspirations, likely because of their increased resilience and inner strength acquired while progressing. This should influence future generations of

women to come forward. Although policy and procedure efforts can be costly if implemented properly, promising outcomes for sustaining employee engagement are likely (Hoyt & Murphy, 2016).

Theoretical Implications

There is little scholarly research on African American women's experiences on the basis of intersection of race and gender (Lewis & Neville, 2015; Nkomo & Cox, 1996). Research on the inclusion of gender diversification at the organizational and individual levels of management is highly encouraged and should include cultivating inclusion (Atewologun & Mahalingam, 2018; Nishii, 2013). There is a gap in the literature on the experiences of this group of individuals, which needs to be filled with the understanding of how experiences of stereotype threat affect engagement with leadership aspirations for African American women (Block et al., 2011; Holder et al., 2015; Kenny & Briner, 2014; Sesko & Biernat, 2016). The findings of this study contribute original, qualitative data to its conceptual framework and are aimed at advancing understanding of African American women middle managers' experiences with stereotype threat within U.S.-based organizations. The African American women leaders can be a catalyst for change that is needed for women to advance in their careers, if organizations are willing to acknowledge and support those efforts.

My study confirms the importance of acknowledging African American women's experiences with stereotype threat and contexts needed for more multilevel analysis to grasp the complex relationships of microaggression, unfair work practices, and gender and racial bias throughout organizations. These are all vital to future theoretical

examinations to inform researchers, policymakers, and women looking to grow in, or into, leadership positions. Through experiential exploration into the lives of African American women and by filling in some gaps in the theoretical foundations of the conceptual framework, this study provides original, qualitative data to stereotype threat theory. This work may prove useful in future research that can expound and bring those limitations to the forefront, while further evolving individual and organization knowledge of unconscious biases and microaggressions (Curtis, 2017). African American women leaders must also be cautious when vocally expressing ways to help create a diverse and valuing environment, because some organizations see this approach as threatening and intimidating to the organizational structure (Hekman et al., 2017).

Recommendations for Practice

Findings from my research are informative for African American women in middle-management roles. The study shows that organizations need to locate and acknowledge stereotype threat and provide the necessary resources, such as mentoring, to successfully grow and diversify. African American women in middle-management positions must continue the efforts that helped them obtain their current position: advanced education, networking with others like them, or even taking on additional responsibilities to get themselves noticed. Maintaining a position in leadership requires constant evolution of oneself and staying abreast of the changes taking place within the organization.

To sustain longevity within their careers, women in leadership must focus on what they bring to the organization, how their unique skills and abilities will aid in

fostering growth and durability, and generate performance connections linking all groups of individuals collectively (Kossek et al., 2017). All of the women interviewed during this study started from the bottom and worked their way into their current positions. They knew they were capable of doing more and developed their skills to obtain their current leadership positions, yet they still need a network of individuals like themselves who they can relate to and from whom they can receive career guidance.

Based on my study results, African American women in middle-management positions need to learn how to acknowledge these threats as they occur and build a wealth of resources and people to help them overcome stereotype threats (see Nguyen & Ryan, 2008). Organizations need to promote and incentivize diversity activities, initiatives, and meetings to help African American women leaders diversify their networks, thus increasing awareness, sustainability, and growth (Norman et al., 2013).

Conclusions

Research exists in support of African American women's experience with stereotype threat, through stereotype threat spillover and psychological disengagement, but little has been done to document those individuals' social and daily experiences and the influences those experiences have on career progression and aspirations. In order to gain in-depth insight into, and holistic representation of, African American women's daily experiences with stereotype threat, such narrative inquiry study is necessary (Webster & Mertova, 2007). Scholars confirm that a deeper understanding of experiences of stereotype threat among African American women in leadership roles is needed (Einarsdottir et al., 2018; Hekman et al., 2017; von Hippel et al., 2017).

The findings within this empirical investigation on the interface between stereotype threat and leadership disengagement among African American women managers also contributes original qualitative data to the study's conceptual framework. Through the application of Inzlicht and Kang's (2010) concept of stereotype threat spillover and Major et al.'s (1998) concept of psychological disengagement, a theoretical contribution established to support further study regarding African American women's experiences with stereotype threat.

My study provides a theoretical and practical understanding of the types of stereotype threats African American women in middle-management positions face, in addition to the spillover these threats have on career challenges and aspirations (see Inzlicht & Kang, 2010). To increase positive social change for African American women in middle-management positions, their accounts of rejections and career progression barriers, by way of stereotype threats, must be explored and exposed (Curtis, 2017; Holvino, 2010). The qualitative, narrative approach used in the current study offered a stage for this marginalized social group to share their vulnerabilities and uncertainties. These narratives, through participant storytelling, bring reality and truth to the concern, and an advanced awareness that will drive the need for social change (see von Hippel et al., 2017). Through the analysis of participant narratives, the detailed accounts of stereotype threats bring to light real-life experiences and promote social change by providing policymakers information needed to promote social justice issues within the human resource management area and in the American workplace. Future research

should encourage unconventional interpretations of stereotype threat across groups of marginalized populations of individuals.

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