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## An Exploration of Women Experiences in Leadership Positions within African Immigrant Churches in the United States

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# Walden University

College of Social and Behavioral Sciences

This is to certify that the doctoral dissertation by

Abraham S. O. Wentum

has been found to be complete and satisfactory in all respects,  
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Walden University

2020

Abstract

An Exploration of Women Experiences in Leadership Positions within African  
Immigrant Churches in the United States

by

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MDiv, Eastern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1998

MA, Westminster Theological Seminary, 1994

BA, Andrews University, 1987

Proposal Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Industrial and Organizational Psychology

Walden University

February, 2020

## Abstract

Little research has been conducted to understand the experiences of the women in leadership positions in the African immigrant church in the United States. The purpose of the study was to explore the experiences of women in leadership positions in African immigrant churches in the United States to inform efforts toward enhancing representation of women in church leadership. The study used an interpretative phenomenological analysis research approach, guided by Bass and Riggio's transformational leadership theory. Data were collected through face-to-face interviews with 12 women in leadership positions in African immigrant churches. Thematic analysis was used to analyze data. Women leaders explained that the challenges they experience in reaching leadership positions include African values and expectations, gender-related challenges, challenges related to available resources, and doctrinal challenges. Some get support when performing leadership roles through training and mentoring. The personal factors that contribute to the success of women in their leadership role in the church include family relationships, prior experiences, determination, and motivation. The outcome of the study may serve to reduce stigma towards women in leadership position while empowering the proponents of inclusive leadership in African immigrant churches with information on policy changes and challenges that need to be addressed. The results also provide a better understanding of the challenges and the opportunities women leaders have in African immigrant churches and be used to guide debate on steps that need to be taken to encourage inclusive leadership.

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## Dedication

TO GOD BE THE GLORY FOR THE GREAT THINGS HE HAS DONE.

To begin with, I would like to thank God for His mercies and bountiful blessings upon me throughout this journey. To go forward, I would like to quote from George Shinn's book *The Miracle of Motivation*.

*“There is no such a thing as a self-made man. You will reach your goals only with the help of others”.*

I dedicate this dissertation to God, without Him, none of this would have been attainable. This study is dedicated to my family and friends who have supported me throughout the whole journey. I would like to thank my wife Irene who was my backbone and made sure that I got all what I needed to be successful. Also, to my children Thelma and Christian who were there for me when I needed help on the computer as I typed my assignments and dissertation. I also dedicate this discourse study my mother, the Late Madam Emilia A. Akogyeram.

Besides, words cannot express my sincere gratitude and how much I appreciated the encouragement, belief in me and prayer my uncle and his wife, the Late Mr. and Mrs. Nicolas A. Akogyeram showered on me. They took me as one of their Children and encouraged and supported me, I dedicate this masterpiece to them. In addition, I would like to dedicate this dissertation to my cousins who were like brothers and sisters to me who have been there for me throughout my academic journey. I am deeply grateful and special appreciation to the Late Dr, Esther A Akogyeram, Late Mr. Seth O Akogyeram, Late Mr. Isaac M Akogyeram, Late Mr. Theophilus A. Akogyeram, Dr. Clement O. Akogyeram. Dr.

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Finally, I dedicate this study to the Late Mr. C. C. Wentum and Late Mr. E. S. Wentum.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

### **Introduction**

Women in different organizations continue to experience barriers attaining a position at the top leadership level; at most they represent a small minority among corporate board directors and chief officers in many countries worldwide (Bark, Escartin, & van Dick, 2014; Nwabah & Heitner, 2009). Women experience underrepresentation in leadership positions in Church or religious organizations (Kausner, 2014; Kenaston, 2015). To develop a better understanding of the effect of diversifying gender in leadership especially in the church leadership, more research is needed about this topic (Djupe, 2014). Such research may enhance female inclusion in the church leadership by highlighting the full benefits of bringing women to leadership roles in the church. The topic of the study was the exploration of women in leadership positions in religious institutions, specifically, African immigrant churches in the United States. This study was particularly focused on African immigrant churches as research indicated there is an underrepresentation of women in the leadership of African immigrant churches (Mensaha, Williams, & Aryeee, 2013). Moreover, there is a paucity of existing research on African immigrant churches based in the United States (Foner & Alba, 2008; Hirschman, 2004).

Scholars have explored the role of women in religious institutions with the aim of understanding their leadership roles, and how the church members and the other church leaders perceive them (Kenaston, 2015; Sweeney, 2014). Female church leaders have received positive reception and appreciation among church members, including male

leaders (Dzubinski, 2015). Moreover, female leaders have been found to perform equally as compared to their male counterparts in terms of effective leadership skills (Ferrari, 2017). Furthermore, women participation in church activities and other religious events is greater than that of men (Robbins & Francis, 2014). Nevertheless, the findings by the previous researchers reveal that women remain underrepresented in leadership positions despite their higher participation and policy changes in churches (Dzubinski, 2015; Kenaston, 2015). Therefore, exploring the phenomenon of having women as leaders in religious institutions, especially in African immigrant churches, is important in order to understand the current underrepresentation of this gender in church leadership positions. In this manner, the findings of this study may be used to promote improved awareness of readers and future researchers about the topic, which would consequently inform efforts towards addressing the underrepresentation of women in church leadership.

### **Background**

Similar to many organizations, leadership in most churches is organized with a top-down authority structure, and churches have rules and procedures to govern the activity of leaders (Weems, 2010). Additionally, churches maintain records pertaining to their operations and finances, as do other organizations (Weems, 2010). Churches are not businesses, but church leaders must still first and foremost act to advance the church mission (Watt, 2014). They must also develop power and authority, manage organizational conflicts, and promote collaborative efforts between church members (Watt, 2014). In a larger sense, research suggests that men and women lead differently as well; for example, male leaders are more likely to display a challenging dimension of

transformational leadership, while women are more likely to display the enabling or rewarding dimension (Brandt & Laiho, 2013). In addition, research has shown that women leaders in fields such as microfinance—a mission-driven field not like church leadership—achieve better organizational outcomes as measured by firm success (Strøm, D’Espallier, & Mersland, 2014). Furthermore, a meta-analysis of organizational psychology literature suggests that, although men and women do not differ in terms of overall leadership effectiveness, women score significantly better in terms of leadership as evaluated by others as opposed to by themselves (Paustian-Underdahl, Walker, & Woehr, 2014). In churches, women also struggle in reaching leadership positions, despite higher representation in the overall membership of these institutions (Chinn, 2013; Dzubinski, 2015; Kenaston, 2015).

The understanding of the disproportional representation of women in church leadership should take into consideration the preferred qualities of a good church leader. It should be noted that evidence suggests that women leadership traits are actually well suited for church leadership (Coetzee-Van Rooy, 2014; Hewitt, 2014; Negrón et al., 2014). Apart from the requirements such as a deep sense of purpose in the ministry towards God, it has been observed that church leaders who have the ability to empower and mobilize people towards a common vision (Coetzee-Van Rooy, 2014), and those who have transformative effect on the lives of the members of the church (Jenssen & Birkeland, 2014) are better leaders. Shaw (2016) indicated that church leaders should possess the ability to inspire and motivate the followers towards achieving the church's mission. The women leaders in the church have been observed to have the ability to



empower and mobilize the church members (Brandt & Laiho, 2013), which then raises the concerns as to why there is an underrepresentation of women in the church leadership. In the specific context of church leadership, Djupe (2014) suggested that there are significant descriptive differences between male and female leadership in Protestant churches as a whole. In keeping with the general results on transformational leadership, Djupe found that female pastors create a “a slightly more inclusive and participatory culture that engages men and women about equally” (p. 551). Despite the discussed evidence on women leadership qualities, there is limited focus on women underrepresentation in leadership (Coetzee-Van Rooy, 2014; Hewitt, 2014; Negrón et al., 2014). More research is necessary to fully understand the potential effects of diversifying gender in leadership (Djupe, 2014; Drogus 2018; Newkirk & Cooper, 2013), and thereby understanding the full benefits of bringing women to leadership roles in the African immigrant church.

African immigrant churches are, as the name suggests, churches that were established by African immigrants in the United States (Adogame, 2013). The establishment of African immigrant churches had two major waves; the first followed the 16<sup>th</sup> to the 18<sup>th</sup> century trans-Atlantic slave trade, and the second referred to voluntary migration in the 1980s (McCabe, 2011). About 66.7 % of the African immigrants who took up residence in the United States came from the Eastern and Western Africa, especially from countries such as Nigeria, Ethiopia, Egypt, Ghana, and Kenya (McCabe, 2011). The churches were established as a result of the need among the immigrants to create a sense of belonging (Hirschman, 2004). The early African immigrant churches in

the United States also provided the immigrants with networks of mutual support that alleviated the challenges experienced, such as discrimination and isolation, and they helped them to adjust and settle in a new country (Foner & Alba, 2008). Some of the African immigrant churches also sprouted as an expression of the immigrants' historical identity (Hirschman, 2004). According to Handlin (1973), the immigrants established the churches as a means of connecting with their old world and keeping the faith of their homeland. The African immigrant church differs from the mainline church, as it includes the aspect of African culture in worship (Zepeda-Millán, 2014). They feature African songs, dancing, and even African languages in worship. In some cases, members can have unique dress codes (Ma et al., 2014). Some researchers have suggested that the underrepresentation of women in the leadership structure of the African immigrant churches is associated with the influence of the immigrant culture (Ademiluka, 2017; Weisenfeld & Newman, 2014). Most African communities assign men the position of power and authority while women are expected to assume a submissive position. This cultural background of most African communities has accounted for the lack of gender diversity in the African immigrant churches leadership in the United States (Weisenfeld & Newman, 2014). Smith (2015) and Ademiluka, (2017) also indicated that the discrimination and suffering experienced by the women are likely to act as an impediment to their participation in the church leadership. It should, however, be noted that the research by Ma, et al., (2014) and Weisenfeld and Newman (2014) did not provide sufficient evidence that links the influence of the culture on the gender diversity in the leadership structure of the African immigrant churches.

Evidence has also pointed the possible influence of religious teachings and doctrines on the women leadership in the African immigrant churches. According to Baxter (2016), the passages of the Bible, such as those in 1 Corinthians indicated that the husbands have authority over their wives. Baxter (2016) also noted that reduced participation of women in the church leadership is linked to the idea that the requirements to become a high-level leader in the church is for an individual to be a husband. However, the argument made by Baxter (2016) cannot adequately explain the underrepresentation of women in church leadership, because the researchers also provided counterevidence that showed the support for women inclusion in the church leadership. According to the Baxter (2016), the scriptures approve the participation of women as independent leaders in the church or as leaders who are under the supervision of the male leaders. Therefore, the theological argument also does not provide conclusive evidence on why women are underrepresented in the church leadership, which calls for further research into whether women view the biblical teaching as an impediment to their participation in the church activities.

When considering women's participation in the church leadership, it is important to assess the formal policies of the churches regarding women in leadership. According to Smith (2015), more than 50% of the churches have adopted policies that facilitate the participation of the women in church leadership. However, Kenaston (2015) noted that despite the significant changes in these policies, women in leadership positions are still significantly underrepresented. The inconsistency between practice and policy in the context of female leadership has been associated with the lack of adherence to the policies

(Smith, 2015). It is important for further studies to be carried out to determine the factors that lead to the inconsistency between practice and policy in the context of female leadership.

In the United States, there is a paucity of existing research on African immigrant churches, and therefore accurate figures are hard to find. However, as of 2014, the largest African immigrant church in the United States, the Nigeria-based Pentecostal Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG), reported having over 720 churches and over 15,000 members across the United States (Margolis, 2014). In a broader sense, the Pew Research Forum (2017) reported that historically Black churches make up roughly 6.7% of the U.S. Christian population, though it is hard to say how much of this population consists of immigrant churches. However, around 7% of the attendance of historically Black churches constitutes immigrants (Pew Research Forum, 2017), and immigrants often clash with the African American community (Hanciles, 2013), suggesting that these immigrants may be primarily in immigrant churches.

There is a gap in research about the struggles of women in reaching leadership positions, specifically in African immigrant churches. Women as leaders in churches have been found effective in promoting the fulfillment of objectives and missions of the religious institutions (Baxter, 2016; Dzubinski, 2015; Robbins & Francis, 2014). Therefore, there was a need to address this gap because of the significant role and active participation of women in religious activities, which makes women an important aspect to the growth and development of these churches (Robbins & Francis, 2014).

### **Problem Statement**

The general problem is that the women are underrepresented in church leadership (Mensah, et al., 2013). The gender ratio in all historically Black Protestant churches is 41% men to 59% women (Pew Research Forum, 2017). For African immigrant churches, women also have significantly higher numbers than men (Mensah et al., 2013). However, women constitute only about 16.6% of Protestant pastors (Djupe, 2014).

Cross-cultural conflicts about gender in leadership have negatively affected African immigrant churches (Madsen & Scribner, 2017; McNeely, Duncan, & Ree, 2017). It has caused women with vast leadership skills and theological knowledge to watch their male counterparts who may have little or no experience in running the affairs of the church take over leadership (McNeely et al., 2017). In general, the men do not like going to church; most male African immigrants spend their Sunday working, resting after work, at entertainment locales, visiting other community members (Mensah, et al., 2013). Women on the other end prefer meeting in the church to visiting friends (Robbins & Francis, 2014). Even with their high numbers in church attendance and generally higher activity in church-related areas, women are less represented in the leadership and wield less power than their male counterparts (Mensah et al., 2013). This is consistent with the general picture of Black churches, where women have long struggled with barriers to attaining meaningful leadership positions (Chinn, 2013), and general Pentecostal churches where women perceive only superficial or low-level leadership opportunities (Starr-Parker, 2012). The real power remains in the hands of men. Making this particularly relevant to the context of African immigrant churches, some immigrant

churches such as RCCG explicitly run programs like Women in Ministry that seek to promote women taking on a church leadership role (RCCG Women in Ministry, 2017).

Despite the observed underrepresentation of women in the leadership positions in the African immigrant churches, limited information is known regarding the women understanding regarding leadership (Mensah et al., 2013). Little as also been done to understand the experiences of women in leadership positions in the African immigrant church in the United States. There is also a gap in the literature regarding the women's perception about the factors and challenges that are associated with their success in obtaining leadership positions in the African immigrant church. The research into these factors will aid in developing a better understanding of the women in leadership in the African immigrant churches as viewed by the women themselves.

The specific problem is that women leadership in African immigrant churches has not been extensively explored, which may have impeded efforts towards enhanced representation in the church leadership (Mensah et al., 2013). As with general figures regarding African immigrant churches, overall statistics regarding the number of women in leadership positions for African churches are very difficult to find, but the RCCG Women in Ministry program alone represents a sample of over 70 prominent female leaders (RCCG Women in Ministry, 2017). Further research may allow a better understanding of this phenomenon, and thereby make known the advantages of female leadership in the church setting.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore the experiences of women in leadership positions in African immigrant churches in the United States to inform the efforts towards enhanced representation of women in church leadership. I aimed this study at understanding how women in leadership positions describe the factors that contributed to their success in obtaining leadership positions, what barriers or challenges they experience in their role, and how gender impacts their leadership roles (Sanchez-Hucles & Davis, 2010). I focused on the phenomenon of women in leadership positions in African immigrant churches in the United States.

### **Research Questions**

RQ1: What are the leadership experiences of women in leadership positions in the African immigrant church in the United States?

SQ1: How do women describe the factors that contributed to their success in obtaining leadership positions in the African immigrant church?

SQ2: How do women describe barriers or challenges in obtaining leadership positions in the African immigrant church?

SQ3: How do women describe gender related issues in obtaining leadership positions in the African immigrant church?

### **Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical framework that guided this study was Bass and Riggio's (2006) transformational leadership theory. Transformational leadership theory proposes that effective leaders go beyond the minimum to engage with and motivate their followers

and is usually characterized in four dimensions of idealized influence, inspirational motivation, individualized consideration, and intellectual stimulation (Bass & Riggio, 2006). That is to say, the transformational leader leads by (a) implementing as an idealized model for followers to emulate, (b) motivating them, (c) giving them individual consideration, and (d) challenging them with stimulating tasks. A more detailed discussion of this theory is presented in Chapter 2.

Transformational leadership theory originally arose from the study of successful, charismatic U.S. presidents, and thus it was not inherently a theory of gendered leadership. However, new values have emerged for leadership in the corporate context in the past several decades (Claes, 1999), and research carried out in response to this shift suggests that the transformational leadership style may actually align better with the characteristics of women leadership (Appelbaum, Karasek, Lapointe, & Quelch, 2015; Brandt & Edinger, 2015). Feminine characteristics, such as strong communication skills, ability to be a good listener, conflict resolution skills, and well-developed interpersonal skills are associated with being a transformational leader (Brandt & Edinger, 2015). These skills synergize well with the people-orientedness of the transformational leadership style. Therefore, transformational leadership theory aligns with the general topic of this study.

In the past, research on ecclesiastical leaders has suggested that transformational leadership is perceived better than other leadership styles in the church context and that women were more likely to display it than men (Druskat, 1994). More recently, Brandt and Laiho (2013) found that while male and female leaders may display roughly



equivalent degrees of transformational leadership, women regarded themselves and were perceived by subordinates as more enabling and rewarding than men. Transformational leadership on the part of church leaders can shape how the church interacts with the outside world, such as becoming involved in outreach programs (Allen, Attoh & Gong, 2017), and as the African immigrant churches are new and still developing, transformational leadership may help to shape their long-term development. As noted, men and women may display different styles of leadership (Kuchynková, 2015) and different dimensions of transformational leadership (Brandt & Laiho, 2013). Indeed, transformational leadership style may be more suitable for women than for men (Appelbaum et al., 2015; Brandt & Edinger, 2015). Therefore, transformational leadership is both important in the church context and relevant to understanding gender differences in leadership, making it a theory well suited to this study.

### **Nature of the Study**

To address the purpose of the study, I implemented an Interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) research approach. The use of the IPA approach allowed me to examine a phenomenon holistically within its native context (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). The IPA facilitated an understanding of the women in leadership positions by uncovering knowledge and meaning based on the experiences and the perspectives of the participants (Smith, 2004).

Based on the IPA approach, I collected the data from the selected respondents using the face-to-face interviews. I used an interview guide with open-ended (semistructured) questions that nudged the respondents to give in-depth accounts of the

lived experiences and how they interpreted such experiences (Attia & Edge, 2017). The process of data analysis involved listening to the recorded interviews, reading of the transcribed interviews, and the development of themes and subthemes (Braun et al., 2014).

### **Definitions**

*African immigrant churches:* African immigrant churches are churches that African immigrants in other nations have established (Adogame, 2013). The African immigrant church differs from the mainline church as it includes aspects of African culture, such as African songs and dancing, in worship (Ma et al., 2014).

*Feminine leadership:* Feminine leadership involves traits that are communal and include a demonstration of caring, nurturance, compassion, and emotional expressiveness (Brandt & Edinger, 2015).

*Leadership positions:* Leadership positions are not necessarily easy to define. However, for the context of this study, the leadership positions listed by the RCCG Women in Ministry (2017) program were used as a guideline. This is because they represent an insider notion of what constitutes church leadership positions. The roles included in this organization are: female parish pastors, female zonal coordinators, zonal coordinators' wives, female providential pastors, providential pastors' wives, regional pastors' wives, and Women in Ministry executives.

*Women leadership:* Women leadership refers to having female leaders within an organization (Kochan, Spencer, & Mathews, 2000). In the religious sector, women

leadership usually refers to having a female pastor or female ministry head (Ferguson, 2018).

### **Assumptions**

Assumptions refer to aspects of the study that are believed to be true but cannot be demonstrated as such (Marshall & Rossman, 2014). The first assumption for this study was that women leaders who participated provided honest and complete responses to the questions asked of them during the interview. This assumption has to be made because I cannot know, with complete certainty, the intention and preferences of the participants in terms of the answers they willingly provided. Nevertheless, I reminded each participant to provide answers that were complete and were as close to the true events as possible. The second assumption was that the women leaders participating in this study were capable of recalling all information and experience in adequate detail. Nevertheless, I included a criterion for eligibility that the participant must have recently (in the past 12 months) obtained a leadership position in an African immigrant church.

### **Scope and Delimitations**

The scope and delimitation of a study refer to specifications that set the boundaries to be covered (Marshall & Rossman, 2014). This study only focused on the population of women leaders in African immigrant churches. This population is aligned with the problem, purpose, and research questions of the study. Therefore, no other populations or groups of individuals were recruited for this study. Moreover, the study only focused on the phenomenon of having women as leaders in religious institutions, especially in African immigrant churches. This phenomenon is directly aligned with the

purpose and research questions of the study. No other phenomena were explored in this study. To address transferability, I provided details and comprehensive discussion of results, findings, and implications of the study to help future researchers and readers easily assess the applicability of the findings to another population.

### **Limitations**

Limitations refer to inherent weaknesses of the study that I could not eliminate completely (Marshall & Rossman, 2014). However, when left unaddressed, limitations may have significant and unwanted implications to the findings of the study. The first limitation of the study was the small sample size and a specific population. Nevertheless, the chosen population was aligned with the problem of the study. The findings of the study cannot be generalized because of the limited sample size. Therefore, I provided a comprehensive discussion of the study findings to allow future researchers to replicate the study or assess the similarity or difference of the current findings to other settings. Another limitation was that the study was likely affected by the natural biases that I had based on my experiences, preferences, and beliefs that are related to the topic of the study. My personal biases may have potentially influenced the results of the study. To minimize the influence of personal biases, I performed bracketing (Sorsa, Kiikkala, & Åstedt-Kurki, 2015). In this manner, I was aware of any personal preferences when conducting data collection and analysis for the study.

### **Significance**

The study casts light on how women in leadership positions influence African immigrant churches. Churches may not be businesses, but they are still ultimately

organizations with a top-down organizational structure that depends heavily on good leadership (Watt, 2014). To be successful, church leaders must advance the church's mission, manage conflicts amongst their followers, cultivate power and authority, and encourage follower cooperation (Watt, 2014). Though in the church context, serving spiritual ends rather than economic ones, there are many of the same attributes of a leader required as in any business or other top-down organizational structure. Therefore, a better understanding of the role of female leaders in churches contributes to the broader understanding of organizational structure and leadership in the field of industrial and organizational psychology.

Many positive outcomes have been identified when women accessed leadership positions. Scholars such as Klatt, Eimler, and Krämer (2016) have argued that women leaders are likely to be great team leaders with significant problem solving and decision-making skills. Allowing women to participate in the church leadership ensures equity and good direction as they involve other members in the smooth running of the church. This is especially true because men and women have different leadership approaches (Kuchynková, 2015). For example, research suggests that men and women are more likely to successfully leverage different dimensions of transformational leadership (Brandt & Laiho, 2013). In the specific church context, there are also descriptive differences in the ways men and women lead (Djupe, 2014). Therefore, if both men and women work together to lead the church, a broader range of outcomes related to organizational success can be achieved.

Additionally, from a social perspective, it can be argued that women should be in the leadership positions of African immigrant churches by simple virtue of being a majority of churchgoers (Mensah et al., 2013; Pew Research Forum, 2017). In spite of this, church leadership remains primarily male. One reason that women may struggle to find leadership positions in many religious sects is due to tradition or bylaws (O'Malley, 2015). For example, in the Catholic Church, the Pope must be male (O'Malley, 2015). Bishops or priests are expected to lead mass while nuns take part in minor activities to assist in the success of the mass (Kupke, 2015). However, looking at the operations of the African immigrant churches in America, there is no similar written structure barring women from leading the church. Indeed, even in African immigrant churches that remain male-dominated in terms of power, such as the Ghanaian immigrant church in Canada, there is some degree of gender power convergence underway, and some immigrant churches explicitly try to foster women in leadership (Mensah et al., 2013). Therefore, African immigrant churches represent a relatively unique window to explore how gender integration in leadership develops in a church setting. This exploration has the potential to expand our understanding of women leaders in the church context from an organizational perspective.

This study provides insights that help in understanding and addressing the challenges that are faced by the women in leadership in the African immigrant churches. By the assessing the experiences of women in leadership positions, the study provides an understanding of what women view as the factors that contributed to their success in obtaining leadership positions. Such information is important in guiding the women who

aspire to be leaders in the African immigrant churches on how to succeed. Success in leadership is important to women in leadership positions in the churches and especially the African immigrant churches where failure may be viewed through the lenses of gender and culture, which characterize women as being weak and not fit to lead (Ma et al.,2014; Smith, 2015). The assessment of the experiences of women in leadership also gives insights into the barriers or challenges in obtaining leadership positions in the African immigrant church. The understanding of the barriers that are associated with the engagement of women in the church leadership is not only important to the women who intend to be church leaders but is also important to other stakeholders who advocate for women inclusion in the church leadership. By providing an understanding of how women describe gender related issues in obtaining leadership positions within the African immigrant church, the study helps shape the contemporary understanding of how the perception of women influence the engagement in church leadership.

### **Summary**

Women still experience barriers to attaining leadership levels in different organizations worldwide (Bark et al., 2014). The topic of this study was the role of women in leadership in African immigrant churches in the United States. In this chapter, the problem, which was the core of the study was established. The specific problem is that role of women leadership in African immigrant churches has not been extensively explored. To address the problem, the purpose of the study was to explore the experiences of women in leadership positions within African immigrant churches in the United States. The theoretical framework guiding this study was Bass and Riggio's

(2006) transformational leadership theory. I implemented an IPA design to address the problem and fulfill the purpose of the study. In Chapter 2, I provide a detailed review of relevant literature to establish the gap in the literature and explain the problem of the study.



## Chapter 2: Literature Review

### **Introduction**

There are significant descriptive differences between male and female leadership in Protestant churches as a whole (Djupe, 2014), but more research is necessary to fully understand the potential effects of diversifying gender in leadership (Newkirk & Cooper, 2013; Djupe, 2014; Drogus 2018) and thereby being the full benefits of women to leadership roles to the African immigrant church. African immigrant churches are churches established by African immigrants in other nations (Adogame, 2013). There is a paucity of existing research on these churches and there is little information on women leadership experiences in African immigrant churches.

The purpose of this phenomenological study is to explore the experiences of women in leadership positions in African immigrant churches, with the goal of understanding how they describe the factors that contributed to their success in obtaining leadership positions, what barriers or challenges they experience in their role, and how gender intertwines with their leadership roles.

This chapter consists of a review of literature relevant to the research problem and the identified research phenomenon. The topics that are covered in the literature review include African churches, immigrants, African immigrant churches, leadership, leadership in the church, and female leadership. The goal of the literature review was to provide a comprehensive understanding of the research phenomenon that highlights the rationale for conducting the research. This chapter includes the theoretical framework of the study. The theoretical framework guiding this study was Bass's transformational

leadership theory (Bass & Riggio, 2005). In the second section, I present a review of literature on themes covering the research phenomenon, consisting of four subsections, namely, an overview of churches and immigrants, leadership in church, women, and leadership, and women leadership in churches. The review of literature conclude with a summary of the highlights and the research gap emerging from the review.

### **Literature Search Strategy**

I consulted the following research databases in order to search for the studies used in the literature review: Google Scholar, PubMed, Educational Resource Information Center (ERIC), JSTOR, Science Direct, and Taylor and Francis. The key terms used to search for the relevant literature on the research phenomenon and the theoretical framework in these databases were the following: *transformational leadership theory, African churches and immigrants, history of African immigrant churches, leadership in church, women, and leadership, and women leadership in African immigrant churches*. These search terms represented, on their own and in conjunction with other terms, the main components of the theoretical framework, research problem, and research phenomenon for the study. As such, the use of these terms gave access to relevant literature for the review. The literature included in the review consisted of research published in the last 5 years in order to ensure the inclusion of the most recent literature developments. Additionally, some older studies were also included in order to accommodate the historical aspects of the topics.

## **Theoretical Framework**

### **Transformational Theory and its Assumptions**

The theoretical framework of this study was Bass's transformational leadership theory (Bass & Riggio, 2006). The transformational leadership theory was first developed by Burns (1978) with the assumption that transformational leaders focus on the values of their followers and assisted their followers to create a balance between their values and the values of the organization, creating a harmony in the values between the followers and the leader. Transformational leadership theory originally arose from the study of successful, charismatic U.S. presidents, and thus it was not inherently a theory of gendered leadership. However, new values have emerged for leadership in the corporate context in the past several decades (Claes, 1999), and research carried out in response to this shift suggests that the transformational leadership style may actually align better with the characteristics of women leadership (Appelbaum, Audet, & Miller, 2003). This is because characteristics that have been described as feminine, such as "heightened communication skills (especially the ability to be a good listener and to be empathetic); advanced intermediary skills (for negotiation and conflict resolution); well-developed interpersonal skills and a soft approach to handling people" (Appelbaum et al., 2003, p. 48). These skills synergize well with the people-orientedness of the transformational leadership style.

The transformational theory is based on the assumption that the transformation process is positive, involves a process, is characterized by disconnectedness, and is based on an individual's perceptions and awareness (Effelsberg, Solga, & Gurt 2013). The

theoretical developments of Burns were expanded upon by Bass (1985), who introduced an updated transformational leadership theory. Bass's transformational leadership theory is based on four components, intellectual stimulation, motivation, personalized consideration, and idealized influence. Bass's theory described the specific association between the followers and the leader that explained the achievements and performance of the followers towards the success of an organization. Additionally, Bass stated that transformational leaders have the ability to inspire their followers to follow the long-term growth of the organization, rather than simply influence the followers during daily interactions. According to Bass (1985), the transformational leadership theory is centered on the assumption that the strategies for both transactional and transformational leadership could be considered as leadership patterns that are used by all leaders but in different degrees.

Transformational leadership theory is also based on the idea that effective leaders go beyond the minimum to engage with and motivate their followers, and it is usually characterized in four dimensions of idealized influence, inspirational motivation, individualized consideration, and intellectual stimulation (Bass & Riggio, 2005). That is, the transformational leader leads by acting as an idealized model for followers to emulate, motivating them, giving them individual consideration, and challenging them with stimulating tasks (Breevaart et al., 2013). In Bass's transformational leadership theory, intellectual stimulation refers to the leader's ability to help followers view problems in new ways and provide creative solutions (Muenjohn & Armstrong, 2015). Transformational leaders encourage followers to think beyond the present conditions to

reach organizational goals and provide effective performance in the absence of leaders (van Dierendonck, Stam, Boersma, de Windt, & Alkema, 2014). In terms of motivation, transformational leaders are able to describe the mission of the organization to the followers in a simple and clear manner that leads to the comprehension and consequent acceptance of the values by the followers (McCleskey, 2014). Personalized consideration refers to the ability of transformative leaders to show concern and care towards each follower as an individual (Tyssen, Wald, & Spieth, 2014).

### **Prior Application of Transformation Theory**

Transformational leadership theory has been used by various researchers to understand aspects relating to church leadership. In the past, research on ecclesiastical leaders has suggested that transformational leadership is perceived better than other leadership styles in the church context and that women were more likely to display it than men (Druskat, 1994). More recently, Brandt and Laiho (2013) found that while male and female leaders may display roughly equivalent degrees of transformational leadership, women regarded themselves and were perceived by subordinates as more enabling and rewarding than men. Transformational leadership on the part of church leaders can shape how the church interacts with the outside world, such as becoming involved in outreach programs (Allen, 2017), and as the African immigrant churches are new and still developing, transformational leadership may help to shape their long-term development.

The transformational leadership theory has also been used previously by McCleskey (2014) to understand leadership development while Moriano, Molero, Topa, and Lévy Mangin (2011) researched the influence of transformational leadership and

organizational identification on intrapreneurship, which is a characteristic of an empowered employee. According to Ghasabeh, Soosay, and Reaiche (2015), transformational leaders focus on the values and beliefs of the followers, which causes followers in an organization to move beyond their own interest and work for the good of the whole organization. Transformational leaders seek to enhance the communication between followers and leaders that also results in a change from personal interest to the interest of the whole group in the decision-making process. Evidence suggests that transformational leaders are associated with higher success rates compared to transactional leaders (Bass, 1985). Muenjohn and Armstrong (2015) have also studied how culture influences transformational leadership. The study by Muenjohn and Armstrong (2015) informed the understanding of the dynamics that influence women leadership and how the changes in cultural influence on immigrant churches impact women church leaders. Qu, Janssen, and Shi (2015) also assessed the influence of transformational leadership on follower creativity. The researchers emphasized the transformational leader's ability to encourage and inspire followers to reach higher productivity and professional development based on strategies that are inspirational, which foster independent thinking and autonomy among the followers.

Avolio and Bass (2004) presented a leadership continuum by expanding the transformational leadership model. The researchers noted that leadership continuum ranges from laissez-faire leadership, on the one extreme, to transformational leadership on another, on the basis of the requirements of the leadership characteristics (McCleskey, 2014). The hands-off approach of laissez-faire leadership refers to leadership in which

decision-making process is avoided, leadership is non-existent, and employees do not receive sufficient support (Effelsberg et al., 2013). This is the least successful form of leadership that negatively influences the leadership through increasing stress, role conflict, and lack of job satisfaction. In this form of leadership, leaders do not provide direct responses to the mistakes of the followers (McCleskey, 2014). In contrast, higher consideration for the followers, which is a characteristic of transformational leadership, has been found to be associated with work satisfaction. Between laissez-faire leadership and transformational leadership is transactional leadership. Burns (1978) introduced the concept of a transactional leader by noting that a transactional leader is characterized by management, rather than leadership. The transactional leader focuses on assigning the tasks and goals to the employees, and communicating with the followers only when there is dissatisfaction in the way the employee has completed the work (Bottomley, Mostafa, Gould-Williams, & León-Cázares, 2015). In this form of leadership, employees feel motivated by expecting a reward when they do a proper job. The beneficial characteristics of transactional leaders include their ability to establish structure and purpose in the working environment; however, transactional leaders may be less able to successfully provide innovative solutions or implement changes (Dinh, Lord, Gardner, Meuser, Liden, & Hu, 2014). In the absence of expected rewards not being met, the leadership strategy does not succeed. Research suggests transactional leadership, unlike transformational leadership, does not focus on inspiration, motivation, and personalization (Boehm, Dwertmann, Bruch, & Shamir, 2015).

### **The Relevance of the Transformation Theory to the Current Study**

The theory is used to understand how women in leadership positions within African immigrant churches interpret the transformation to leadership and their gender and cultural experiences (Martin, 2015). The theory also provides the basis upon which general leadership transformation experiences and the associated challenges can be understood. As noted, men and women may display different styles of leadership (Kuchynková, 2015) and different dimensions of transformational leadership (Brandt & Laiho, 2013). Indeed, transformational leadership style may be more suitable for women than for men (Applebaum et al., 2003). Therefore, transformational leadership is both important in the church context and relevant to understanding gender differences in leadership, making it a theory well suited to this study.

The use of transformational leadership theory to form the theoretical framework for the research is based on the fact that in transformational leadership theory, there is an emphasis on the inclusion and behavior of the follower, built upon the belief that people are not born, but become, leaders (Effelsberg et al., 2013). The adoption of the transformational theory in this study is also based on the understanding that the transformational leadership strategies are predominant when the intention of the leader is to inspire or motivate followers (McCleskey, 2014). Further, the nature of the relationship that followers have with their transformational leaders is characterized by comfort. However, the relationship between the followers and their leaders in transactional leadership is characterized by fear (Birasnav, 2014). Zhang and Bartol (2010) noted that empowered employees empower others in the organization through



their focus and energy, which results in great productivity and performance. Researchers have noted that the applicability of transformational leadership differs on the basis of the context; however, in general, transformational leadership is beneficial for the effectiveness of the leader, team efficacy, and team cohesion. Transformational leadership is also important as a tool for increasing the motivation of the followers towards the goals of the organization (Northouse, 2015). The fact that the transformational leadership is based on empowering and inspiring the follower to achieve the greater good for the organization is important to the study of women's involvement in leadership in an environment that is undergoing changes in view towards the position of women in leadership (van Dierendonck et al., 2014).

The nature of churches such as those founded by minority immigrants is characterized by the need to empower and motivate the members. The transformational leadership theory is therefore more appropriate for this research since it focuses on the experiences of women in leadership positions within the African immigrant churches. The study aims at understanding how the women describe the factors that contribute to their success in obtaining leadership positions and the barriers or challenges they experience in their leadership role. The study also assesses how gender intertwines with their leadership roles.

## **Review of the Literature**

### **Overview of Churches and Immigrants**

**Evolution of the immigrant churches.** The research on the religious institutions formed by immigrants has been conducted mostly in the field of sociology.

Early researchers focused on the participation of immigrants in church and the religious practices and institutions they brought with them to the host country (Chiswick & Miller, 2014). Researchers were motivated by the special place of the church in the lives of immigrants, which was based on the observation of welfare systems developed by religious congregations for Jewish, Irish, and Italian immigrants' needs (Asamoah-Gyadu, 2015). Additionally, the increasing immigration of individuals from different religious denominations also resulted in the higher relevance in the sociology of religious identity (Eppsteiner & Hagan, 2016). A model of African immigrant initiated churches, as presented by Aderibigbe (2015), provided a framework on the characteristics of immigrant founded churches in the context of African immigrants. The author noted the long history of research on immigration and religion, based on the transnational movements associated with religions such as Christianity. However, the majority of the researchers who dealt with the two topics of religion and immigrant considered them separately and exclusively. The phenomenon has been covered under the concept of transnationalism, which includes economic and sociopolitical dimensions in which religion is an important aspect of activities across nations, where immigrants create and maintain their religious identities and practices in new countries.

The interest on the role of religious institutions and religion in the life of immigrants among scholars changed after mid-1960s due to the changes introduced in the United States immigration, and scholars began to focus on the diversity in the society resulting from immigration (Chiswick & Miller, 2014). Although the focus increased towards other issues, such as labor participation of immigrants, gender relations, social

networks, and immigrant demographic characteristics, the significance of religion in the life of immigrants did not reduce (Danielson, 2015). Studies conducted during the mid-1960s suggest that the role of religion was still prominent in the life of immigrants (Adogame, 2016). Research trends suggest little variation from the common themes in the literature on the topic, which revolve around the question on whether religion facilitated or hindered assimilation of immigrants in society (Frederiks, 2015; Mellis & Schreck, 2016).

**The role of ethnic identity in immigrant churches.** Some studies suggest that immigrants had cut ties with their past, while other studies suggested that ethnic institutions assisted immigrants to retain their ethnic identity in the new country (Adogame, 2016). Research conducted in sociology has established the interrelations between ethnicity and religion in terms of functions (Vincett, Olson, & Adogame, 2014). In the past, researchers considered the disciplines of religious studies and ethnic studies in separate, exclusive terms, with almost no focus directed towards understanding the interrelations between the two (Janzen, Stobbe, Chapman, & Watson, 2016). As a result, there is a lack of clear understanding of the development and nature of this interrelation. Some researchers in the past considered ethnicity and religion as different aspects, with more emphasis placed on religious identities of the immigrants than their ethnic attributes (Winkler, Fernández, & Leirvik, 2016). However, research conducted subsequently revealed that for immigrants, the ethnic identity was never fully replaced with religious identity (Janzen et al., 2016). This insight is also supported by the observation that ethnic

origins were one of the major reasons for the development and establishment of specific churches, such as African immigrant churches (Tsang, 2014).

The religion serves as the expression of differences in ethnicity, and religious organizations serve the functions of both ethnic assimilation and ethnic reproduction (Vincett et al., 2014). Although ethnic groups adapt to the context of their new countries, immigrants also differ in terms of how they integrate and emphasize their ethnic and religious identities (Ehrkamp, Nagel, & Cottrell, 2014). Some religious communities of immigrants emphasize the religious identity of their members over ethnic identity; on the contrary, other religious communities emphasize the ethnic identity of their members and function religious communities to preserve ethnic boundaries and cultural traditions (John, 2016). Analysis conducted by researchers show that an important aspect of understanding the strategies on ethnic and religious identities is the status of individuals as minority or majority in the host countries (Chiswick & Miller, 2014).

Scholars have also highlighted the role of religion in the creation and continuation of different ethnic groups (Agyekum & Newbold, 2016). Ethnic grouping, for instance, has been found to be established at times on the basis of the identification of the immigrants with specific religious traditions rather than other ethnic factors such as nationality and language (Adogame, 2016). In the United States, traditional religious loyalty, customs, and beliefs were found to be the decisive factors in determining ethnic affiliation (Adogame, 2016). The aspect of religion in the formation of ethnicity is assisted by the peculiar experience faced by immigrants (Danielson & Vega, 2014).

Experiences such as continuous resettlement and uprooting result in the increased feeling of religious commitment experienced by immigrants (Zepeda-Millán, 2014).

Researchers have highlighted the intimate mutual relationship between religion and ethnicity in the analysis by suggesting the inseparable relationship between Irish nationalism and Catholicism in the United States (Chiswick & Miller, 2014). The feelings associated with religion and ethnicity have been considered as mutually reinforcing and primitive (Makoni, 2018). As a result, scholars suggested the importance of considering ethnicity and religion in terms of their interrelations, rather than as separate concepts, as ethnicity has significant religious aspects and religion serves an important ethnic purpose (Snyder, 2016; Vincett et al., 2014). Studies support the assertion that ethnicity and religion are closely associated with, and support, each other (John, 2016).

The relationship between ethnicity and religion can be considered in various ways. Some people who have ethnic identity do not have a religious identity, some are religious but do not consider ethnic affiliation as an important part of their life and religious discourse, while some consider their ethnicity and religion to be interconnected (Winkler et al., 2016). Additionally, the last relationship between ethnicity and religion can be further divided into cases in which ethnicity is founded upon religion and cases in which religion and ethnicity are the same (Vincett et al., 2014; Zepeda-Millán, 2014).

The question of ethnicity and religion in the context of immigrants is also affected by the events that take place in both their country of origin and their hosting countries (Garcia-Muñoz & Neuman, 2013). Research suggests that individuals who immigrate to other countries maintain links with their country of origin even after multiple generations

while also assimilating in their host countries (Lee, 2015). In this context, immigrant churches have always been an important factor connecting the two communities (Tsang, 2014). Specifically, the Catholic church has played a significant role in understanding the importance of increasing such connection. In general, the existing literature gives access to findings that largely involve European immigrants and the role of the church in connecting their communities of origin with the communities in the host countries (Chiswick & Miller, 2014; Danielson, 2015). Outside of Christianity, researchers have also focused on the role of Buddhist religious institutions in connecting immigrants with the communities of their origin country. The fact the immigrant churches understands the origin of the immigrants endear them to such churches.

**Immigrant churches and migrant empowerment.** Researchers found differences in religion to be central in the ways in which early immigrants organized their lives (Adogame, 2016). For immigrants, participation in religious activities is not only a form of expression of individual affiliation but also a way to connect with the communities made up of people with similar origins (Janzen et al., 2016). Churches provide immigrants with a way to participate in religious activities and continue an active participation that develops and forms immigrant communities (Abo-Zena & Barry, 2013). Some researchers also maintain that in the modern age, religious organizations and communities have become a major tool for the development of immigrant civil societies (Carroll & Daniel, 2014).

Churches that are built by immigrants are peculiar in terms of their focus on the assimilation of immigrants and are likely to be, on a local level, multicultural (Asamoah-

Gyadu, 2015). As a result, they are likely to develop strategies directed towards the goal of unifying the members on the basis of an identity that unites all members while downplaying specific interests on the basis of their countries of origin (Vincett et al., 2014). Researchers have noted that since many immigrants who participate in churches that downplay specific national dimensions do nevertheless maintain links to their countries of origin, creating a balance may create challenges to the leaders of such churches (Frederiks, 2015; Mellis & Schreck, 2016). The challenge exists where the leaders desire to foster church unit at the expense of the peculiar interests associated with the individuals' links to their countries of origin. Leaders often resolve such challenges by promoting a purpose that transcends beyond countries through the goals and ideologies of the church (Winkler et al., 2016).

Research conducted on both small and large religious institutions as links between communities includes the activism of religious institutions in relation to fields such as human rights, enterprise, fund-raising, lobbying, and media. In this case, immigrants are presented with the opportunity to form important links via churches (Chiswick & Miller, 2014). Churches built by immigrants also play an important role in providing help during the crisis to the country of origin by gathering support from the immigrants in host countries and sending the help to the country of origin (Adogame, 2016). Although such results present a significant body of literature on the role of churches in the lives of immigrants, the focus on the importance of religious institutions as links between different cultures needs to be further explored.

**The assimilation of the new immigrant into churches.** Early researchers

focused on European immigrants and explored the process of assimilation resulting in part from participation in religious activities (Adogame, 2016). Thus, the focus of current researchers on the topic has been inspired by the early research focus on understanding the process of assimilation of immigrants through institutions in the community, such as churches, and the socioeconomic implications of religious affiliation (Chiswick & Miller, 2014). Researchers have described various characteristics peculiar to the participation of immigrants in a church that may differ from those of native citizens. In general, religion has been found to be an important aspect that forms the identity of new immigrants (Zepeda-Millán, 2014).

Trends associated with globalization pose new arenas for research inquiry in understanding how local level institutions respond to the changes that are presented (Adogame & Grodź, 2014). Maintaining the balance between the universal nature of the church and the local community-level functions of the church present an interesting field of research that is an important part of the globalization process (DeYmaz, Li, & DeYmaz, 2013). Religious institutions present some of the most important spaces in which the identities of immigrants are shaped; as a result, how church leaders respond to the process of their assimilation is of immense importance in driving change (Garcia-Muñoz & Neuman, 2013).

Large churches are hierarchical and bureaucratized; as a result, the issue of immigration presents a dual challenge (Adogame, 2016). Homogenization of culture is one response to the assimilation of immigrants (Mellis & Schreck, 2016). The other response is characterized by acceptance of diversity, which is an important characteristic



of modern societies (John, 2016). In the United States, it is expected from parishes that they assimilate and respect the religious culture of immigrants that become a part of their institutions (Adogame, 2016). They are also expected to use the native language of the immigrants if possible (Zepeda-Millán, 2014). However, the acceptance of multiple groups, with the diverse interpretation of religious cultures, may create problems. One response to such problems is to promote the views held by the majority, while the other is to promote cultural unity (Garcia-Muñoz & Neuman, 2013). As a result, many parishes accept diverse groups and encourage individual members to broaden their views of identify by adopting one ethnic name for the group based on the name used by the state (Snyder, 2016). In such circumstances, even if the new identity does not exactly describe the identity of all members, the identity of immigrants in the host country begins to be shaped by the newly adopted label (Carroll & Daniel, 2014).

Such process of assimilation is facilitated by the leaders of the church (Chiswick & Miller, 2014). Although the adoption of a new, proximate ethnic label may weaken the cultural ties of immigrants with their country of origin, this process also facilitates the activities of the church to include all the members of the church, rather than only specific members based on nationalities (Makoni, 2016). An important part of this process is also the influence of social and political realities of the host country (Chiswick & Miller, 2014). Thus, leaders of the church in such large churches have different problems and use different strategies.

In smaller churches, on the contrary, there is a lesser focus on hierarchies and bureaucracy (Min & Jang, 2015). Such churches are more likely to accommodate

different requirements resulting from the expectations of the immigrants (Snyder, 2016). Since smaller churches are not likely to be part of international networks, the operation in such churches is more effective in new environments (Ehrkamp et al., 2014). Smaller churches are easy to organize and provide greater flexibility to different cultural views towards religion and religious institutions (Adogame, 2016). In such churches, it is easier to become a leader. The focus in such churches is to capture the interests of and empower the immigrant members to ensure they feel a part of a bigger movement (Lee, 2015). Such churches are more likely to accommodate the needs of the immigrants related to language and culture and as a result attract more followers from similar ethnic and racial groups (Zepeda-Millán, 2014). The leaders in such groups are better able to structure their institutions by creating a balance between the religious teachings and cultural needs (Ehrkamp et al., 2014). The function required from the leaders of smaller immigrant churches, therefore, are not similar to those required from leaders of larger immigrant churches.

### **Leadership in Church**

**Role of leadership in the church.** Church leaders should facilitate teamwork and ensure that the church member works towards a common goal. For church leaders to facilitate teamwork, it is essential that the church leaders provide an active engagement in encouraging the members of the church in the attainment of the goal (Smith, 2016). Church leaders are required to work in teams with other organizations and churches (Hartwig, 2016). Inherent in the ability to work as a team are values such as trust, acceptance, and respect. In order to facilitate such teamwork, a church leader must be

able to create and promote a climate of trust, creativity, and mutual respect at the church (Smith, 2014). Research conducted on church leaders suggests that leaders have a hold of the bigger picture along with a clear understanding the vision of God for the church. As a result, church leaders are able to conduct their leadership tasks with harmony and without stress in a collaborative fashion (Briggs, Hyatt, Hirsch, Fassett, & McGill, 2015). Such collaborative work requires that church leaders have the ability to recruit members for various areas of the church administrators who are competent. Without such judgment, church leads may find it difficult to provide harmonious leadership (Jenssen & Birkeland, 2014).

Church leaders must also present a vision in order to be effective. The aspect of vision for a church leader includes not only the understanding of the practical needs of the church for development in the future but also the dimension of God. It is important for church leaders to consider God in the process of vision. Church leaders believe that a vision can have significance for the members of the church only if the vision comes from God. That is, the vision is viewed by leaders of the church as not a creation but a discovery, which is sought and received ultimately from God (Jenssen & Birkeland, 2014). Church leaders consider vision to be present in the Bible, in figures such as Moses. Further, the promises and commands of Jesus to his followers are seen as visionary, rooted in the idea of making disciples in every country. Therefore, the idea of vision has a spiritual aspect among church leaders that adds an additional layer of significance (Alexander & Higton, 2016).

The characteristic of vision has been found to be applicable to all types of leaders (Graham, 2014). However, for church leaders, the necessity of having a vision is firmly associated with the future of the church (Hewitt, 2014). A church cannot function in the absence of visionary leaders. Vision, in the context of a church, promotes essential values such as attractiveness, credibility, inspiration, and realism (Coetzee-Van Rooy, 2014). The visionary church leader inspires members of the church to continue their progress and development. Vision serves as a force that guides the development of the church (Scuderi, 2014). Research findings suggest a lack of vision across most churches, however, suggesting that many church leaders substitute vision with emotional appeals (Coetzee-Van Rooy, 2014). On the contrary, solely having a vision cannot influence the lives of the members of the church. An effective leader is able to influence the organization and the members of the church on the basis of their vision by adopting the vision into the various aspects, such as communication and planning, of the church (Hoch & Kozlowski, 2014).

Similar to many organizations, leadership in most churches is organized with a top-down authority structure, and churches have rules and procedures to govern the activity of leaders (Weems, 2010). Additionally, churches maintain records pertaining to their operations and finances like other organizations (Weems, 2010). Moreover, the actual tasks of church leadership are significantly similar to those of other organizations (Watt, 2014). Thus, a problem of church leadership is foremost a problem of leadership. Churches are not businesses, but church leaders must still first and foremost act to advance the church mission (Watt, 2014). They must also develop power and authority,

manage organizational conflicts, and promote collaborative efforts between church members (Watt, 2014).

**Characteristics of good church leader.** Characteristics of church leaders that are considered effective include multiple dimensions (Hewitt, 2014). More important of these is a deep sense of purpose in the ministry towards God. Such a purpose is found to be associated with risk-taking and facilitating bold action in the context of ministry (Negrón et al., 2014). Similarly, another characteristic associated with effective church leadership is the capacity to empower and mobilize people towards a vision that leaders project (Coetzee-Van Rooy, 2014). Transforming the lives of the members of the church is another aspect of leadership that is considered effective by analysts (Jenssen & Birkeland, 2014). Members of the church whose lives are changed due to leaders of the church experience a deeper sense of spirituality which permeates in all aspects of their daily lives (Hewitt, 2014). Research also suggests that effective church leaders assist individuals to find and use their spiritual abilities towards the greater good of the community (Gräb, 2014). Thus, church leaders assist individuals to grow and evolve on personal levels, more evidently in terms of better decision-making, deeper relationship with other people and God, and higher spirituality (Scuderi, 2014).

Another important characteristic of church leaders is related to inspiration and motivation (Shaw, 2016). In the absence of the ability to inspire and motivate, a church leader fails to implement change in any form. In order to inspire and motivate, a church leader must have a purpose and vision for the church. Additionally, in alignment with the purpose and vision of the church, an effective church leader must also set goals for the

members of the church that are challenging and purposeful but attainable (Gräb, 2014). It is important that a church leader is able to engage and motivate the members of the church towards the achievement of the goals of the church (Coggins & Bocarnea, 2015).

Church leaders also manifest the characteristic of articulating their feelings and vision to others. Additionally, such communication is necessary to have an open dialogue with the members of the church (Hartwig, 2016). Effective church leaders devote sufficient time to the visitors, events, and another part of the community associated with the church (Smith, 2016). In addition, church leaders also utilize sermons for expressing their goals and vision for the church. In addition to direct communication with church members, church leaders also work with other church leaders towards their mission (Hoch & Kozlowski, 2014).

For church leaders to be effective, it is important that their vision is brief and clear. The vision of a church leader is viewed to result in success only when it is communicated in clear terms and is easier for the members of the church to understand (Briggs et al., 2015). Once a vision is communicated by a church leader, it is important that members of the church view the vision as a positive force in their lives. The members of the church must be capable of identifying the significance of the vision (Tunheim & DuChene, 2016). For church leaders to be effective, they must convey their vision as a descriptive image. A vision is seen as a mental image and the leader of the church must be able to create the mental image in the mind of the followers (Ferrari & Vaclavik, 2018). It is also important that the process of communication includes all the members of the church's administration (Magezi, 2015). An important part of a church

leader's ability to communicate vision is the selection of people responsible for the communication of ideas. It is also important for a church leader to communicate the vision of the church continuously over a period of time, as such remind increase the involvement of the members (Young, Patterson, Wolff, Greer, & Wynne, 2014).

Understanding the needs of church's administration is also important for a church leader to effectively materialize their vision (Northouse, 2015).

A consistent theme in the literature on church leaders was the significance of the leaders to be in a genuine relationship with God. Researchers note that church leaders who consider spirituality valuable highlight the significance of depending on a supreme being (Ferrari & Vaclavik, 2016). The life of a church leader is viewed as a journey for purpose and meaning in essentially personal terms. Spirituality is also seen as a force that affects church leaders' stability, integrity, and responsibility to society.

Leadership characterized by a genuine relationship with God and which values spirituality lead with responsibility and share authority with others in the administration (Negrón et al., 2014). However, an important characteristic of church leaders is that while leading with responsibility, they ascribe ultimate responsibility to God. In essence, church leaders consider the church to ultimately belong to God. Such an act of ascribing responsibility to God causes church leaders to experience a personal relationship with God that leads to increased motivation and power as leaders (Hartwig, 2016).

Researchers also suggest the alignment between the qualities required for exemplary leadership and spirituality, and the views of church leaders in describing the awareness and presence of God in their lives (Stonebraker, 2015).

Research also suggests that effective church leaders exude a sense of completeness integrated into their life. The church leaders provide a living example of their beliefs. A balance between spiritual, professional, and personal aspects is an essential part of such wholeness (Thompson, 2017). Researchers highlight the importance of both spiritual and emotional fitness among church leaders (Stonebraker, 2015). The completeness in church leaders includes, in addition to spiritual and emotional fitness, the aspect of physical fitness in the form of exercise. Church leaders use exercise to decrease depression and stress. Another important aspect of this wholeness is spending more time with their family (Ferrari & Vaclavik, 2016).

Although effective church leads have been known to be good communicators, research also suggests the significance of listening. Church leaders who are active listeners are more successful at attracting and retaining followers. In the context of a church leader, active listening takes the form of inquiry with the church members (Briggs et al., 2015). During such investigation, effective church leaders show neutrality. Based on the information gathered from the members of the church, effective church leaders craft better visions for the church that are in alignment with the needs of the church members (Smith, 2016). In the context of immigrant churches, such active listening process includes a focus on the integration of church members with the host community.

The literature suggests that associated with vision, persistent, and communication are the qualities of openness to new members and evangelism that are found among effective church leaders (Jenssen & Birkeland, 2014). Especially for growing churches, church leaders exhibit multiple traits associated with evangelism and openness. Effective



church leaders make attempts to reach out to individuals who are not a part of the church in the form of events and programs that are directed towards people who are not a part of the church yet (Gräb, 2014).

An important part of many characteristics of effective leaders, such as facilitating the process of change, persistence, vision, and communication, is authenticity (Briggs et al., 2015; Hilderbrand, 2016). Effective church leaders do not imitate or compare themselves to others. Effective church leaders do not define themselves on the basis of their designation. An authentic church leader is able to bring their own experiences in the process of leading the church, which may allow them to relate to the similar experiences of church members (Sims & Quatro, 2015). Church leaders who are authentic experience a sense of uniqueness in their relationship to God and in their mission for the church which is based on personal connection. Church leaders serve many functions, including that of spiritual leader, fundraiser, counselor, and administrator (Smith, 2016). Experiencing a genuine sense of purpose and relationship with God allows a church leader to function across all these roles harmoniously.

**Transformational leadership in the church.** In the context of leadership in the church, transformational leadership style has been found to be the most effective style of leadership (Briggs et al., 2015; Ferrari, 2016). Although some factors associated with transactional leadership have also been found in church leaders, the most common style encountered has been transformational leadership style (Scuderi, 2014). Additionally, the preference for transformational leadership style over transactional leadership style was consistent across ethnic differences (Stonebraker, 2015). Church leaders active in social

and political affairs have been found to utilize the transformative leadership characteristics more often (Ferrari, 2016). Majority of church leaders consider their job to encourage and inspire people. These characteristics are also associated with transformational leadership style (Tunheim & DuChene, 2016).

The literature also reveals that effective church leaders are persistent. Especially in immigrant churches, church leaders must be able to balance between tradition and change (Thompson, 2017). Church leaders must persist against challenges resulting from the change, including criticisms, backlash, and stubbornness of the church members. Besides the challenges posed by the attitudes of the members of the church, church leaders must also show strength when faced with the stress and possible burnout resulting from the work involved in leadership (Hilderbrand, 2016). Effective church leaders view change as an opportunity for reform and consider leading the process of change to be their responsibility. Effective leaders analyze the process of change and try to understand the social structure of the church and its community to devise a response to change (Haddad, 2016). An important part of this process, too, is the effective development and communication of the church leader's vision for the future of the church (Stonebraker, 2015). Church leaders who are successful in navigating the challenges posed by the change are able to communicate the vision of a better future of the church to the members of the church (Young, Patterson, Wolff, Greer, & Wynne, 2014). Thus, instead of resisting change, successful church leaders are able to become a vehicle for positive change.

The characteristics associated with successful church leaders also suggest the importance of transformational leadership theory to form the theoretical framework of this study (Briggs et al., 2015). Effective church leaders understand the value of relationships in resolving conflict, organizing, and inspiring members. Members of the church, too, are more likely to follow a church leader if they are able to trust and know the leader (Hartwig, 2016). By understanding the value of relationships, church leaders are better able to introduce change. Additionally, church leaders who value relationships are better able to judge, which is beneficial during conflict resolution and counseling (Alexander & Higton, 2016). A better relationship with the members of the church allows a church leader to have a better understanding of individual church members which is beneficial to help them (Coetzee-Van Rooy, 2014). The ability to be inclusive is another essential characteristic of church leaders who value relationships, as such leaders can accommodate people of different backgrounds and personalities (Stonebraker, 2015). Especially in churches that are centered around immigrants, inclusion and diversity are essential traits. Church leaders who are relational are able to form relationships with individuals from different generations, backgrounds, ages, countries of origin, ethnicities, and races (Smith, 2014).

Church leaders view their spiritual leadership in terms of a transformation that occurs during which Christ becomes a part of their formation. As a result, the aspect of leadership is viewed to emerge from this transformation into their leadership (Scuderi, 2014). Church leaders view their transformation occurring through God, expressed in the form of their leadership. The research reveals an important focus placed on the inner life

of church leaders with consideration for external world, which requires a balancing act (Thompson, 2017). Church leaders are required to seek fulfillment in their emotional and spiritual inner life, and exterior life is viewed as a manifestation of the inner power (Magezi, 2015).

Effectiveness church leaders not only work on their own development but also assist the development of other leaders within the church administration (Coetzee-Van Rooy, 2014). Sharing leadership also allows church leaders to create a shared sense of responsibility among all church administrators (Hoch & Kozlowski, 2014). Experts on leadership agree that church leaders are more prone to the transformative style of leadership. In the transformative style of leadership, an important aspect is the desire to help potential leaders develop (Thompson, 2017). Church leaders who wish to assist in such development provide more time with the members and administrators of the church with the intention of providing mentoring based on personal characteristics (Sims & Quatro, 2015). An important aspect of such shared leadership is the ability to form relationships based on trust. Church leaders share responsibility and tasks with the members of the church, which allows them to assist other people to learn about leadership (Magezi, 2015). Sharing leadership is based on the principle of inclusivity, which drives church leaders as they seek to make everyone who is a part of the church is informed (Ferrari, 2016). As part of sharing leadership, church leaders ensure they share information, which allows the possibility of collaboration among different types of church stakeholders (Hoch & Kozlowski, 2014).

**Selection of members into church leadership.** There are different approaches that are used to select one into church leadership position. The various avenues are mainly bible-based with the first being associated with charismatic churches (Means, 1989; Cowen, 2003). The charismatic churches believe that the leadership is a bestowal of a spiritual gift. Therefore, in the charismatic ministry, the church leaders are called directly by the Holy Spirit. The leadership was not therefore subjected to any election or appointment but individuals were divinely called (Forman, Jones & Miller, 2007). The early church leaders such as Paul, and the Twelve disciples are often quoted in the defense of the divine call of members into the leadership position (Cowen, 2003). Among the those who were considered called to lead the church were the prophets who were both male and female (Baxter, 2016).

Familial leadership in the church has also been observed. The familial leadership refers to where individuals enter into leadership position because of their family relationship with the existing church leaders (Forman et al., 2007). The familial leadership has its roots in the bible as seen with the case of James and Jude. Although James was not among the Apostles, he assumed church leadership and later became the respected leader of the early Christians. The familial leadership in the current churches is evident where the church leaders install their wives, and other relative to head key church docket (Cowen, 2003).

Appointive church leaders are also present in the Christian churches. The selection of the church leaders through appointment is the most common avenue through which church leadership positions are filled (Forman et al., 2007). The appointment of

the church leaders has its basis on the biblical teachings where individuals who are of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom are chosen to assume the leadership positions. The appointive leaders are usually chosen through some sort of election, which is carried out by their peers (Getz, 2003; Forman et al., 2007). The appointive selection of the members into the leadership position is one that is predominant among the Immigrant churches (Weisenfeld & Newman, 2014). However, the identification of the individuals who are deemed as the possible candidates for the election for the church positions is mainly based on the biblical directions which include the need for be good repute and wisdom. Other qualifications, which vary across the different churches include experience and the perceived ability to execute the tasks associated with the respective church position (Cowen, 2003; Negrón et al., 2014; Ferrari & Vaclavik, 2018).

### **Women and Leadership**

**Characteristics of women leaders.** The literature on women and leadership suggests that women, in general, are perceived as more helpful, social, empathetic, cooperative, collaborative, expressive, and understanding (Cook & Glass, 2013; Davis & Maldonado, 2015; Holten & Brenner, 2015; Shea & Renn, 2017). Studies conducted on the unique characteristics related to the thoughts, values, and experience of women reveal a number of common themes. For instance, women show a preference for trust, community, commitment towards values, and collaboration (Henry, Foss, Fayolle, Walker, & Duffy, 2015; Mulki, Caemmerer, & Heggde, 2014; Popli & Rizvi, 2015). Important factors contributing to the development of women have been reported to be collaboration and positive confirmation. Early research suggested that women, in self-

reported preferences, valued discussions, collaboration, and acceptance, as opposed to debates, competition, and evaluation (Madsen, 2015; Walker & Aritz, 2015).

Specific to leadership, women believe responsibility, care, and experience to be the foundations of leadership (Carnes, Bartels, Kaatz, & Kolehmainen, 2015; Hoyt & Murphy, 2016; Place & Vardeman-Winter, 2018). Participation and building of relationships are the qualities that have been emphasized. Women perceive the skills that women are conditioned to develop as women to be their strengths (O'Neil, Hopkins, & Bilimoria, 2015). For instance, women perceive their style of caring and their values regarding relationships to be their strengths. The concept of power, too, is understood by women on the basis of their relationships (Bongiorno, Bain, & David, 2013). Additionally, women consider power in terms of the ability to use it as representatives of other people (Lumby & Azaola, 2013).

**Differences between men and women in leadership.** Research suggests that men and women lead differently. For example, male leaders are more likely to display a challenging dimension of transformational leadership, while women are more likely to display the enabling or rewarding dimension (Brandt & Laiho, 2013). In addition, research has shown that women leaders in fields such as microfinance—a mission-driven field not like church leadership—achieve better organizational outcomes as measured by firm success (Strøm et al., 2014). Furthermore, a meta-analysis of organizational psychology literature suggests that, although men and women do not differ in terms of overall leadership effectiveness, women score significantly better in terms of leadership as evaluated by others as opposed to themselves (Paustian-Underdahl et al., 2014). It is

generally believed that women and men have different types of weaknesses and strengths. However, there is no agreement in the literature on whether and to what extent such differences exist. For instance, while some studies suggest that women and men have different leadership styles, other findings suggest no or few actual differences. Such actual differences or lack of differences is contrary to perception, as female leaders are perceived to be different by both superiors and subordinates.

Male leaders, unlike the female leaders, are viewed as assertive and independent. Such differences based on gender are considered to be more likely due to social conditioning than genetic differences. Another important factor for such differences is stereotyping based on gender (Peus, Braun, & Knipfer, 2015). Researchers have argued that women and men consider roles at the workplace that are more in alignment with their sex, which may be contributing to the differences between gender on the style of leadership (Kaatz & Carnes, 2014).

The existing literature suggests that while men are more likely to be autocratic, women are more likely to be participative. Women leaders exhibit a higher concern with sustaining relationships compared to men who are more task-oriented (Storberg-Walker & Haber-Curran, 2017). However, such differences are often depended on the context (Holten & Brenner, 2015). For instance, in roles that require characteristics associated with women, women have a higher orientation with the tasks. Similarly, in roles that require characteristics associated with men, men show higher orientation with the tasks (Peus, Braun, & Knipfer, 2015). Additionally, the leadership style of women also depends on the number of women leaders in an environment. When the number of



women leaders is low in a specific environment, women leaders are more likely to resist stereotypical styles of leadership associated with women, such as sustaining relationships and being participatory (O'Neil et al., 2015).

Researchers suggest that the belief of similarities in the leadership styles of men and women require revision (Davis & Maldonado, 2015). However, researchers also suggest a revision to the stereotypes associated with women and men in terms of leadership style (Liu, Cutcher, & Grant, 2015). Such assertion is based on the finding that context proves a significant factor in the selection of leadership style by both genders (Walker & Aritz, 2015).

Studies, in general, confirm that the leadership styles of women leaders are in alignment with the transformational style of leadership. Similarly, the leadership style of men is in alignment with the transactional style of leadership (Lumby & Azaola, 2013). Women leaders share information and power, increase other people's self-esteem, energize subordinates, and promote greater participation. Men, on the contrary, consider, in general, leadership in terms of transactions with followers. However, such findings also depend on the context, as women with transformational leadership style are often associated with organizations undergoing rapid change and growth, which are more likely to accommodate such leadership styles (Cook & Glass, 2013). The participatory nature of women leaders is reported to be effortless by such leaders, suggesting the influence of career choices and socialization. Thus, such leaders do not hold leadership positions that require the use of traditional strategies for power (Lumby & Azaola, 2013).

Studies conducted on the differences between men and women style of leadership, however, lack, in general, the consideration of inequalities in the power structure (Chakraborty & Saha, 2017). At organizations that operate in traditional styles, women are less likely to have greater resource access or hold powerful posts (Javidan, Bullough, & Dibble, 2015). Thus, research suggests the possibility that differences in gender may result from the differences in the hierarchy of status (Baker, 2014). Lack of resources and power may drive women to show higher concern regarding relationships. Thus, research suggests that those with higher power have more control over various aspects of the organization, while those without power may seek to develop qualities that may be more suitable to their needs, such as compassion (Kaatz & Carnes, 2014).

The differences in gender in the context of leadership may also be associated with the expectations of people who hold the positions of power in the organization. As a result of inequalities in power, female leaders have a higher dependence on those with power (Wolfram & Gratton, 2013). Therefore, it is likely that women leaders may be responding to the expectations of such individuals in their leadership behavior.

Researchers have noted the important role of expectation in shaping the behavior of individuals. Behavior depends on the expectations of individuals on both sides of the interaction and may vary on the basis of different contexts (Norris & Tankersley, 2017; Shea & Renn, 2017).

**Women leaders and bias.** Researchers have suggested that whether a woman is able to achieve a leadership position at the organization may be affected by factors related to stereotyping on the basis of gender that affects roles in the organization, along

with different expectations from women and men in such positions (Holten & Brenner, 2015). Researchers have also highlighted the fact that leadership positions in an organization are still considered to be requiring traditionally masculine characteristics like competitiveness and assertiveness (Popli & Rizvi, 2015). Consequently, traditionally feminine characteristics may be viewed as less effective compared to the masculine characteristics for success in leadership positions.

The research on women and leadership, conducted in the United States, has provided support that female employees may be viewed as less qualified for leadership roles compared to male employees. It is possible, as a result, that qualified female employees may be excluded from considerations for leadership roles due to this perception (Cook & Glass, 2013). However, there is a lack of decisive evidence to provide such causal relationship.

The expectation of an individual in the workplace may be reinforced and confirmed on the basis of the fact that individuals may seek, choose, and notice behavior that is consistent with the expectation (Henry et al., 2015). Additionally, those in power may become aware of the expectations of such individuals and may manage their behavior accordingly (Norris & Tankersley, 2017). Women who are not able to behave according to the expectations of those who have power may not be able to take advantage of the possible opportunities (Martin, 2015). Thus, they may seek to conform to the expectations in order to grow in the hierarchy. Especially in organizations that are traditionally male-dominated, female leaders are more likely to modify their behavior to ensure it meets the expectations of male holders of power (Kaatz & Carnes, 2014). A

problem may arise in characterizing the character of female leaders in such context, as in this study on church leadership, a traditionally male-dominated field, due to the lack of balance between the norms of the organization and the expectations of exhibiting behaviors that are more appropriate for females based on the expectations of those in power (Baker, 2014).

In addition to meeting the expectations of those in power, female leaders may also modify their behaviors in order to meet the expectations of their followers (Mulki et al., 2014). In the context of this study, this insight is of equally significant value as female leaders seeking to meet the expectations of those in power because the success of a church depends on the followers (Storberg-Walker & Haber-Curran, 2017). Followers of female leaders suggest a higher preference for women who show greater consideration in their behaviors, such as friendliness and helping others (Javidan et al., 2015). Followers of male leaders, on the contrary, suggest a higher preference for men who exhibit transactional leadership qualities, such as making followers follow procedures, upholding rules, and clarifying roles (Kumra, Simpson, & Burke, 2014). Further, female leaders are rated negatively when they exhibit dominant leadership styles. Such leaders are also less influential compared to female leaders who show transformational styles of leadership.

Thus, the literature suggests that women leaders have to experience challenges resulting from the need to meet the expectations of both followers and superiors. Followers expect women leaders who are open, warm and giving. However, these qualities may decrease the worth of female leaders as leaders in the evaluation of their superiors. In this context, too, the variable of context is important, as such expectations

from followers are more common in organizations that are structured on the basis of hierarchy (Holten & Brenner, 2015). Given the nature of the church, which is largely hierarchical in structure, such expectations from both superiors and followers are relevant. As a result, in the context of the study, it may be possible that female church leaders in immigrant churches experience such challenges of expectations.

However, based on the literature, it is also evident that there is a lack of studies in which such relationship is established. It may be possible that the experiences of women leaders in immigrant churches may be different from larger, traditional churches, which are more likely to be bureaucratic and hierarchical. The experiences of women in church leadership must be explored in the context of immigrant churches, therefore, in order to understand the differences between their experiences and the experiences of women in larger churches. Additionally, such an exploration allowed more information to compare and contrast between the experiences of women leaders in terms of expectations from their followers and their superiors in church.

### **Women Leadership in Churches**

**Theological arguments for women leadership in the church.** In terms of theology, those who support the higher participation of women in leadership positions in churches and those who oppose the higher participation of women in leadership positions in churches both use Bible to support their positions (Baxter, 2016). Those who support the higher participation of women in leadership positions in churches cite the ideas of gender equality found in the Galatians as well as the parts in the New Testament that suggest women in roles of authority. Based on such references, they argue that Bible

supports the participation of women in churches in leadership positions (Baxter, 2016). Another source of argument used by supports of greater female participation in the church as leaders is the fact that some passages, such as those in 1 Corinthians, prescribe the form of participation that women should take as leaders in the church (Baxter, 2016). Those who support the higher participation of women in the church generally fall into one of the two categories. The first category consists of individuals who approve the participation of women in the church as leaders (Baxter, 2016). The second category consists of individuals who also approve such participation but under male leaders' authority. Those who support female leaders in the church also cite the references to gender equality in the Bible (Baxter, 2016). One such argument states that the creation of humans, based on the image of God, was equal for both men and women. Thus, based on the account of creation as presented in the Bible, gender equality can be established (Baxter, 2016).

On the contrary, those who oppose the participation of women in the church as leaders cite the passages of the Bible, such as those in 1 Corinthians, that they argue call for the submissiveness of females in church (Baxter, 2016). Additionally, one of the requirements to become a higher level leader in the church is described as being a husband, which those who oppose the participation of women in the church as leaders argue suggests that women cannot be church leaders (Baxter, 2016). Researchers argue that those who oppose the participation of women in the church as leaders by citing Bible as reference do not provide direct claims excluding women from becoming leaders (Baxter, 2016).

**The current state of women leadership in the church.** Similarly, the study of women leaders in churches has received considerable attention (Sweeney, 2014). For the majority of its history, the policies of the church did not allow women to obtain leadership positions. Researchers note that despite the significant changes in these policies, women in leadership positions are still significantly underrepresented (Kenaston, 2015). By the middle of the 1990s, the number of churches that did not allow women to participate in churches as leaders had declined to less than 50% (Smith, 2015). However, researchers argue that although formal policies of the churches prohibit discrimination based on gender, such policies are not always practiced in informal actions (Smith, 2015). Such inconsistency between practice and policy in the context of female leadership has been described in the literature in multiple fields, including the church (Smith, 2015).

Findings suggest that women leaders in the church are not compensated adequately, do not receive equal consideration of higher roles, and are underemployed (Sharp & Huebner, 2013). Despite such inequities, female church leaders are generally appreciated by the members of their church as well as male leaders of their church (Dzubinski, 2015). The competence of female church leaders, similarly, is equal to those of male church leaders in their tasks (Ferrari, 2017). Despite the slightly higher participation of women in religious organizations as well in seminary activities, the inclusion of women in leadership positions is still significantly disproportionate (Robbins & Francis, 2014). In the specific context of church leadership, Djupe (2014) suggests that there are significant descriptive differences between male and female leadership in

Protestant churches as a whole—in keeping with the general results on transformational leadership, he found that female pastors create a “a slightly more inclusive and participatory culture that engages men and women about equally” (p. 551). But more research is necessary to fully understand the potential effects of diversifying gender in leadership (Djupe, 2014) and thereby the full benefits of bringing women to leadership roles in the African immigrant church.

At present, although women contribute significantly to the activities of the churches, there are still disparities in the number of churches led by men as opposed to women. The findings suggest that women are more likely to be leaders in churches that are ethnically diverse (Smith, 2015). Additionally, such churches are smaller in a number of members and have lower economic resources compared to churches led by men. Women leaders are also more likely to be found in churches that are located in cities (Chiesotsu & Joo, 2017). Another important insight about churches led by women is that the majority of the members of such churches consist of women (Schleifer & Miller, 2017). Specifically, Black women leaders in churches are more likely to be a part of independent churches instead of churches affiliated with mainstream denominations (Bay, 2015).

**Challenges for women leaders in the church.** In the context of churches, researchers interested in religion in the field of social science have devoted considerable attention to exploring the position of women. Especially for occupations where the potential employees are more in number compared to the available jobs, such as churches, researchers have suggested the higher presence of gender discrimination



(Ademiluka, 2017). In those fields in which such discrimination exists, it is caused significantly by employees favoring men. In general, the treatment of women in systems of religions have not been adequate (Robbins & Francis, 2014). Various reasons have been introduced throughout history by theologians to further the discrimination against women (West, 2016). However, researchers have also maintained that the actual tenants of most religions, if followed accurately, may be used to eliminate such discrimination.

Research suggests that in the workplace in general, women are capable of interacting and building relationships with individuals in a powerful position (Smith, 2015). However, in the context of the church, interactions with those at the top level of leadership can be a hostile experience for women. Additionally, women do not receive an invitation to be involved in leadership tasks as frequently as men (Dzubinski, 2015). Such a lack of invitation, in the context of the church, is partly due to the fear of the loss of authority from the male leaders (Ferrari, 2017). Thus, researcher describes the dynamics of power as one of the most significant problems experienced by women in the church in the context of leadership (Bay, 2015). In the formal structure of the church, the organization of individuals is on the basis of hierarchy, with male leaders generally at the top (Dzubinski, 2015).

Additionally, women church leaders experience challenges with perception. Women leaders are expected to show soft skills of leadership such as caring and nurturing; however, assertive female leaders are seen as not nurturing and caring (Bay, 2015). As noted previously, this problem of perception is a general problem experienced by women in the workplace as leaders, from both superiors and subordinates (Schleifer &

Miller, 2017). However, in the context of the church, women experience the similar problem of perception. Such perception can lead to discrimination of women as leaders in the church on the basis of perceived characteristics (Robbins & Francis, 2014).

As noted previously, the dynamics of power is one of the most significant problems experienced by women in the church in the context of leadership (Chiesotsu & Joo, 2017). Leaders display power in various ways, through knowledge, expertise, charisma, and legitimacy. The legitimacy refers to a form of power allows the leader to provide punishment or reward (Wong, Worthy, Fung, & Chen, 2017). Charisma refers to a form of power in which followers are influenced on the basis of charm. Expertise refers to a form of power in which leaders' personal development enhances their skills and power. Knowledge refers to a form of power that is based on longevity. Such models, however, are built on the basis of male leadership (Sharp & Huebner, 2013). As a result, women leaders exhibiting such characteristics of leadership may often be perceived as threatening. Women are socialized to be nurturing and polite and not express their ambitions. Such socialization and perception may be a disadvantage for women leaders in the church (Sweeney, 2014).

The challenges over the leadership of women in church remains an issue at present. Although White women leaders have found more acceptance in the context of the church, and are more concerned with challenges in achieving a higher leadership position, African American women have not been able to overcome similar challenges in finding acceptance for basic leadership roles (Baxter, 2016). Thus, the focus of this study

on women in African immigrant churches expands the literature on non-White women leaders in the church.

**Women leaders in African immigrant churches.** Although there is insufficient literature on the experience of African immigrant women in church leadership, researchers have devoted considerable attention to the experience of African American women in the context of the church (Baxter, 2016). Researchers have noted that the role and experience of African American women in the context of the church changed drastically during different periods of time. However, across different time periods, they played a significant part in church, and always experienced struggle obtaining leadership position (Baxter, 2016).

Although researchers have devoted considerable attention to African American churches, there has been limited research on African American women leaders, and scarce research on women leaders in African immigrant churches (Baxter, 2016). One of the reasons for such lack of attention is the lack of specific data. Additionally, the failure in focusing on the significance of churches that not traditional, especially churches led by non-White women, forms one of the significant reasons for such lack of focus in research (Baxter, 2016).

The gender ratio in all historically Black Protestant churches is 41% men to 59% women (Pew Research Forum, 2017), and in African immigrant churches were women also have significantly higher numbers than men (Mensah et al., 2013). And yet, Women constitute only about one in six Protestant pastors, (Djupe, 2014), a power differential that is also present in African immigrant churches (Mensah et al., 2013). In the United

States, there is a paucity of existing research on African immigrant churches, and therefore accurate figures are hard to find. However, as of 2014, the largest African immigrant church in the United States, the Nigeria-based (RCCG), reported having over 720 churches and over 15,000 members across the United States (Margolis, 2014). In a broader sense, the Pew Research Forum (2017) reports that historically Black churches make up roughly 6.7% of the U.S. Christian population, though it is hard to say how much of this population consists of immigrant churches. However, around 7% of the attendance of historically Black churches constitutes immigrants (Pew Research Forum, 2017), and immigrants often clash with the African American community (Hanciles, 2013), suggesting that these immigrants may be primarily in immigrant churches.

In the African American communities, men assumed the position of power and authority and, until the twentieth century, women mostly assumed a submissive role (Weisenfeld & Newman, 2014). Additionally, the respect experienced by women in society, in general, did not correspond to similar respect in the context of the church. Consequently, churches had departments as part of the church that were specifically devoted to women and had women leaders. The historical experiences of Black women leaders were characterized by discrimination and suffering (Weisenfeld & Newman, 2014). In addition to racism, Black women leaders also experienced gender-based discrimination as the profession of church leadership was considered as a traditionally male profession. The patriarchal structures of both White and Black church denominations excluded Black women from participating as leaders (Weisenfeld &

Newman, 2014). Further, the authority of women church leaders was questioned continuously by both women and men.

The ordination of women in the church began by the end of the nineteenth century and became common in some denominations of churches. Increasingly, African American women leaders began to leave mainstream denominations in order to become a part of more sympathetic smaller denominations that accepted female leaders. Following the establishment of the Black congregation by Jane Williams in 1886, many other female church leaders established their independent churches. The needs of the society resulting from faster urbanization resulted in the increasing number of African American women becoming leaders in smaller, independent churches (Baxter, 2016).

Researchers have noted the effects of such independent churches on women, and specifically on African American women. Such churches enhanced the dignity of African American women who were working by providing them with a moral support network in the community (Weisenfeld & Newman, 2014). Despite being perceived as illiterate, such smaller churches also encouraged the cause of education of women and the use of such education at church. Smaller churches also provided women with the license required in order to preach, as opposed to the majority of mainstream churches. Those independent churches that did not provide ordination to women nevertheless allowed them to acquire significant positions in leadership roles (Baxter, 2016).

Smaller, independent immigrant churches typically began in private apartments in the form of prayer meetings, from where they moved to storefronts (Baxter, 2016). Such churches were initially perceived as low status, unconventional, suspicious, and overly

emotional. Nevertheless, such churches provided immigrants with refuge from the challenges of the world (Weisenfeld & Newman, 2014).

In this study, the concept of glass ceiling provides a better perspective of the prospect of women leaders in African immigrant churches. Glass ceiling refers to barriers that are not visible, but which hinder the possibility of women in reaching higher positions within an organization (Weisenfeld & Newman, 2014). Following the civil rights and feminist movements, the focus on decreasing the discrimination against women in leadership positions across organizations led to an increase in female leaders. Such effect, however, was not equally visible in the sphere of higher leadership positions in churches across the nations (Weisenfeld & Newman, 2014). Although the bias based on gender across different parts of the culture has decreased, the prejudice based on gender in the church is still significant. Compared to other fields, women in churches experience significantly higher bias in reaching the highest positions in management (Smith, 2015). Such challenges are even higher among African American women, as African American women experience discrimination in reaching higher leadership positions in other fields as well (Baxter, 2016).

### **Summary**

This chapter consisted of a review of literature relevant to the research problem and the identified research phenomenon. The topics covered in the literature review included African churches, immigrants, African immigrant churches, leadership, leadership in the church, and female leadership. The goal of the literature review was to provide a comprehensive understanding of the research phenomenon that highlights the

rationale for conducting the research. The literature review was classified into four sections.

The first section provided a review of the literature on the theoretical framework of the study. The theoretical framework of this study is based on Bass's transformational leadership theory (Bass & Riggio, 2006). The transformational leadership theory was first developed by Burns (1978) with the insight that transformational leaders focused on the values of their followers and assisted their followers to create a balance between their values and the values of the organization, creating a harmony in the values between the followers and the leader. In the context of this study, the use of transformational leadership theory to form the theoretical framework for the research was based on the fact that in transformational leadership theory, there is an emphasis on the inclusion and behavior of the follower, built upon the belief that people are not born, but become, leaders.

The second section was focused on providing a review of the literature on themes covering the research phenomenon, consisting of four subsections. The first subsection focused on immigrants and churches. It was found that early researchers focused on the participation of immigrants in church and the religious practices and institutions they brought with them to the host country, and on European immigrants and explored the process of assimilation resulting in part from participation in religious activities. The interest on the role of religious institutions and religion in the life of immigrants among scholars changed after the mid-1960s due to the changes introduced in the United States immigration, and scholars began to focus on the diversity in the society resulting from

immigration. A model of African immigrant-initiated churches, as presented by Aderibigbe (2015), provided a framework on the characteristics of immigrant founded churches in the context of African immigrants.

The second subsection focused on the context of leadership in the church, in which it was found that transformational leadership style has been found to be the most effective style of leadership. Although some factors associated with transactional leadership have also been found in church leaders, the most common style encountered has been transformational leadership style. Characteristics of church leaders that are considered effective include multiple dimensions.

The third subsection focused on women and leadership suggested that women, in general, are perceived as more helpful, social, empathetic, cooperative, collaborative, expressive, and understanding. Researchers have suggested that whether a woman is able to achieve a leadership position at the organization may be affected by factors related to stereotyping based on gender that affects roles in the organization, along with different expectations from women and men in such positions. Studies conducted on the differences between men and women style of leadership, however, lack, in general, the consideration of inequalities in the power structure.

The fourth subsection focused on churches and women. It was found that researchers interested in religion in the field of social science have devoted considerable attention to exploring the position of women. Although there is insufficient literature on the experience of African immigrant women in church leadership, researchers have devoted considerable attention to the experience of African American women in the



context of the church. At present, although women contribute significantly to the activities of the churches, there are still disparities in the number of churches led by men as opposed to women. It was concluded that the role of women leadership in African immigrant churches has not been extensively explored. The next chapter focuses on the methodological details of the study, including information on the research methodology, research design, population and sample, and issues of trustworthiness.

## Chapter 3: Research Method

### **Introduction**

The specific problem is that role of women leadership in African immigrant churches has not been extensively explored. This study addressed the observed problem by exploring the experiences of women in leadership positions in African immigrant churches in the United States. The methodology approach was IPA. The methodology facilitated obtaining in-depth information and knowledge about the experiences of women in leadership positions. This chapter begins with an in-depth explanation of the research design appropriateness and my role. I identify and discuss the different procedures for recruitment, data collection, data management, and data analysis. I also discuss the aspect of trustworthiness and the ethical considerations that guided the research process.

### **Research Design and Rationale**

#### **Restatement of Research Questions**

RQ1: What are the leadership experiences of women in leadership positions in the African immigrant church in the United States?

SQ1: How do women experience the factors that contributed to their success in obtaining leadership positions in the African immigrant church?

SQ2: How do women describe barriers or challenges in obtaining leadership positions in the African immigrant church?

SQ3: How do women describe gender related issues in obtaining leadership positions in the African immigrant church?

The phenomenon to be explored was women in leadership positions in the African immigrant church in the United States. Therefore, the experiences of these women constituted the data used to address the research questions.

### **Central Phenomenon of the Study**

The phenomenon of women leadership in the context of the African immigrant church in the United States was the focus of this study. In this study, I used face to face semistructured interviews as a means to obtaining in-depth data about the experiences of women in leadership positions. Bass and Riggio's (2006) transformational leadership theory guided the further understanding of barriers and other factors that influence women leadership in African immigrant churches.

### **Interpretative Phenomenology as the Research Tradition**

IPA as described by Smith and Osborn (2004) was the research tradition of choice for this study. According to scholars, phenomenology is a qualitative design that is commonly used for research studies that require in-depth exploration of lived experiences of individuals about a phenomenon (Husserl, 1970; Moustakas, 1994). The phenomenological approach provides an understanding of a research phenomenon by facilitating the development of overall essence of knowledge and meaning based on the experiences and the perspectives of the participants (Smith, 2004). As such, the approach enables the researcher to condense the accounts of the research participants into information that give a general and common understanding of the research interest (Smith, 2004; Vagle, 2016).

**Philosophy of phenomenology.** The phenomenological approach is based on the

philosophical assumptions that a research phenomenon is best understood from the lived experiences of individuals as narrated by those individuals (Husserl, 1970; Moustakas, 1994; Smith, 2004). Phenomenology indicates that the meaning and understanding of the experience is generated by the individual's consciousness of the research phenomenon (Vagle, 2016). As such, the phenomenological philosophy gives priority to the respondent's own interpretation and meaning for the research phenomenon. Therefore, to adhere to the phenomenological perspective, researchers need to set aside their own understanding, experiences, and interpretation of the research phenomenon and allow the development of the meaning regarding the research phenomenon to be based only on the participants' lived experiences (Moustakas, 1994; Starks & Trinidad, 2007; Creswell, 2017).

**Theoretical components of IPA.** As already indicated in the previous sections, the understanding of the research phenomenon through IPA is informed by how respondents make meaning of their experiences. The approach facilitates the development of meaning based on three theoretical underpinnings with the first being the hermeneutics, which argues that the experiences of the respondents inform their points of views. Hermeneutics guides the making of meaning and interpretation based on the respondent's perceptions of the lived experiences as depicted in the respondent's language (Larkin, Watts, & Clifton, 2006). Based on the IPA approach, the researcher needs to understand the perceptions and the interpretation of the respondents regarding the lived experience and decode the meaning with the purpose of developing an understanding of the created meaning (Larkin et al., 2006). The other theoretical

underpinning of IPA is idiography, which explains the need to understand unique perspectives of each respondent. Idiography gives voice to the development of similarities and differences among the narrated experiences and the created meanings (Smith, 2004).

**IPA data collection.** Because the IPA approach is based on the meanings that are developed from the accounts narrated by the respondents, the face-to-face interview is an effective data collection tool (Patton, 2002). The face to face interview in IPA is guided by semi-structured questions that do not limit the interaction between the researcher and the respondents, which is important in ensuring that the researcher is able to gain trust and build a good relationship with the respondents (Attia & Edge, 2017). Semi-structured questions should be open-ended and nudge respondents to give an in-depth account of the lived experience and how they interpret such experiences (Attia & Edge, 2017). The narrated accounts are audio recorded for further analysis.

**IPA data analysis.** The analysis of collected data in IPA is guided by the need to understand the respondent's perspective while seeking to make sense of the knowledge that is developed. For the researchers to understand the meaning created by the respondents, there is a need for them explore the data based on the existing theories (Braun et al., 2014). The process of data analysis generally involves listening to transcribing, and reading, the recorded interviews followed by the development of the themes and subthemes (Braun et al., 2014).

### **Choosing Phenomenology as a Qualitative Method**

I used phenomenology as the research design to address the study's research questions (Groenewald, 2004; Starks & Trinidad, 2007; Petty, Thomson, & Stew, 2012). A researcher, who implements qualitative phenomenology, can investigate a phenomenon through the collection of data regarding the lived experiences of individuals from a relevant social group, through subsequent structured analysis, and meaningful reflection in relation to the research questions of a study (Vagle, 2016). The use of the phenomenological design in this study was also informed by the understanding that the design is effective when aiming to identify phenomena through the experiences of individuals and stakeholders of a phenomenon (Creswell & Creswell, 2017; Giorgi, 1997; Hoe & Hoare, 2013). Based on the descriptions of phenomenology, I evaluated that this design was appropriate and aligned with the purpose and research questions of this study. Both the purpose and research questions explicitly mentioned the need for exploring lived experiences of women in leadership positions in African immigrant churches in the United States.

I also assessed other research designs were for their appropriateness for this study. However, I did not choose these other research designs because they were not aligned with the purpose and requirements of the current study. I did not choose a grounded theory, which is a design appropriate for research studies that require the development of new theory based on systematic data collection and analysis (Glaser, 2017; Punch, 2013). The purpose of this study did not require the development of theory from the data. Moreover, a narrative inquiry was also inappropriate for this study. Narrative inquiry is a

research design focused on the importance of collecting and reporting data in chronological order (Bahari, 2010; Kim, 2015). The order of events or occurrence of data was not a particular requirement when fulfilling the purpose of this study, which made this design inappropriate. Phenomenology was also chosen over ethnography, which is the research design that requires incorporating cultural aspects of a group of people (Hammersley, 1983). Finally, a case study is a research design that is focused on an in-depth exploration of perceptions to make sense of a phenomenon (Yin, 2015). Therefore, a case study was not chosen because instead of focusing on perceptions, case studies require data about lived experiences of individuals. Based on the assessment of other possible designs, I concluded that phenomenology was the most appropriate in terms of addressing the purpose and research questions of the study.

### **Role of the Researcher**

As the researcher, I was an observer of the phenomenon and the participants. I was observing the phenomenon based on the answers of participants in an interview. More specifically, researchers of most qualitative studies serve as the main tool for collecting and analyzing data (Patton, 2002). Therefore, as the overall observer in this study, I conducted participant recruitment, interviews for data collection, and thematic analysis. Since I had limited information and knowledge regarding the experiences of women in leadership in the Immigrants churches, I occupied the outsider position during my interaction with the research participants and the research phenomenon (Attia & Edge, 2017). However, since my thinking influences the development of meaning and the interaction with the research participants, I took time to learn, reflect based the existing

literature and during the course of the study (Attia & Edge, 2017). The need to educate myself regarding the various aspects of the research phenomenon was also based on the arguments made by Kacen and Chaitin (2006), which suggest that the researchers who occupy the outsider position are more likely to generate interpretations that do not reflect the actual experiences as narrated by the research participants (Attia & Edge, 2017).

During the recruitment of participants, I personally obtained site permission and invited potential participants to be an interviewee for this research. According to De Tona (2006), it is important for a researcher to approach the gatekeepers who regulate the access to the research participants. To access to the women at the various level of leadership in the church, I approached, the heads of the church and explained to them the study and its relevance in addressing issues of interest to the women worshipers. I assured the heads of the church that the study will not interfere with the operation of the church and that the identity of the church and researched individuals will be kept private. During this phase, the minimization of bias and conflict of interest was important to avoid any unwanted implications to the findings of the study. Therefore, I ensured that the participants were recruited based on their eligibility (e.g., inclusion and exclusion criteria) instead of familiarity with the researcher. I also eliminated family members, friends, relatives, colleagues, and community members as options for participants in this study. By avoiding the inclusion of these individuals as participants in this study, I minimized the potential conflict of interest and possible influences of researcher-participant familiarity to the findings or overall outcome of the study.



After the recruitment phase, I personally conducted data collection for the study. I conducted semi-structured interviews with participants. During the interview, I used an interview guide to avoid asking unnecessary or leading questions that may be influenced by personal biases. After the data collection phase, I conducted the analysis of the interviews. During the interviews, I minimized personal biases by acknowledging any preferences, experiences, beliefs, and expectations that were related to the topic of the study. When analyzing data, I was also careful in making interpretations especially when the interpretations were aligned with my personal expectations. I supported each interpretation with actual data from interviews and citation from existing literature.

## **Methodology**

### **Participant Selection Logic**

**Population.** The target population for this study was women leaders in African immigrant churches in the United States. I chose this population because of its relevance to the current study. Based on the purpose and research questions of the study, the social group that is explicitly mentioned is women leaders in African immigrant churches. Moreover, the phenomenon explored in this study was women in leadership positions within African immigrant churches in the United States. Therefore, the chosen population was aligned with the requirements of fulfilling the purpose of this research since they have the relevant knowledge and experiences.

**Sample and sampling strategy.** I recruited samples from the population. The sample was recruited using purposive sampling. Purposive sampling approach was commonly used in qualitative studies (Barratt, Ferris, & Lenton, 2015; Robinson, 2014).

The sampling approach was characterized by non- random selection of samples with a very specific set of characteristics that are aligned with the research requirements (Robinson, 2014). This sampling method has been effective in recruiting participants that are relevant for qualitative research studies, including phenomenology (Etikan, Musa, & Alkassim, 2016; Gentles, Charles, Ploeg, & McKibbon, 2015; Robinson, 2014). The adoption of the purposive sampling as the recruitment technique of choice in this study was also informed by the fact that it ensures the selection of people from a specific social group, which ensured that the study obtained information that adequately answered the research questions of the study. To facilitate the adoption of the purposive sampling, the study used a set of eligibility criteria that are discussed in the section below.

**Participant selection criteria.** The participants were recruited to form the sample based on a set of eligibility criteria, which include both the inclusion and exclusion guidelines. I used the following inclusion criteria: (a) women in at least one leadership position (e.g., pastor, worship leaders, spiritual education leaders, evangelism leaders, and musician-spiritual leaders); (b) obtained the said leadership position within the past 12 months; (c) at least 18 years old. The basis for excluding an individual from the study was at least one of the following: (a) women leaders who were uncomfortable to give information about the phenomenon of the study; (b) women leaders who this leave their position in the church within the duration of the study (e.g., 6 months from beginning the recruitment). I determined the eligibility of the participants by including the criteria in the invitation to participate and discussing it after receiving the signed copy of the informed consent form.

**Sample size.** The sample size for qualitative studies, including phenomenological research, is not as large as that of quantitative methodology-based research (Malterud, Siersma, & Guassora, 2016). Qualitative researchers determine the number of participants based on the data saturation, which refers to the instant wherein no new data can be identified with the addition of a new data set (e.g., new interview transcript) (Tran, Porcher, Tran, & Ravaud, 2017). Therefore, the number of unique codes does not increase significantly when new data is added. Phenomenological researchers claimed that a sample of 10 to 25 individuals with relevant characteristics is usually enough to reach data saturation (Arbour & Wiegand, 2014; Kornhaber, Wilson, Abu-Qamar, McLean, & Vandervord, 2015). Based on this information, the sample size of this study was at least 12 eligible women leaders, provided data saturation has been reached.

**Participant identification and recruitment.** I followed the following steps in the identification and recruitment of the participants:

- I first obtained permission from church leaders: As already mentioned I considered the access to gatekeepers as an important step in ensuring the research was able to reach all the targeted participants without any opposition from the individuals who are in-charge of the selected Immigrant churches (De Tona 2006). I reached out to the relevant gatekeepers (heads of the immigrant) by sending out a request letter. The letter explained the study details including the purpose of the research and how the respondents were involved in the research. The letter also described the short and long-term benefits of the study along with a declaration of the risk to the participant. I

communicated to the gatekeepers the steps that the study took to protect the privacy of the church, the participants and the information that I collected from the participants. The letter also introduced the affiliate institution and the reason for carrying the research. All those who agreed that I can conduct the study with their women leaders were asked to provide a permission letter as proof of their agreement to be part of the study

- I then asked the university Institutional Review Board (IRB) for permission to conduct the study. In the IRB report, I presented the methods for recruitment, data collection, and data analysis. Most importantly, I also presented the procedures for addressing ethical concerns. In this report, I discussed how to ensure that the risks to participants were minimal, and the procedure to be implemented did not violate the rights of the participants.
- I then began the recruitment process by sending a letter to the church heads asking them to distribute the flyers with my contact information.
- The potential participants who were willing to participate contacted me through the contacts provided in the flyer.
- I then send an invitation email to the women leaders to be a participant in the study. Included in the invitation email were: (a) purpose of the study, (b) possible contribution of the study to the churches and society; (c) reason for invitation; (d) coverage of participation; (e) participant eligibility criteria.
- I then sent a copy of the informed consent to the women leaders who accepted the invitation. The informed consent is an important tool in research that helps

to provide the potential research participants with the detailed description of the study (Creswell & Creswell,2017), In the study, I used the informed consent to inform the participants about myself, the affiliate institution, and what the research purposes to achieve. The informed consent also explained what I expected from the participants and the potential benefits associated with research. I also mentioned the risks associated with the research and the steps that I took to ensure that the participants and the information is protected. The participants who agreed with the contents of the consent form affixed their signature in the last part of the form. By signing the form, the participant agreed to be an interviewee for the study and certified that he or she satisfied the eligibility criteria. I however, assured the participants that the signing of informed consent did not take away their right to terminate their involvement in the study at any stage of the research (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). The participant sent the signed copy of the consent form to me, then I coordinated with the participant to schedule the interview date and time. Alternatively, the participants also replied to the email in which the consent form was including stating “I consent.”

### **Instrumentation**

I used the questions contained in the demographic form, which were added to the first part of the interview guide to understand the participant’s context (Appendix B). The considered demographic items include the Age, ethnic self-identification, whether the participant is immigrant or born in US, if the participant is immigrant where she come

from, what position she holds, how long she has been appointed in that position, previous positions or church enrollment.

The main data collection technique for this study was a semi-structured interview (Appendix B) Therefore, the instrument that was used for this study was a semi-structured interview guide. The interview guide was used to ensure that I did not ask irrelevant and biased questions during the interview (Kallio, Pietilä, Johnson, & Kangasniemi, 2016). The use of the semi-structured interviews in this study also allowed me to create an environment for the participants to express themselves with freedom while focusing on the purpose of the research (Holt, 2010). Unlike the structured interviews, the semi-structured interviews limit the restriction and interference of the participants when they are narrating their experience, which is important in enhancing the interaction between the researcher and the research participants (Holt, 2010). The semi-structured interview technique, therefore, allows the researcher to get in-depth information about the experiences of women in leadership, which is important in the construction of knowledge and meaning about the research purpose.

In developing the interview guide, I had several items in question form that had a direct correspondence to at least one of the research questions. To ensure that each of the research questions was adequately addressed, the research developed three interview items that corresponded to each question. Furthermore, I developed the questions in the interview guide based on relevant literature and theory to ensure that the questions allowed the collection of information that directly addressed the research questions of the study.

### **Procedures for Data Collection**

The interview guide was used to obtain relevant data from women leaders in African immigrant churches in the United States. I collected the data by serving as the interviewer of the participants. Each participant was asked the same set of questions using the interview guide. I asked follow-up questions, as I deemed appropriate to follow the participants' thoughts and ideas. I did not impose a rigid frame to the interview. Therefore, there were at 10 interviews that were conducted, to reach data saturation. Each interview lasted an hour. Each interview was recorded for transcription purposes. As soon as someone was interested and met the criteria a day/time for the interview was set. The location for the interview was in the public library.

On the day of the interview, I arrived early to prepare the materials to be used (interview guide, writing materials, recorder). I began the interview a few minutes after the participant arrived. I began by explaining the topic of the study, the purpose of the interview, and how the interview approach. The participants were also informed about data security approaches. I also reminded the participants about their right to terminate the interview at any point by informing me. Based on the consent form the participants, I then began the interviews. During the interaction with the participants in the interview, I developed knowledge and meaning and for any response that needed further understanding, the research asked the participants for further explanation using relevant prompts. In this manner, I obtained rich and informative data that enabled the development of in-depth meaning and knowledge about the research purpose. At end of the interview, the participant asked me questions. The participant then exited the

interview after discussing questions with me. I thanked the participant for the time and effort allotted for the interview.

### **Data Analysis Plan**

The data analysis technique for this study was Braun, Clarke, and Terry's (2014) thematic analysis (Clarke & Braun, 2014). This analysis technique is composed of six steps: (a) data familiarization, (b) code development and coding, (c) theme development, (d) theme revisions, (e) theme finalization and theme definition development, and (f) report generation (Braun et al., 2014).

I performed familiarization by reading each transcript for two times. During the second reading, I highlighted relevant texts that directly addressed the research questions of the study (Braun et al., 2014). I then performed coding. I first developed a coding scheme by identifying codes for the highlighted items in three interviews. I then developed the coding scheme by applying the codes to all the interview data. I then combined similar codes to create a group. Each group represented a theme that was labeled in relation to the answers to the research questions (Braun et al., 2014). After having the initial list of themes, I revised the themes by combining two small groups or decomposing one big group into two smaller but more concise themes. I then finalized the themes by identifying major themes and minor themes based on the frequencies in the raw coded data (Braun et al., 2014). Each theme was defined in relation to the research questions. In the sixth step, I wrote the report of the findings, which is presented in Chapter 4.



## **Issues of Trustworthiness**

Trustworthiness is the qualitative counterpart of validity and reliability in quantitative studies (Birt et al. 2016; Elo et al., 2014). To improve trustworthiness, a qualitative researcher must improve four aspects of the study – dependability, transferability, credibility, and confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The details of improving these aspects of the study are discussed in this section.

### **Credibility**

Credibility is the qualitative counterpart of internal validity in quantitative researcher (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Nevertheless, I also asked follow-up questions for the sole purpose of collecting in-depth and more comprehensive yet relevant data for the study. Another method that was used in order to improve credibility is member checking (Birt et al., 2016). Each participant reviewed his or her own interview data and initial interpretations to ensure the accuracy of the information.

### **Transferability**

Transferability is the qualitative counterpart of external validity in quantitative research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Transferability is a description of the applicability of the results to other settings or contexts (Connelly, 2016; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). To improve transferability, I provided “thick description” or comprehensive discussion of the findings of the study. In this manner, future researchers and readers can assess easily if the findings are applicable to other setting or not. Similarly, I provided a complete description of the procedures that were implemented to allow other researchers to easily replicate the study.

**Dependability**

Reliability in quantitative research studies is likened to dependability in qualitative studies (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). To improve the dependability, I provided an audit trail. Researchers claim that an audit trail is an effective measure that will improve dependability by providing readers a basis for assessing the procedures and results that are relevant to the study (Ang, Embi, & Yunus, 2016). In the audit trail, I included the complete documentation procedures that were implemented for this study, as well as the outputs for the different steps undertaken for this phenomenological research. Based on the documentation, readers can easily assess the dependability of the study.

**Confirmability**

Confirmability is described as the objectivity of the findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Therefore, minimization of subjectivity or bias improved confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Moreover, I performed bracketing by acknowledging sources of personal biases, such as experiences, perceptions, and expectations related to the study being conducted.

**Ethical Procedures**

Addressing ethical issues is one of the main considerations when conducting a study that involves human participants. In this section, the procedures for addressing ethical concerns are discussed. These issues include IRB approval, informed consent, data security and confidentiality, and voluntary participants.

### **Institutional Review Board Approval**

As part of ensuring that the rights of the participants were ensured, obtained IRB approval (approval number [2019.02.1 - 211:43:26-06'00']). In the IRB report, I presented the procedures that were taken in order to address ethical issues and ensure that the risks to participants was minimal. In the IRB report, I also discussed the procedures to be implemented to ensure ethical concerns were addressed during recruitment (e.g., informed consent). Before conducting any data recruitment and collection procedures, I first obtained IRB approval to avoid any conflicts while performing the research and interacting with the participants.

### **Informed Consent**

During the recruitment phase, each participant received a copy of the informed consent form. The contents of the form educated the participants about the purpose of the study, scope of participation (e.g., interviews, member checking), minimal risks, confidentiality agreement, data handling and management, voluntary participation, procedure for termination of participation, audio recording of interviews, and possible implications of the study to women leadership in African immigrant churches. No individual was included in this study as participants without reading and signing the informed consent form. However, only those who agreed to the contents of the consent form had to affix their signature.

### **Data Security and Participant Confidentiality**

Confidentiality is an important consideration when conducting data collection with human participants. To keep the identity of the participant confidential, I used

pseudonyms to replace the name of the participants. The church where the participant serves as a leader was also changed to a pseudonym. These pseudonyms were used in the data sheets, result reports, and final dissertation write-up.

For confidentiality of data, I kept all written and printed sheets with information related to the study. These forms included, but were not limited to, printed interview guide, notes during interviews, letters to different organizations and individuals, and interview transcripts. These files were kept in a locked cabinet inside the private office or room that I only had the access. I also kept all electronic files in a password-protected external storage or hard drive. The hard drive was placed inside the same locked cabinet where the printed forms were placed. All these records and files are kept in the safe location for 5 years after the culmination of the study. After the 5-year storage period, all data will be deleted through burning, shredding, or permanent deletion.

### **Volunteer Participants**

All participants were volunteers. Nevertheless, my family member, friend, relative, or colleague was not recruited to ensure that conflict of interest was minimized. Moreover, the participants were not given incentives for agreeing to participate in the study. Similarly, women leaders who declined to participate were not punished or given consequences for their decision.

Any participant had the option to quit being part of the study at any point after signing the informed consent. No consequences were incurred for the decision to quit. However, quitting participants had to inform me about their decision through email, phone conversation, or personal communication. Any data collected from the participant

were returned once the decision was communicated to me. Their information was included in the study. The participants were compensated by being given a 25-gift card at Target, Amazon.com, or a local store.

### **Summary**

Chapter 3 is about the methodology of the study. The major points in chapter 3 are grounded on the need to address the purpose and research questions of the study. The phenomenon that was explored is women in leadership positions within African immigrant churches in the United States. Therefore, a qualitative phenomenological study was implemented.

## Chapter 4: Results

### **Introduction**

This study was carried out to address the gap in the current literature relating to the role of women leadership in African immigrant churches. Few researchers have explored the unique challenges faced by women in obtaining top leadership positions in African immigrant churches (Mensah et al., 2013; Madsen & Scribner, 2017; Pew Research Forum, 2017; RCCG Women in Ministry, 2017). I was therefore motivated to understand the views of the women leaders in such churches on their experiences regarding the journey to leadership and what they encountered as female leaders in African immigrant churches. In this study, I sought to address the gap by exploring the experiences of women in leadership positions in African immigrant churches in the United States.

To understand the experiences of women in leadership positions in African immigrant churches in the United States, I adopted a qualitative methodological approach rooted in phenomenology. Phenomenology allowed me to obtain in-depth information and knowledge about the experiences of women in leadership positions and allowed the development of knowledge and answers to the research questions to be driven by the participants. I implemented the phenomenological approach using semi-structured interviews to get in-depth information about the experiences of women in leadership, which was important in the construction of knowledge and meaning about the research purpose. The interviews focused on one research question that was subdivided into three subquestions as listed below:

- RQ1: What are the leadership experiences of women in leadership positions in the African immigrant church in the United States?
- SQ1: How do women experience the factors that contributed to their success in obtaining leadership positions in the African immigrant church?
- SQ 2: How do women describe barriers or challenges in obtaining leadership positions in the African immigrant church?
- SQ3: How do women describe gender related issues in obtaining leadership positions in the African immigrant church?

In this chapter, I provide an in-depth description of the aspects that informed the process of data collection and analysis. The chapter also includes a detailed description of the results with emphasis on the participants' demographics, the setting, codes, themes, and subthemes that emerged and how the themes addressed the research questions.

### **Demographic Data**

Table 1 shows the demographics of each of the 12 study participants. The participants are identified by numerical code. The average age of the participants was 48 years with the minimum age being 30 years and the maximum being 60 years. All participants were from African countries including Kenya ( $n = 3$ ), Nigeria ( $n = 3$ ), Ghana ( $n = 3$ ), Tanzania ( $n = 2$ ) and Zimbabwe ( $n = 1$ ). Four of the participants had attained master's degrees as their highest level of education, four had doctoral degrees, and the other four held bachelor's degrees in various disciplines. Nine of the participants were married; one widowed; one divorce, and one single. Eight of the respondents were from the Seventh Day Adventist Church (SDA), whereas others were from either the RCCG-

Household of Faith, The Church of Pentecost USA (Ghana) - Pentecostal, or the Pentecostal — RCCG Light House. Table 1 also indicates various roles of participants in their respective churches. The participants had varying years of experience in their current roles with an average of 4 years. The least experienced had only 1 year of experience, whereas the most experienced had 10 years. The participants were also noted to have varying years of experience in other church-related roles with an average of 6 years. The least experienced in other roles had only 1 year of experience while the most experienced had 10 years (see Table 1).



Table 1

*Description of the Participant Demographics*

Participant	Age	Origin	Highest level of education	Marital status	Current role	YCR	YO R	Church
1	60	Nigeria	BA	Married	Assistant pastor	5	10	RCCG Household of Faith
2	43	Kenya	Masters	Single	Women ministry/hospitality	2	1	SDA
3	50	Tanzania	Masters	Married	Assistant director in educational ministry	1	2	Seventh-Day Adventist
4	41	Ghana	Doctorate of nursing practice	Married	Women's Leader	3	2	The Church of Pentecost USA INC (Ghana)- Pentecostal
5	30	Kenya	Masters	Married	Children's ministry leader	2	14	SDA
6	60	Nigeria	Masters in education	Married	Leadership by design	10	10	RCCG Light House
7	60	Ghana	BSN	Married	Health and temperance	5	6	SDA
8	37	Tanzania	Doctoral candidate	Divorced	Assistant health leader	5	10	SDA
9	54	Nigeria	Ph.D. in organizational leadership	Married	Executive director for church NGO and a church pastor	5	2	Pentecostal—RCCG Light House
10	55	Ghana	RN BSN	Widowed	Children ministry and women's Ministry	1	3	DFW Ghanaian SDA
11	50	Zimbabwe	BSN	Married	Assistant Sabbath school superintendent	2	4	SDA
12	40	Kenya	Doctor of nursing practice	Married	Health ministry and international missions	10	10	SDA

*Note.* Origin refers to the country of origin; YCR refers to years in current role, and YOR refers years in other roles

### **Data Collection Process**

To collect data for this research, I recruited participants by sending a letter to the church elders asking them to distribute the flyers with my contact information. The flyers were only sent to the church elders who had consented to have research carried out in their church. I had sought church consent through a written request letter addressed to the church elders. I adopted purposive sampling using a set of eligibility criteria to facilitate the selection of the participants who were best suited to answer the study research questions. I then sent invitation e-mails describing the study and eligibility criteria to the participants who expressed interest to participate. Before the collection of the data, I ensured that the participants had a good understanding of the study, their rights, and their roles in the research. The participants were also given time to ask questions regarding any aspect of research and the privacy and confidentiality details.

The participants, after reading and understanding the consent forms I sent to them via e-mail, gave consent by signing the forms or by stating, "I consent." They also consented to provide certain details regarding themselves such as their church, age, marital status, place of origin, experience, and the position they held. They also consented to have the interview audiotaped. Upon consenting, the participants set up an appropriate time and date for the interviews. I carried out the interviews as agreed with the participant, using the interview guide (see Appendix B). The interviews took place between June, 2017, and July; 2017, in a private room in a public library and were attended only by the participant and me. I recorded the interviews using a digital audio recorder, which I stored in a secured cabinet before transcribing the information

verbatim, typing the transcripts using Microsoft Word, and storing them in a password-protected computer.

### **Data Analysis**

The analysis of data involved reading the interview transcripts to understand the knowledge developed by the participants. I read the interviews before I identified the codes. The codes in this study involved the constructs I developed during the process of reading the interviews as a means of summarizing the information or the views shared by the participants. I used these codes as a flexible way of analyzing and interpreting data. Development of the codes was an iterative process, whereby during the subsequent reading cycles the repetitive codes or the codes that communicated similar information were combined. During the reading cycles, which were three to four per interview, I discarded some of the information that did not relate to the experiences of women in leadership positions in the African immigrant church in the United States. An example of the interview response that was deemed irrelevant to this study was from Participant 3, who said, “My journey - all right. It's been a long journey in any way. It has been a long journey. Before I moved to America, I was once in Europe. That's in Ireland”

I coded the 12 interview transcripts using the traditional method of hand-coding. I conducted line-by-line and focused coding on each transcript. This resulted in a total of 474 line-by-line coded phrases and 399 focused codes for the 12 transcripts. Overall, a total of 873 line-by-line and focused codes were generated. I provided definitions for each of the 399 focused codes based on the context of the transcript and added these definitions to the codebook. I developed five themes and assigned a specific color to each. The themes were: Challenges or Gender-Based Challenges (assigned red color);

Support (highlighted green); Personal Factors Contributed to Success (highlighted purple); Women's Role in the Church (highlighted gold); and Leadership Style (highlighted green). Next, the focused codes for each transcript were color-coded based on the content to align with the corresponding theme. The following table provides a summary of the breakdown of the total number of aggregate family codes per each theme.

Table 2:

*Description of the Total Number of Initially Developed Codes for Each Theme*

Theme	Aggregate codes
Challenges or gender-based challenges	120
Support	84
Personal factors	78
Women's role in church	56
Leadership style	61
Total	399

Following subsequent processing and further aggregation of the codes that were regarded as similar, the 399 codes that were obtained were further reduced to 61. Each of the codes that was developed from the 12 interviews is identified in Appendix C. The process of aggregating the codes was based on the analysis of the content that was deemed similar. For example, most of the women leaders shared their views on the effect of African culture on the ability to occupy top leadership position by indicating as follows: men are placed in most leadership positions” women are not allowed to be a pastor or elder; women are not given the same opportunity or positions as men, such as an elder role; some people are not receptive to having a female leader or pastor because of the African culture. I identified such descriptions as “Women tend to experience bias

and discrimination influenced by African culture." A similar approach was used in the development of themes that are described in Table 3. The subthemes were also identified that described the various aspects of the theme. For instance, the theme on "Challenges" was described by four main subthemes that included challenges related to African values and expectations, gender-related challenges, challenges related to available resources, and doctrinal challenges. The description of the subthemes is provided in Table 4.

### **Evidence of Trustworthiness**

I ensured that the study achieved trustworthiness by adopting the guidelines provided by Lincoln and Guba (1985). Based on the guidelines, I assessed the credibility, transferability, and confirmability within the study.

#### **Credibility**

The credibility of the study was enhanced based on the steps laid out in chapter 3. In-depth and comprehensive data was used in addressing the study research questions. I ensured comprehensiveness and clarity of the data by using follow-up questions during the interviews. An example is where I sought clarification of the term that was used by participant 2, I asked "Okay. You mentioned Dorcas. Is this the same thing as a women's ministry?" Based on this question, I was able to understand that the participant referred to leadership in the women ministry. I also enhanced the credibility by transcribing all the information from each interview and the responses were typed in a word document. The information that was typed on the word document was then checked for accuracy by replaying the recorded interviews and checking each word. The credibility of the research was further enhanced by the use of member checking where each participant reviewed a typed copy of her recorded interviews and initial interpretations to ensure the accuracy of

the information. The steps taken, therefore, ensured that there were no omissions or introduction of extraneous information that could compromise the integrity of the study.

### **Transferability**

As indicated in Chapter 3, Transferability is a concept that describes the attempts made in qualitative studies to achieve generalizability and, therefore, it is an equivalent of external validity. However, this study did not go to great lengths to achieve generalizability since it is not the major focus in qualitative research (Creswell, 2013). However, I believed that there is a likelihood that the experiences shared by the women leaders who took part in this study were similar to that of the women leaders who did not take part in the study, which motivated the description of the findings to enhance transferability. The research enhanced the transferability by providing in-depth account of the views presented by the participants, which facilitated the study to comprehensively describe the experiences of women in leadership positions within the African immigrant church in the United States. The comprehensive description or the thick description that is provided includes the description of the experience, places of origin, roles/leadership position, and churches to facilitate a better understanding of the responses and the contexts. In this research, transferability has also been enhanced through the provision of a complete description of the procedures that were implemented to allow other researchers to easily replicate the study. The fact that the participants were drawn from a cross section of African countries also helped with the transferability of the study.

### **Dependability**

Dependability refers to the consistency and reliability of the research findings and the degree to which research procedures are documented. This researcher achieved

enhanced dependability as evidenced by the strict use of the views shared by the women leaders regarding their experiences as leaders within the African immigrant church in the United States. I based the answers to the research questions on the knowledge that emerged from the unedited data that was transcribed in line with the verbatim responses from each of the women leaders. As indicated in chapter 3, I provided an audit trail through the complete documentation of the procedures that were implemented for this study such as the process of data collection, data management, coding cycles, and the data analysis, as well as the outputs for the individual steps. I also utilized the review services from the dissertation committee chair, Dr. Susana Verdinelli who has immense expertise and experience in research methods. Dr. Verdinelli reviewed the transcribed interview transcripts and process that was used in the identification of codes and themes that emerged from the reviewed transcripts.

### **Confirmability**

The confirmability was attained through the adoption of strategies that focused on reducing potential biases such as researcher biases. This research achieved enhanced confirmability through the use of the interview guide, which ensured that I did not ask irrelevant and biased questions during the interview. I also enhanced the confirmability by acknowledging of any of my preferences, experiences, beliefs, and expectations that were related to the topic of the study. I carefully carried out the analysis of the data to ensure that interpretations were aligned with the knowledge that was developed by the participants. Each of the interpretations that were made in this research is supported by actual data from interviews.



I also ensured that I carried out the interviews with the focus on encouraging the participant to freely share her views. The research remained attentive and neutral to any thoughts and feelings shared by the participants. Evidence is abundant from the 12 interviews that showed my attempts to remain attentive and focused on the views shared by the participant. Some of the evidence included the repetition of the few of the words uttered by the participants when answering the questions. For example, when interviewing Participant 3, I repeated the words such as "Okay. That's your calling. Okay" confirmability was also enhanced through the review of codes and the themes that emerged from the initial codes. The dissertation chair and I collaboratively reviewed the codes and emerging themes.

## **Results**

### **Description of the Emerging Themes**

The analysis of the interview responses resulted in the development of five themes and 16 sub-themes. Initially, the themes were described individually after which an explanation of how they answer the research questions was provided.

Table 4 presents the emerging themes and subthemes.

Table 3:

*Development of the themes from the codes that emerged from the interviews*

Themes (5)	Second cycle codes (61)	Definition of the themes
<b>Theme 1:</b> Challenges/ Gender-Related Challenges	Finding volunteers; Women tend to experience bias and discrimination influenced by African culture; Negative perceptions of women by men; Men surprised at the success of women; Time-management; Lack of desire and ambition; Ministry lacks finances Women experience exclusion; Women placed in gender-based roles; Lack of opportunity; Young women not assisted as should; Lack of support Women not considered equal to men; Not being informed; Rejection of female authority; Not allowed to let children preach; People not educated about women; Falsely accused by older gentleman; Caught in middle because of position	This is defined as challenges, gender-related challenges, and barriers experienced by the participants or women in the church, often related to the traditional African culture and negative perception of women in leadership roles.
<b>Theme 2:</b> Support Received	Vote; Appointment well-received; Nominated; Confirmed by bishop; Support from pastor/ female pastor/ leadership; Leadership is shared; Not looked down upon much; Support from husband/ family; Support received from volunteers; Opportunities for leadership; Assistance from leadership; Women receive training; Women allowed to be in leadership roles; Women in leadership roles are increasing	This is defined as support received by the participants in their leadership roles in the church in relation to their positions and appointments, as well as how women, in general, receive support in the church

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<b>Theme 3:</b> Personal Factors that Contribute to Success	Completion of work tasks; Performs above expectations; Grew up around strong women in leadership; Influenced by Grandfather; Prayer and prioritizing God; Support from family and staff; Observes women in leadership; Personal commitment; Qualifications; Prior experience; Inner strength; Life principles	This is defined as personal factors that contributed to the success of the participants in their leadership role in the church, including their family relationships, prior experiences, and motivation.
<b>Theme 4:</b> Women's Role in the Church x	Being more vocal; Opportunities increasing; Women have had to fight to prove themselves; Women's role in the church is not equal to men; Qualities of women; Women carry out daily tasks; Women's role and the Bible	This is defined as how women's role is viewed in the church in relation to their gender, ability to advance to leadership roles, negative and positive perceptions of their positions, their voice, and in relation to African and U.S. cultures.
<b>Theme 5:</b> Leadership Style	Leadership through carrying out duties; Leadership through conflict resolution; Leadership through compassion; Leadership through connecting people; Leadership through commitment; Leadership through planning and organization; Leadership through being vocal; Leadership preparation by being a wife; Leadership style rooted in life principles and ideas	This is defined as how the leadership styles of the participants have influenced their success, including how they oversee their ministry, the relationship to church members, including the immigrant community.

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*Note. (n= 12)*

Table 4:

*Description of the obtained themes and subthemes*

Themes	Subthemes	Themes and sub-themes' sample participant data
<b>Theme 1:</b> Challenges	i. Challenges associated with African values and expectations	Participant 4: in the culture from where I came from, women stayed in the kitchen. Participant 4: in the African community, there's always the fact that women are not always held to the same platform as men. Participant 1: it's almost like they look down on the women or they feel like the woman is not capable of doing what they can do.
	ii. Gender-related challenges	Participant 9: They still want to resist us. When you're delegating, some men don't like to be delegated Participant 1: people are reluctant in helping.
	iii. Challenges related to available resources	Participant 2: When it comes down to the budget and balancing thing, I may be at the bottom of the list, in terms of finances, where the finances are allocated. Participant 6: Bible directs us that men have the headship, so I don't see women trying to strike, [or] want to be pastor or elder.
	iv. Doctrinal influence	
<b>Theme 2:</b> Support	i. Support when performing leadership roles	Participant 1: in the beginning we got a bit of resistance about a female running things, but now they embrace you as a person and are actually now willing to work with you. Participant 2: So mentoring is also another big thing that I get by being in the leadership position that I'm in. Participant 1: but now I see more females involved just because some people are more comfortable with having female elders in visitation, [inaudible], professional problems.
	ii. Training and mentoring	And then the main one here, we have a female pastor. So that has really even opened up the eyes of the little ones Participant 2: I think women in our church currently right now have great opportunities of leadership positions because our pastor is a woman.

Participant 1: So if you can actually volunteer to be head, they will try and do as much as they can to support you and they're behind you.

**Theme 3:**  
Personal factors

- i. Qualification and experience  
Participant 4: And in previous years, I've been holding a lot of positions at church. So apart from being in education, I have experience of just holding positions and carry out my duty.
- ii. Hard work and competence  
Participant 1: more women are given chances of leadership roles because they see more that women can multitask and women do make things happen.  
Participant 1: But then they get surprised because a lot of times when you put women in these positions, they actually end up being more successful than their male counterpart.
- iii. Determination  
Participant 1: I go above and beyond to help our children that as far as the [inaudible] opportunities on other ministries
- iv. Positive societal influence  
Participant 4: Women, we are so committed to whatever we believe in. When we believe in something, women, we are committed. I'm committed more than my husband now.  
Participant 2: So I think one of the factors is that I grew up around a lot of women leaders.

**Theme 4:**  
Women's role

- Limited leadership opportunities  
Participant 11: Some people believe that a woman cannot go beyond leadership and they do everything to block it.”  
Participant 7: Already we're not on an equal part, but as a woman, you're always trying to prove yourself that you can do this.
- Agitation for women inclusion in leadership  
Participant 4: few of us at church, we are in the leadership. So we voice it out. So we voice it out and so far, it's better.  
Participant 2: So I think the caring nature of a woman-- the caring nature of the woman and the service-hood of a woman plays a great role in the leadership position I have in health care.
- Positive feminine attributes

**Theme 5:**  
Leadership

- Leadership approaches adopted by  
Participant 2: I think, in the last one year has been broken a lot because we currently have more deaconesses and we've had lady elders, and our pastors is a female pastor.  
Participant 1: I think I'm more empathetic to different people's feelings, and I'm more open to different ideas.

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women  
leaders

- Addressing  
the  
challenges  
in  
leadership.
- 

Participant 1: I'll let them come early and we'll arrange, by the time he comes in, I'll just let him know this is how we're going to-- that it's not a discussion.

**Theme 1: Challenges**

The main theme to emerge in this data was related to various challenges participants experienced in reaching leadership positions. The challenges that were identified from the interviews with the women leaders in the African immigrant churches mainly focused on the barriers or the factors that hinder women from occupying the top leadership positions in such churches. Four main subthemes emerged within this theme: challenges related to African values and expectations, gender-related challenges, challenges related to available resources and doctrinal challenges. Each of these subthemes is described below.

**Challenges related to African values and expectations.** According to the obtained interviews, the challenges that were grouped under the African influence were the most prevalent. In this study, the challenges that are related to African influence are mainly the gender role expectations for women based on African values. Based on the obtained interviews it is evident that the cultural expectations regarding the role of women in African culture impede the selection or appointment of women to certain positions that are considered to be a reserve for men. In total 11 of the 12 respondents revealed scenarios where African values and expectations have hindered their ability to occupy the top leadership position in the church.

It emerges from the interviews that the influence of the African values and expectations leads to the women in the African immigrant churches being offered roles that are considered feminine. The participants revealed that the leadership positions within the church that are considered to be feminine, according to the African culture,

such as the roles in the children department, kitchen department, and welcoming of the visitors were reserved for the women. The participants further indicated that the other positions that were considered to be equated to the positions of the head of the family were reserved for men. The two major positions that were considered to be well suited for men as per the African traditions included the elders and pastor's positions. The participants, therefore, indicated that in the African immigrant churches where most of the congregation embraces the African culture, the women do not get the opportunity to lead.

Participant 1 stated:

When we come up to picking or nominating elders, you don't hear a female name being mentioned at all. They all are just suggesting all these men. They felt like there was something I could bring for the children. Even [in the] building committee you hear them just bringing up men. We have some female engineers. And then just the culture that a man is the head, and this should be on top of everything, that becomes a challenge because it's almost like they look down on the women or they feel like the woman is not capable of doing what they can do.

Participant 2 stated:

There are certain jobs that have been considered male jobs. I think some women, because of how they grew up and the culture that they came in, they don't push for those positions. Being a female comes with its challenges and especially when it comes to leadership roles because in our culture, men are the leaders in all.

Participant 4 stated:



“In the culture from where I came from, women stayed in the kitchen. And then the church I am going to is very-- a lot of African people, so the culture from Africa is in the church.”

The participants also revealed that the positions and roles of the women in the family as dictated by the African culture sometimes hinder their ability to effectively discharge their leadership roles in the church. The views shared by the participants suggest that women leaders are faced with challenge of balancing the demands that are imposed by the culture defined roles and the demands associated with their roles in church leadership. Participants indicate that for them to succeed they need to have good time-management skills, which enable them to strike a good balance between the cultural demands such as taking care of children and providing of leadership in the church. Three of the 12 participants expressed how the roles imposed by the African culture impose time limitation on the women in the leadership positions in the African immigrant churches.

Participant 2 stated:

Some of the barriers are being a mother and a leader. Because that's a very hard balance. So there are always challenges of how much you dedicate within your leadership to your family versus the position that you're in. I think, one of the barriers, of course, like I mentioned, is the time-management part of being a mother or being a wife and now serving in a position at the church and balance the two. Sometimes you feel like one pulls you more, of course, family, than you.

Participant 4 stated:

Because I'm the mother, I'm the teacher, I'm the wife. So time [is a barrier], because of all the responsibility [ies] mentioned. Yeah, because you're the mother at home, the wife, so sometimes, it's very hard to check that role and responsibility. So, definitely [I have] to plan ahead to give me a time to plan my life, too, because otherwise, I cannot make it because of my responsibility in my house.

Due to the fear of contradicting the African traditions and culture or due to conditioning over a long period of time, it seems women in the African immigrant churches are reluctant to seek top church leadership positions. It seems that even when the women have the required qualifications, the African culture seems to hold them back. Some participants have become comfortable with playing second fiddle to men in church leadership due to the long periods of culture-based domination by men in leadership. A total of three of the 12 participants expressed disinterest with top leadership positions as a result of the influence of the restrictive African culture that prohibit women from being top church leaders. Participant 2 stated:

I think some women, because of how they grew up and the culture that they came in, they don't push for those positions. There are certain positions that I've shied away from because I've always had this perception that they are male positions.

Participant 6 stated:

Okay. What it is basically, we know our roles. From the past, we know there are certain positions, like a pastor or [head elder?], [these are?] the men's, the headship. So it's accepted in the communities I've been to. But even my first

church I went to back in the day, that was how it was. The African-American church, they accept that. And they have the [headship?] and keep it [inaudible] or [elders?]. So it's been like that.

**Gender-related challenges.** The responses that were obtained also revealed that women also face gender related challenges that impede their ascendancy to the top leadership positions in the African immigrant churches. In this study the gender-related challenges include the negative view of women in leadership positions by men and the lack of support and stereotypical views of women. Most of the respondents indicated that the gender-related challenges sometimes make them not to desire a leadership position. The gender related challenges that were revealed by the participants ranged from looking down upon women leaders, disregard of the directives given by the female leaders by the congregation, and the disrespect of the female leaders due to their gender.

The interviews from the women leaders indicated that often some members of the church look down upon them due to their gender. The participants indicate that the female leaders face a difficult time discharging their duties because some of the members directly reject to listen to them and sometime tell them to their face. The participants indicated that the male leaders in similar position are subjected not to the rejection that the female leaders face.

Participant 3 stated:

I believe one of the barriers then is people look at you like oh, you're a woman and you want to lead especially in African churches. Like oh, I don't want a woman to pray for me. They will know that you're ordained as a pastor, you

qualify to pray for them but they're still like, okay. Maybe because of African thing that they go-- I don't know how to put it. They're like, I don't want a woman to lead me. I remember when I was growing up, my daddy said that also. That, "I don't want to go to a church where a female is the leader, is the pastor."

Participant 9 stated:

The role of your-- calling or ordination in the church, you want to do some or delegate some duties before men. Some men will resist it either verbally or through body language. It's like who are you as a woman to command me or to--? so even no matter how nicely or respectfully you say it, they just see it as a woman commanding them or leading them. So some will just not do it or just quietly or verbally say it out to your face, so.

Participant 11 stated:

There will be a time when as the pastor's wife, I've given instruction as duties, and people will not want to do. Now if pastor goes there and gives them the same instructions, they will do it, everything. So that's an insult like that.

Participants also indicated that it is not only the members of the church that look down upon the women in leadership positions but also their fellow leaders. The views shared by the women leaders revealed that some of male leaders look down upon them as indicated by their failure to listen to their opinions. Some of the participants who play the role of assistant leader to a male leader indicate that male leaders only want their views to be adhered to and never consider the views of the female leaders. The women leaders noted that the views of the women leaders are particularly regarded by the men leaders

especially during leaders' meetings and their efforts to seek audience with other leaders is often considered a sign of disrespect. Participant 1 stated:

He [male head leader] wants to be in control, full control to where I can look like I don't know anything. And then predominantly, it's been the men that take all positions in the Seventh-day Adventist church. And then just the culture that a man is the head, and this should be on top of everything, that becomes a challenge because it's almost like they look down on the women or they feel like the woman is not capable of doing what they can do. So even in the board meeting, for instance-- we have a female staff here. And so for some reason - I don't know why - they've chosen me to challenge, at least for their voices to be heard. And that sometimes can lead to being disrespectful of the office. Which, if it was a male pastor, I don't think that would be the case. Sometimes it's to show that dominance over the female issues. Yeah. Because sometimes we've had some board meetings that were not very pleasant just because of male views, them wanting to express that dominance and just to show that, even though you're holding office, we're still kind of above you.

Participant 3 stated:

But I tell you the truth is there are some things that a senior pastor still wants a man to do Sometimes. Yeah. We said, "I need a man to do this." A man passed away in the church and we were going there for the funeral and they said, "I need a man to [go?] and do this." Yeah. That we women-- that we're so emotional and

want that-- because of our emotions, that we need somebody that will go and encourage the family. Not a woman that will go there and cry with them.

Participant 4 stated:

And then if I'm raising my hands to say something, and then they pick a man and I was the first one to raise my hand, I interrupt it and say, "I was the first one raising my hand." Yeah, they don't like it, but [inaudible]. They will laugh about it, yeah. They don't give it an opportunity, and even something similar [comes?]. We are in the meeting, kind of [inaudible]. [The other thing?] [inaudible] is you never [go get tea?]. Just given that chance to express your concern, yeah, it's not there. So giving chance to explain, they challenge your idea, they just ignore your [inaudible]. [inaudible] it's just like a regular thing, but when it comes to a man, it's just like, "Yeah." Yeah, so, that's me.

The views shared by the participants suggest that the disrespect and bias against women in leadership demands that they need to prove themselves. The participants indicated that unlike men leaders, the female counterparts are forced to deliver more to earn respect and for their leadership roles to be considered legitimate. The participants indicated that they feel pressured to work excessively hard for them to be accepted.

Participant 7 stated:

I'm thinking I have to work twice as hard as a man. And I have to do twice as better to be on the same level. And I have to work twice as hard. I have to achieve twice as much to get the same level of respect for what I do as a woman.

Participant 9 stated:

Yeah. You have to prove your ability, as I said, all the time. When you are [inaudible] in any way, you have to prove yourself 10 times better than the people [inaudible]. So the same thing in the church, when you're a woman, you have to prove yourself 10 times better than the men for you to be acceptable.

The views shared by the participants also suggest that the unique attributes of women are seen as weakness rather than strength. Participants indicated that the emotional nature of women is often taken as a weakness and therefore seen as unable to carry out their leadership duties such as representing the church in certain events. The participants therefore suggested that the church often support the need for married women who want to lead the church in the senior position such as pastoring need to co-pastor with the husband. According to the participants, the push to co-pastor with the husband is based on the belief that female pastors need to depend on their husbands for direction, and guidance, which is often not the case with the male pastors who need to pastor.

Participant 3 stated:

A man passed away in the church and we were going there for the funeral and they said, "I need a man to [go?] and do this." Yeah. That we women-- that we're so emotional and want that-- because of our emotions, that we need somebody that will go and encourage the family. Not a woman that will go there and cry with them.

Participant 9 stated:

Because the founder of the church allowed the wife to also be a pastor. She was also ordained as a pastor. So they both co-pastor the church. So as a result, they give freedom for women coming behind them. Especially the pastor-- the overseer. They're called head of the church, the overseers. So the general overseer. Then the wife is also co-overseer, general overseer. So though there's always women discrimination, here and there, based on some men [inaudible] it's only men who can lead us. But as long as your husband is alive they believe your husband is the pastor [inaudible] you are both co-pastors. They still believe it's your husband who is-- you are under your pastor. Yeah. You're under the leadership of your husband.

**Challenges related to the available resources.** The other sub-theme related to the challenges faced by women leaders in the African immigrant churches is the challenges related to the available resources. In this study, the challenges related to the available resources refer to where the distribution or assigning of the resources to the different leaders is influenced by the gender of the leader. The sub-theme describes the unequal distribution or assigning of the resources to the departments led by the women leaders. The resources that emerge from the interview include the financial resources and support from church members.

The interviews that were collected from the female leaders indicated that the support that is offered by the church members to the leaders vary based on gender. The participants indicated that the female leaders, unlike the male leaders, are not given adequate support by the church. The participants indicated that their efforts to invite the



church members to participate in certain roles often fall on deaf ears. According to the participants, the problem is more prevalent among male members.

Participant 1 stated:

So this ministry, people wanted to be there and be successful, but they're reluctant in helping. They want their chief to be hard and to give activities and do things, but then they're reluctant in being part of the process of actually making those kids do stuff. That's just usually a struggle, not just now, but in the past. But what we're doing now is trying to involve both males and females because we realized a lot of times it's a lot of women that end up being involved.

Participant 5 stated:

However, many, many times, you get nominated into a position, but then you are not able to function effectively because you don't get all the support that you need. Because sometimes you may ask for, "Hey, can everybody please remain behind because we want to put this program together. We need volunteers." And nobody remains behind. So that becomes very difficult. And then you are forced to narrow [inaudible] to calling one church member after another after another and begging people to, "Hey, can you please do this? Can you please do this?" I don't think it should be like that.

The other challenge regarding the distribution of the available resources relates to the finances. The views shared by the participants suggest that women leaders are not given sufficient financial support to enable them to accomplish the duties associated with their leaders. Without financial backing, the women leaders risk failing in their duties and

are often forced to solicit funds from members. According to the views shared by the women leaders, the failure to provide sufficient financial backing makes their ability to deliver challenging.

Participant 2 noted:

That's a hard one. Well, yes. Finances. Because to do some of the things that we do, we have to be able to have finances, especially when it comes to the health care, health fairs, and stuff like that. But when it comes down to the budget and balancing thing, I may be at the bottom of the list, in terms of finances, where the finances are allocated. And so that sometimes is very discouraging and very negative. But when we sit down for the budget, usually the budget is zero. So you have to raise your own money or look for other resources, donations, or come out of your own pocket in order to sustain the ministry that you have. Sometimes they're not sufficient [finances] to do the programs that need to be done.

**Challenges associated with doctrinal influences.** The fourth subtheme on the doctrinal influence describes the challenges associated with how the various African immigrant churches interpret the biblical teachings regarding the role of women in church leadership. The sub-theme focused on how theological teachings and the bible are used to limit the inclusion of women in the top leadership positions. The responses obtained from the women leaders suggest that biblical teachings are used to deny women the chance to occupy top leadership positions. According to the views shared by the participants, the positions that the bible does not allow women to occupy include the position of elders and pastors, which are reserved for men. It also emerges from the obtained interviews

that doctrinal beliefs of some African immigrant churches do not allow the ordination of women, which denies the women from occupying top leadership in the church organization.

Participant 2 stated:

Also in biblical account, a lot of times, the men are the leaders of the home, the leaders of the church. There is also fear of wanting to aspire to those leadership roles that have always been perceived as male roles, from maybe a biblical standpoint or a cultural standpoint.

Participant 6 stated: “The Bible directs us that men have the headship, so I don't see women trying to strike, [or] want to be [pastor or elder].”

## **Theme 2: Support**

Based on the analysis of the interviews that were obtained from the women leaders, it was observed that the other main theme that emerged is the theme relating to the support of women. In this study, the support theme describes the approaches, strategies, and actions that were deemed to promote or enable women leaders to effectively perform their leadership roles or even increase their chances of being selected to the top leadership position. The subthemes that emerged from this theme included the following support when performing leadership roles, and training and mentoring. A total of 36 codes were identified from the various interviews, which corresponded to two subthemes. Each of these subthemes is described below.

**Support when performing leadership roles.** The subtheme of support from the church leaders refers to the efforts being taken by the top leadership (male and female) to

advance the inclusion of women in the top leadership. The responses that were obtained also revealed that women leaders get support from various entities within the church and the family, which enables them to either ascend to the top leadership position in the African immigrant churches or be able to effectively carry out their leadership roles. Based on the views shared by the respondents, it emerged that the support the women get as they perform their roles can come from the members of the church, the fellow leaders and the family members. The participants also indicated the support that they get is in the form of the advice and verbal encouragement, volunteers who offer to help in accomplishing activities, and support in solving and coping with the challenges faced in the leadership.

A total of 8 participants shared views that indicated that women leaders in African immigrant churches get support from the members. The support from members can be in the form of the volunteering where the members with the required expertise offer to help in accomplishing the roles assigned by the female leaders. The participants indicated that they can delegate activities to members. Some of the members also offer/agree to be assistants to the women leaders and help to ensure that the leaders can accomplish their roles.

Participant 2 stated:

And also we like everyone to participate in all our activities. So when we do function, we try to get as many health-care providers within our church to participate and be a part of the program or come up with ideas that may benefit the program. The other ways of overcoming the time-management barrier is by--

when I was married, is to talk to my spouse and telling him that this is the job that God has led me to have some balance, so that I could participate in leading.

Participant 4 stated:

Yes, because we have members in the community. And those members-- yeah, we delegate activities, like if you have planned some [inaudible]-- orchestrated some activities in the [church?] [Inaudible], so we delegate those activities [so at least?] everybody can participate in an upcoming-- I mean, upcoming activity. Yeah.

Participant 12 stated:

My experience has been a positive one at this church. I was probably the youngest and first female administrator at the church. And if there was anybody that was opposed to it, they were not up front on that, so. And I had a lot of males that were supportive of that.

A total of 5 participants shared views that indicated that women leaders in African immigrant churches get support from fellow leaders. The support from the leaders is through the creation of a positive environment for the women leaders to carry out their roles. The participants indicated that some of the leaders such as the pastor help in working on the programs within their departments, which reduces the burden associated with their leadership roles.

Participant 1 stated:

We have a female pastor. I think she goes out of her way to make sure that she's tapping into potential leadership who are female so we can kind of have a balance of both sexes. I usually will say something about it, but then you don't want to be

confrontational in a church as a woman. But I tell pastor a lot of times, and she will take it one-on-one with the individuals involved. So we've seen some improvement.

Participant 11 stated:

We do all manners of training with [public?] [inaudible], economic [incoming?]. Often, it's an [incoming?] through us to be able to share names, both men and women, on how to be involved. So it's not narrowed down to only women, also pastors. We have a lot of pastors [inaudible]. So it's through this program, we'll be able to expose them.

A total of 3 participants shared views that indicated that women leaders in African immigrant churches get support from the family members. The support from the members of the family is through encouragement. The participants mainly indicated women leaders get support from their husbands, which is important given the role the women play in families in the African culture.

Participant 3 stated:

We were so committed to the church. Even my children then. Because we are not many. My children are the ushers. They are the ones that will play the drum. They are the ones that will sing. So it's like within the family, we were so committed and all that. The man (head pastor) came over where we started the fellowship. He came over to launch it, to pray and all that. And he gave some money and all that to buy some little, little things that we needed to start there

Participant 11 stated:

Luckily for me, I married a husband that is more or less like my father, also, like my best friend. Before we were married, I told him, "This is my father [again?] and I need to [inaudible]." And he told me, "You know what? Everybody is telling me, do whatever you want to do." So he supports me. So those are the two major factors that I would tell you that really, really encouraged me because right from the beginning, I knew what I want to do and I'm a go-getter. I just want to get [inaudible], and he always allowed me. And once again, he also says that we do things together.

**Training and mentoring.** The subtheme of training and mentoring refers to the efforts taken by the church to train women and mentor them for top leadership positions. Under this sub-theme, the mentoring services provided by the family members who have been in the leadership position were also considered. The responses that were obtained also revealed that women leaders get training on how to carry out their roles by the church. The views shared by the participants regarding mentoring showed that women leaders mainly get mentoring from fellow leaders who are in the senior position and from the family leaders who have been in leadership. The participants indicated the church has programs that offer training to the prospective women leaders. The training programs ensure that the women are well equipped with the skills and knowledge required to effectively to accomplish their leadership roles.

Participant 3 stated:

And also you've been born again Christian, you have to do what is called believers class. I went through all that. So after that, when you do the believer's

class, then you do what is called workers in training. We do that workers in training to train you if you want to be a worker in the church.

Participant 9 stated:

When you join the Redeemed Christian Church of God, they make you go through the workers training. Worker's training. So that's the [inaudible] a member of the church and they train you to be able to participate in some activities in the church based on your potential abilities.

### **Theme 3: Personal Factors**

The theme, which is defined as personal factors, refers to the factors that contribute to the success of the participants in their leadership role in the church. The factors that emerged from the interviews include family relationships, prior experiences, determination, and motivation. Based on the factors that emerged, four subthemes emerged the qualification and experience, hard work and competence, determination and positive societal influence. Each of the subthemes is discussed below:

**Qualification and experience.** The subtheme of qualification and experience describes that academic and professional training and the experiences that make each participant uniquely suited to the leadership position currently occupied. According to the views shared by the women leaders, it emerged that one of the personal factors that made them ascend to the leadership positions in the African immigrant churches is their experience. It also emerged that women were required to have the requisite qualification for the specific top leadership position.



According to the response given by the women leaders, it emerged that one of the factors that facilitate the ascendancy of the women to the leadership position is the experience. Experience in this study refers to the number of years that one has spent in the various leadership positions or the skills gained from performing the various leadership roles. It emerged from the study that all the women leaders who took part in the research had at least a year of experience in other roles with an average of 6 years per leader in other roles, which suggest that all the women leaders had prior experience before they were selected to the positions they occupied at the time of the interview. It also emerged that there are women leaders who have been in their current leadership for prolonged periods of 10 years while others had only occupied their positions for a year. Participant 2 stated:

I've always been in some type of leadership within the church since youth. Started being a youth leader when I was 19. And I have been in the church health leadership for almost four years, in different [inaudible] and so forth. And that's how I was appointed in that level of leadership.

Participant 4 stated: "And in previous years, I've been holding a lot of positions at church. So apart from being in education, I have experience of just holding positions and carry out my duty."

It also emerged that women leaders had the required qualifications that made them stand out and be selected for different leadership positions. The participants indicated that they had the academic background and professional training that made them fit for the specific. The academic and professional training impart the required skills

and knowledge that enable the women to effectively discharge their leadership roles. However, in some of the African immigrant churches, it emerges that the women are trained on specific skills before they can take up their leadership duties.

Participant 2 stated:

During that time, I also was aspiring to be a nurse and be part of the health field. And after I graduated in nursing, there was more desire to participate in helping our church members be a little bit more healthy. I think it was received well because most of the church members knew that I was within the health-care field and I was already proactive within the church leadership. So maybe they felt that they would be in good hands. But I think it was received well.

Participant 4 stated:

Yeah. I have Master's in Education, yeah. Yeah. Currently, I'm working as assistant director in the education department. Yeah, because I'm in education as my career, so the church [felt that?] because of my experience in education, I'm the right person to get that position.

**Hard work and competence.** The subtheme of hard work and competence describes the displayed work ethic that makes women successful in their leadership position. It emerged from the study that the women leaders perform above the expectation. The participants indicated that women leaders sometimes surprise the fellow leader with their success in executing their leadership roles.

The views shared by the participants suggest that women are hardworking. It become clear that despite the African culture, which puts pressure on the women leaders,

women can accomplish their leadership roles. It emerged that women leaders have the required competence to effectively discharge their leadership roles. Women can multitask and in so doing they can complete their roles. It also emerges that women have good organizational skills that enable them to plan and execute their roles.

Participant 1 stated:

I go above and beyond to help our children that as far as the [inaudible] opportunities on other ministries. But then they get surprised because a lot of times when you put women in these positions, they end up being more successful than their male counterpart. More women are given chances of leadership roles because they see more that women can multitask and women do make things happen.

Participant 4 stated, “So what I normally do, I just push in and push in and try to justify why I’m saying that. [But it’s there?] and there’s nothing I can do.”

Participant 7 stated:

I’m thinking I have to work twice as hard as a man. And I have to do twice as better to be on the same level. And I have to work twice as hard. I have to achieve twice as much to get the same level of respect for what I do as a woman.

**Determination.** The subtheme of determination describes the efforts of women in the leadership position to address the challenges that they face in their leadership position. It becomes clear from the views shared by the participants that women leaders display a high level of commitment, which enables them to overcome the hurdles that they face in their roles. It also emerges that woman leaders have the inner strength, which

enables them to withstand the challenges associated with their leadership roles. The determination of women is evident through their ability to complete their work tasks while addressing the demands associated with their family roles. Women leaders have the required commitment, which propels to success. Participants indicate that women leaders show a higher level of commitment compared to their male counterparts. It also emerges from the interviews that women leaders have the inner strength, which is evident by their willingness to carry out their leadership roles without fear of failure. The participants also indicate that women leaders are not ready to give up despite the various challenges that they face. The journey traveled by the women leaders to reach their various leadership positions is also evidence of inner strength. The women leaders also understand that they are needed to work up to 10 times more than men but they remain unfazed.

Participant 4 stated:

“Women, we are so committed to whatever we believe in. When we believe in something, women, we are committed. I'm committed more than my husband now.”

Participant 5 stated:

When you have to work with different areas of the church because in student ministry they are having children's [inaudible] and hospitality [inaudible], and you have to make sure that whatever hospitality needs they have, your kids have to-- Women's Day is coming up, then even though mainly a lot of people who are in hospitality will be women also, but these are now set-up entities. So you have to step in and make sure that women's ministry or men's ministry or whatever

functional program that is coming up within the church that needs the services of the hospitality ministry.

**Societal influence.** The subtheme of positive societal influence refers to the unique family and society influences on the women leaders that have made to aspire to lead and to become better leaders. Apparently women leaders' decision to pursue leadership is a product of the influence of society. Some of the women leaders are propelled by the desire to address the challenges regarding the women underrepresentation in the leadership within their societies. Other women seem to have been influenced by Western culture, which unlike the Africa culture allow women to occupy the leadership position. It also emerged that the influence of the family members influences the women to seek leadership positions and to be successful in their positions. Participant 2 stated:

So I think one of the factors is that I grew up around a lot of women leaders. My grandmother was very proactive in the leadership in the church. More the women who want to get those positions are ones that have been exposed to the Western culture and who have been in some leadership role within the Western culture. Yeah.

Participant 11 stated:

I met a woman. Another woman came to me yesterday. She's African-American and she said she's been looking [inaudible] of making me African woman [inaudible]. How did you do it? And I told her, "It's not me that did it. My background helped me to do it. Now, when it comes to me now, [inaudible]. What

else mostly is that [inaudible]? My ultimate mostly respect in that, whatever. Now most times, I don't mind letting the pastor know that. But most ways, God has called him and guess what? You get [inaudible]. Whatever my wife does, is what I do. If I'm not there and my wife speaks, know the family was.

#### **Theme 4: Women's Role**

This theme is defined as how women's role is viewed in the church in relation to their gender, ability to advance to leadership roles, negative and positive perceptions of their positions, their voice, and in relation to African and U.S. cultures. This theme describes women leaders' perception of their leadership roles. The theme also describes the changing perception of the role of women in leadership in African immigrant churches. Factors that are associated with the changing role of women in leadership are also described. The subthemes that make up the fourth theme of women's role include the limited leadership opportunities, agitation for women inclusion in leadership, and positive feminine attributes. Each of the themes is described below.

**Limited leadership opportunities.** The subtheme of limited leadership opportunities shows that women have limited leadership opportunities in African immigrant churches. The subtheme also describes the unique contributions by women towards the limited leadership opportunities. It emerges from the interviews that women do not have equal leadership opportunities compared to men. The interviews indicate that the unwillingness of women to challenge the status quo such as the negative African belief systems regarding the position of women in leadership contributes to the limited leadership opportunities among women.

Participant 2 stated:

But I think some women, because of how they grew up and the culture that they came in, they don't push for those positions.

Participant 4 stated:

Me, I talk, but some women, they have that fear and [therefore?] they just keep quiet. So they have an idea, but they can't talk, so it's [inaudible].

Participant 11 stated:

Some people believe that a woman cannot go beyond leadership and they do everything to block it.”

**Agitation for women inclusion in leadership.** The subtheme on agitation for women inclusion in leadership refers to the deliberate steps that are taken by women in the leadership to challenge the barriers that hinder the involvement of more women in the top leadership position. It emerges from the interviews that some of the women leaders are challenging the limited leadership opportunities for women in African immigrant churches. The participants indicate that they have had to fight for their voices to be heard. It emerges from the interviews that the women in the leadership play an important role in agitating for the inclusion of women in the leadership. However, not all women leaders display the fighting spirit with some choosing to be silent due to the intimidation they receive from the male leaders.

Participant 7 stated:

Already we're not on an equal part, but as a woman, you're always trying to prove yourself that you can do this.

Participant 4 stated:

Few of us at church, we are in the leadership. So we voice it out. So we voice it out and so far, it's better. Because you ask-- every time I take something, I get the same thing, which is not good, but at the same time, I'm fighting for the women. Yeah. I'm thinking every sentence I said on the board, they're not following it. I'm keeping my adrenaline up because I tell you-- or sometimes, I say something, "Oh, we already talked about it. So I'm just really a woman, and if I want to say something, I say it. And they know, everyone from the school knows me. I'm just like-- I don't know. I'm [not afraid?] [crosstalk][put it that way now?], so I cannot [inaudible] to women, and I [inaudible] for them, [cognition?] for the [inaudible] in that it's possible, and [crosstalk] because I have that relationship with a lot of women who [inaudible] be there for me if I should ask them for help, and [take care of?] the church. [crosstalk] activity. So [inaudible] to me because that open-minded.

**Positive feminine attributes.** The subtheme on the positive feminine attributes describes the unique characteristics of women that make them better leaders. It emerged from the interviews there are various characteristics of women that make them better suited to occupy certain positions within the church. One of the characteristics that were mentioned by a high number of participants is the caring nature of women, endear them to the church members. The caring nature of women is also indicated to enable them to adhere to service-hood.

Participant 2 stated:



So I think the caring nature of a woman-- the caring nature of the woman and the service-hood of a woman plays a great role in the leadership position I have in health care.

Participant 7 stated:

We're not shy. We don't hold back. We use what God has given us, and once you expose people to what you can do and how you can do people begin to appreciate it. Women make an excellent supportive role and not so much as [inaudible]. I think it takes a different kind of mind to accept that.

### **Theme 5: Leadership**

The leadership theme refers to the leadership style adopted by the women leaders and how such a leadership approach influences the success of women leaders. The theme describes how women leaders oversee their ministry, the relationship to church members, including the immigrant community. The theme also describes how women in the leadership position address the challenges that they face. The subthemes that make up the leadership theme include the leadership approaches adopted by women leaders and addressing the challenges in leadership. Each of the themes is described below.

**Leadership approaches adopted by women leaders.** The subtheme on addressing the challenges in leadership describes the approaches that are used by the women in the leadership positions to address the challenges that they face in their roles as leaders. The theme also highlights the leadership characteristics that are associated with the women leaders in African immigrant churches. It emerges from the interviews that women leaders employ their feminine attributes in leadership, which enable them to be

compassionate, determined, interactive and organized leaders.

According to the obtained interviews, it is evident that women leaders show compassion in their leadership approach. The analysis of the interviews reveals that women leaders are sympathetic and empathetic towards the church members. The female church leaders are also understanding, which enables them to easily connect with various members of the church. The leadership approach adopted by the women leaders enables them to be trusted by the church members. Women leaders also show lots of determination in their work and they are focused and organized as shown by their work planning skills.

Participant 2 stated:

I think it does influence my approach greatly, especially in the health-care field, because as a woman you're caring and nurturing, and you want your family to be healthy. And there's always concerns and looking for ways to improve and to engage either your family or your children in a certain direction. So in that reason, being a woman in the health-care field, I feel great responsibility for my church members or for those who I'm entrusted with their health, to really make a difference. So I think the caring nature of a woman-- the caring nature of the woman and the service-hood of a woman plays a great role in the leadership position I have in health care.

Participant 4 stated:

Planning of all the activities and [missions?] for education, such as the [mentor?] program for the kids in church, the tutoring program for the church members,

including [kids?] from [among the?] community [inaudible] in other [inaudible] denominations from all over the [DFW?]. For the time, I just have to plan. So I know I have a meeting on Sunday. I still have to clean the house and do all that, so I'll do after supper on Saturday night. I know I have a meeting on Sunday, then I'll plan my day [full of?]- planning everything on Friday, [inaudible] myself. So I plan accordingly and beforehand.

Participant 5 stated:

And the members of the church, we interact within the church and outside of the church, so they have seen me in that capacity, whereas they were confident and comfortable that if I'm stepping into a woman's minister role because I'm very passionate about women affairs, then I'll be okay. If I'm stepping into a hospitality role - hospitality comes very natural for me - so that is something that was acceptable to the members of the church. It was never an issue.

Of course, you have to. I think, as a leader, you have to share. You cannot be a one-person do-it-all. And sometimes you may see opportunity of getting new ideas because people have all these great ideas, and if you don't give them the opportunity, then you make up all those things. So yes, it's a leadership partnership.

**Addressing the challenges in leadership.** The subtheme on addressing the challenges in leadership describes the approaches that are used by the women in the leadership positions to address the challenges that they face in their roles as leaders. As evident from the interviews, women leaders are constantly faced with unique challenges

such as gender-related challenges that undermine their leadership. For them to successfully execute their leadership roles, women leaders are faced with the need to address such challenges. One of the approaches women use in addressing the challenges is being vocal. Interviews indicate that women leaders have a fighting spirit and they are ready to confront the challenges that they face head-on. But it is emerging that women leaders are not confrontational in all situations. It is evident that in some instances the women leaders adopt dialogue and often involve the top leadership (pastors) as an intervener in solving issues with other leaders.

Participant 2 stated:

I overcame those barriers, one, by praying about it. Okay. So my spiritual connections are the ones that were able to kind of balance those areas for me. The other ways of overcoming the time-management barrier is by-- when I was married, is to talk to my spouse and telling him that this is the job that God has led me to have some balance, so that I could participate in leading.

Participant 4 stated:

Yeah. And then if I'm raising my hands to say something, and then they pick a man and I was the first one to raise my hand, I interrupt it and say, "I was the first one raising my hand." Yeah, they don't like it, but [inaudible].

### **Addressing the Research Questions**

The interview responses provided in-depth insights into the study research question, which focused on the assessment of the experiences of women in leadership positions within the African immigrant church in the United States. From the description

of their experiences as women leaders, the participants' responses led to the emergence of themes on how women ascend to the leadership position in the African immigrant churches with a focus on the cultural, faith-related and gender-related factors that either support or impede women from occupying the top leadership positions in the church. The interviews further advanced the theme that personal factors such as the level of qualification and experience, women's determination and hard work and the level of competence influence the experiences of the women leaders and how well church members and fellow leaders receive them. The participants also advanced the theme that women leaders have an important role in determining their access to the top leadership positions and how they are treated as leaders. The women leaders are of the view that the tendency of women to accept the status quo and let men dominate the top leadership positions is associated with limited leadership opportunities for women. According to the participants, women need to agitate for their right to lead and to be heard and respected when in the leadership positions. It also emerged that women can use their positive feminine characteristics such as being caring to advance their leadership success. Apparently from the interviews that women adopt various leadership approaches such as empathetic, interactive, cooperative, and partnership leadership, which endear them to the church members.

The first sub-question in this research focused on the experience of women leaders regarding the factors that contribute to their success in obtaining leadership positions within the African immigrant church. The women leaders' responses to this sub-question led to the emergence of the theme on the personal factors, which indicated that

one of the factors that contribute to their success in obtaining the leadership positions within the African immigrant church is their experience in leadership and their qualification. It emerges that women need to have prior experiences in leadership for them to be accepted to the top leadership position. They should have the requisite academic and professional training. It also emerges that positive societal influence such support from the family and fellow leaders enhance their chances of ascending to the top leadership position. The responses also suggested that women's determination, hard work, and competence contribute to their success in obtaining leadership positions. The interviews also advanced the view that mentoring is a key contributor to the ascendancy of women to the top leadership positions in the African immigrant churches. According to the participants, mentoring by the female leaders in the top position such as those in the eldership and pastor's position enable the women to have the aspiration for the top leadership and help to debunk the cultural belief that the top leadership is reserved for men.

The second sub-question focused on how women describe barriers or challenges in obtaining leadership positions within the African immigrant church. The responses from the women leaders showed that one of the main challenges that women face is challenges associated with African values and expectations. It emerged that the African traditions limit the access of women to the top leadership position. The respondents also advanced the view that the role of women in the African traditions, which is to be in the kitchen, take care of children and family impose pressure on women especially regarding time limitation, which limits their ability to execute the work-related roles. It also

emerged from the interviews that women leaders face gender-related challenges such as biases and discrimination based on gender. Women indicated that women in the leadership position are often looked down upon by church members and even by their fellow leaders. The other challenge that emerged is the challenge associated with the allocation of the available resources. According to the women leaders, the allocation of resources such as finances is sometimes done unfairly towards the departments led by women. Women leaders are sometimes allocated zero budgets despite the need for them to carry out various activities that require finances. The obtained interviews also indicated that women face the challenges associated with the church doctrines, which do not encourage gender equality in the distribution of the top leadership positions. According to the respondents, most of the African immigrant churches uphold the belief that the top leadership positions such as eldership and the pastoral positions are reserved for men. The ascendance of women to the top leadership position in the church organization is also curtailed by the belief that women cannot be ordained.

The third sub-question focused on how women describe gender-related issues in obtaining leadership positions within the African immigrant church. Based on the obtained interviews, it emerged that there are gender-related factors that enhance access of women to top leadership positions while there are other factors that impede women's progress to the top leadership positions in the African immigrant churches. Some of the gender-related factors that were noted to enhance access of women to top leadership positions included the positive feminine attributes such as caring nature and the adoption of the empathetic approach in leadership. The ability of the women to connect with the

members of the church and to involve them in church leadership also emerged as a factor that enhances access of women to the top leadership positions. The other factors that enhance access of women to top leadership positions include women's hard work such as the ability to multitask and determination. The gender-related factors that were noted to impede women's progress to the top leadership positions in the African immigrant churches included gender bias that is propagated by cultural and religious beliefs where women are discriminated from accessing leadership. It emerges from the interviews that the cultural beliefs have made women believe that they should not seek some top leadership positions since they should occupy such positions. The interviews also indicate that African immigrant churches have been emboldened by the African culture and the doctrinal interpretations to pursue ideologies that discriminate against women leaders.

### **Summary**

The study's research design, which relied on the phenomenological approach, facilitated the collection of interviews from the women leaders that provided in-depth insights into experiences of women in leadership positions within the African immigrant church in the United States. The findings that were obtained, which included the demographic findings, the approach used in the data collection and the analysis of the obtained data along with the trustworthiness of the research findings were discussed in this study. The participants provided their views regarding the factors that contribute to their success in obtaining leadership positions within the African immigrant church. Participants indicated that the success of women in leadership is associated with their hard work, commitment, experience, qualification, and societal influence. The views



shared by the participants also advanced knowledge of barriers or challenges in obtaining leadership positions within the African immigrant church. The participants indicated that the barriers that impede the women from accessing the leadership positions include the challenges associated with the African culture, gender-related challenges, challenges associated with the allocation of the available resources, and challenges associated with the doctrinal beliefs. The views shared by the participants also provided insights into how women describe gender-related issues in obtaining leadership positions within the African immigrant church. It emerged from the views shared by the participants that the gender-related issues can either enhance or impede the ascendancy of women to the top leadership position. It is therefore evident that the responses provided by the participants addressed the gap that the study focused on. In the subsequent chapter, the findings presented in this chapter are discussed with a focus on how they relate with the existing findings and the associated research and practice implications.

## Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

### **Introduction**

Based on the assessment of the existing literature, I noted that there are limited studies explored the unique challenges faced by women in obtaining top leadership positions in African immigrant churches. I was therefore motivated to address the gap by exploring the experiences of women in leadership positions in African immigrant churches in the United States. This study addressed the gap using a phenomenological approach which enabled me to explore the experiences of women in leadership positions in African immigrant churches in the United States.

A total of 12 women who contacted me through the information provided in the flyer and who met the inclusion criteria took part in the study. With consent from all the participants, I conducted interviews; each interview was audiotaped. I transcribed and thematically analyzed interview recordings. From the analysis, various themes were identified. The first theme related to various challenges participants experienced in reaching leadership positions, which included four main subthemes. The second theme related to the support of women, which was made up of two subthemes. The third theme related to the personal factors that contributed to the success of the participants in their leadership role in the church and were made up of four subthemes. The fourth theme related to the women's role and was made up of three subthemes (limited leadership opportunities, agitation for women inclusion in leadership, and positive feminine attributes). The fifth theme related to the leadership, which included two subthemes. In this chapter, I describe the relationship between the findings I obtained and the existing

literature that focused on women in leadership, especially church leadership and the associated challenges to establish areas of agreement or contradiction. I also discuss the limitations and recommendations for future studies.

### **Interpretation of the Findings**

The findings of this study provide information that confirms the existing knowledge on women leadership especially the top leadership position in African immigrant churches. The findings also extend the existing knowledge by providing new insights into the topic. The comparison of the findings with the existing literature facilitates the development of important insights for positive social change in enhancement of the inclusion of women in leadership and identifies areas for further research.

### **Challenges**

The theme relating to challenges faced by women in leadership emerged as the most prominent in this study and also in the existing literature where various researchers had discussed the topic (Ademiluka, 2017; Baxter, 2016; Robbins & Francis, 2014). Challenges related to culture that are faced by women leaders have been previously highlighted (Weisenfeld & Newman, 2014). Concerning the challenges that are related to the African influence, Weisenfeld and Newman, (2014) agreed with the findings of this study that gender role expectations based on African values are one of the challenges that impede women from accessing top leadership positions or discharging their leadership roles adequately. The findings also corroborate the literature that indicates that cultural expectations regarding the role of women in African culture are a challenge that impedes

the selection or appointment of women to certain positions that are considered to be a reserve for men (Nkomo & Ngambi, 2009). It is due to the culture-related role expectations supported Sanchez-Hucles and Davis (2010) that women leaders such as those in the African immigrant churches are offered roles that are considered feminine while the positions that are considered to be equated to the head of the family were reserved for men.

Culture related challenges faced by women leaders disfavor the leadership opportunities and sometimes hinder their ability to effectively discharge their leadership roles in the church. The reported challenge of balancing the demands that are imposed by the culture defined roles and the demands associated with their roles in church leadership was previously termed as a work-family conflict by Rosener (2011). Sweeney (2014) also supported the findings that women in the African immigrant churches avoid challenging for top leadership positions due to fear of contradicting the African traditions.

Gender-related challenges faced by women in leadership positions have been extensively discussed in the literature (Weisenfeld & Newman, 2014). As reported in this study and by previous researchers' women leaders are looked down upon due to their gender by their male counterparts and the followers (Smith, 2015). Furthermore, this study added that unlike men leaders, the female counterparts are forced to deliver more to earn respect and for their leadership roles to be considered legitimate. Ma et al. (2014) agreed with the views expressed in this study that the emotional nurture of women is often taken as a weakness and therefore seen as a liability in carrying out their leadership duties such as representing the church in certain events.

The unique contribution of this study to the literature on the challenges that are faced by women in leadership is in relation to the findings on the challenges related to the available resources. The study advances the view that there is an unfair distribution or assigning of the resources to the departments led by the women leaders. According to the study, women leaders are not given enough financial support to enable them to accomplish the duties associated with their leadership role. Although women leaders attempt to address the shortage in resource allocation to their departments, the study indicated that their efforts are sometimes unsuccessful because their call for assistance is often ignored. The unfair allocation of resources to the women-lead departments could be due to discrimination or lack of confidence in the ability of the women to effectively manage the resources (Javidan et al., 2015).

The influence of the church doctrines on women leaders is a topic that has been extensively examined (Baxter, 2016). It emerges from the existing literature that based on the interpretation of biblical writing there are church doctrines that prohibit women's leadership (Smith, 2015). For the case of the African immigrant churches, the study indicated that biblical teachings are used to deny women the chance to occupy top leadership positions. The doctrinal beliefs of some African immigrant churches do not allow the ordination of women, which denies the women from occupying top leadership in the church organization.

### **Support**

Despite the challenges faced by women leaders, this study found that women leaders in African immigrant churches also get support in various ways. According to this

study, women leaders get support from various entities within the church and the family, which enables them to either ascend to the top leadership positions in the African immigrant churches or be able to effectively carry out their leadership roles. Although not focusing on women leaders in the church, Cheung and Halpern (2010) also noted that support of the family is important for women to excel in leadership.

Just as the case for any leader, Dzubinski (2015) noted that women leaders also need goodwill and support from their followers. This study noted that women leaders in the African immigrant churches have the support of the members of the church and the fellow leaders as they perform their roles. The support from the members is in the form of volunteering where the members with the required expertise offer to help in accomplishing the roles assigned by the female leaders while fellow leaders support women by creating a positive environment for them to carry out their roles.

Training and mentoring are important in empowering leaders and enhancing their leadership skills (Wakahiu & Keller, 2011). Newkirk and Cooper (2013) argued that the training and mentoring of women leaders encourage the involvement of women in leadership. According to Dunbar and Kinnersley (2011), successful women leaders provide the ideal mentors for young and emerging women leaders. This study also found that women leaders mainly get mentoring from fellow women leaders who are in the senior position and from the family leaders who have been in leadership. The study also indicated that the African immigrant churches offer training to the prospective women leaders, which as indicated by Newkirk and Cooper (2013) is important in building leadership capacity.

## **Personal Factors**

Various factors enable women leaders to thrive in their roles as leaders or for aspiring women leaders to get leadership positions. The importance of leadership experience cannot be overstated as evidenced by a wealth of literature on the topic (Watt, 2014). It is not dissimilar for the case of women leaders in the African immigrant churches where, as shown in this study, experience is a prerequisite for them to ascend of to the leadership position. Bullough, de Lugue, Abdelzaher, & Heim (2015) also supported the findings of this study regarding the need for aspiring women leaders to have the appropriate academic background and professional training, which enable them not only to qualify for leadership but also to excel as a leader.

Ferrari (2017) noted that women in leaders are hardworking and show a high level of competence. This study also reported similar findings among the women leaders in the African immigrant churches where they perform above the expectation. The hard work displayed by women leaders in the African immigrant churches could be linked to the view that they feel they need to prove themselves. Various attributes enable women leaders to perform above the expectation with the reported examples being their ability to multitask. Rosette and Tost (2010) also supported the reported view that women have good organizational skills, which enable them to plan and execute their roles.

Job commitment and determination are key attributes of good leadership, which have been reported among women leaders (Adams, 2014). According to this study, the women leader in the African immigrant churches displays a high level of commitment, which enable them to overcome the hurdles that they face in their role. The determination

displayed by women is associated with their inner strength. As noted in this study, woman leaders have inner strength, which enables them to withstand the challenges associated with their leadership roles.

This study provides new insights relating to the personal factors that enable women leaders to excel in African immigrant churches. As noted in this study, women leaders are propelled by the desire to address the challenges regarding the women's underrepresentation in the leadership within their societies. According to Hoyt and Murphy (2016), the environment and the social interaction shape an individual's perspective and goals. It is evident in this study that the Western culture, which unlike the Africa culture allow women to occupy the leadership position, has challenged and empowered women to seek top leadership position and change the status quo in the leadership of African immigrant churches. The study also indicates that influences from family members propel women to seek leadership positions and to be successful in their positions.

### **Women's Role**

As evident from this study, women have limited leadership opportunities in African immigrant churches. However, it seems women in African immigrant churches contribute to the reported limited leadership opportunities. The study reported the unwillingness of women to challenge the status quo such as the negative African belief systems regarding the position of women in leadership contributes to the limited leadership opportunities among women. Although this study is the first to report the highlighted contribution of women to a limited number of women in leadership in the



African immigrant churches, the findings could be due to discrimination, challenges and an environment that favor men over women leaders (Nkomo & Ngambi, 2009; Javidan et al., 2015). It also emerges that although some women are unwilling to challenge for top leadership positions, they are some who are actively engaged in agitation for increased inclusivity in the African immigrant churches. The findings also suggest that women use their strengths to advocate for enhanced inclusivity in the leadership position. One of the characteristics that were mentioned by a high number of participants is the caring nature of women, which endear them to the church members. An existing literature agrees that women are caring (Brandt & Edinger, 2015), however, limited previous evidence links their caring nature to increase leadership opportunity.

### **Leadership**

The leadership approach adopted by women is a subject that has been widely researched with various researchers supporting the findings that women leaders employ feminine attributes in leadership, which enable them to be compassionate, determined, interactive and organized leaders (Brandt & Edinger, 2015). Walker and Aritz (2015) also agree with the views expressed in this study regarding the fact that women leaders are sympathetic and empathetic towards the church members. Compassion, determination and interactive nature are leadership attributes that have been indicated to enhance followers' trust (Smith, 2014; Brandt & Edinger, 2015). Similarly, this study noted that the leadership approach adopted by the women leaders enables them to be trusted by the church members.

Although the study reported changing attitudes in favor of women inclusion in leadership in African immigrant churches, the women leaders are constantly faced with unique challenges such the gender-related challenges that undermine their leadership (Smith, 2015). The findings indicate that women in leadership attempt to address the challenges by being vocal. It is evident that women leaders have a fighting spirit and they are ready to confront the challenges that they face head-on.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The design of this research was based on Bass and Riggio's (2006) transformational leadership theory. The theory was adopted given its ability to explain to relate the feminine characteristics with being a transformational leader (Brandt & Edinger, 2015). The transformational theory facilitates the understanding of how women in leadership positions within African immigrant churches interpret the transformation to leadership and their gender and cultural experiences (Martin, 2015).

According to the theory the feminine characteristics, such as better communication skills, ability to be a good listener, conflict resolution skills, and well-developed interpersonal skills synergize well with the people-orientedness of the transformational leadership style (Brandt & Edinger, 2015). In the past, research on ecclesiastical leaders has suggested that transformational leadership is perceived better than other leadership styles in the church context and that women were more likely to display it than men (Druskat, 1994). More recently, Brandt and Laiho (2013) found that while male and female leaders may display roughly equivalent degrees of transformational leadership, women regarded themselves and were perceived by

subordinates as more enabling and rewarding than men. The findings of the study support the claims made by transformational theory regarding attributes of women leaders.

According to this study women, leaders are compassionate, determined, interactive and organized leaders. The study also noted that women leaders are sympathetic and empathetic towards the church members. The findings indicate that the highlighted feminism among women leaders enhances followers' trust, which is a characteristic feature of transformational leaders (Smith, 2014).

Transformational leadership theory also proposes that effective leaders go beyond the minimum to engage with and motivate their followers and is usually characterized in four dimensions of idealized influence, inspirational motivation, individualized consideration, and intellectual stimulation (Bass & Riggio, 2006). The observed determination and hard work among the women leaders in the African immigrant churches offer support to the theory. The study noted women leaders perform beyond expectation and seek to involve others leaders, which aligns with their leadership traits as proposed by the transformational theory (Ghasabeh et al., 2015; Muenjohn & Armstrong, 2015).

### **Limitations of the Study**

This study has inherent limitations that need to be taken into consideration when interpreting the findings. The first limitation is associated with the non-representative nature of the sample. This research focused on the experiences of the women in the top leadership position in the African immigrant churches. The sample is limited by the fact that it only includes the leaders in the top leadership position. Therefore, the women

leaders in what the study perceived to the lower positions were not included, which suggests that the obtained findings are less informative of this segment of the women leaders.

The second limitation arises from the categorization of women leaders into those in top leadership. There is no standard criterion to determine what top leadership means in different churches. Even though most of the churches that were included in the study considered the elder and the pastor positions as top leadership positions, it should also be noted that within the church set up there are various departments with heads. It therefore unclear what exactly top leadership means and if it is similar across the different churches. Although the selection of the participants from different churches seemed to enhance the generalizability of the study, it also surfaces the limitation of the difference in experiences based on specific churches. As noted in this study, women leaders in some African immigrant churches tend to consider the position of elders and pastors to be a reserve of the men and they do not seem to be ready to challenge, while other churches allow the appointment of women to the positions. This is a limitation because the scope of this study did not allow the assessment of the experiences based on individual churches but rather generally as African immigrant churches. Further research should, therefore, be carried out to explore the variation in experience across the different denominations of African immigrant churches. Future researchers should also develop a standardized criterion for categorizing women leaders, which is consistent across the different denominations.

The other possible limitation in this study is my bias. I am a strong advocate of inclusive leadership. I strongly believe that women leaders have a lot to offer and they should be allowed to showcase their leadership skills. It is, therefore, possible my views might have influenced my approach and interpretation of the findings. However, it should be noted that I maintained an open mind during the interview process and allowed the participants to advance their views and knowledge regarding the research phenomenon. I ensured that each of the themes emerged from the views that were shared by the participants. I also limited personal bias by triangulating the data with an existing secondary survey and allowing the participants to review own interview data and initial interpretations to ensure the accuracy of the information. I also kept notes during the interview process to help me check myself of possible bias.

The other limitation that emerged towards the end of the research is the limited ability of the adopted theoretical framework to explain some of the findings. Although the transformation theory provided the basis to understand women leaders and their approach to leadership, the theory seemed to be limited in explaining the challenges faced by the women leaders. However, the theory was able to provide a framework for understanding and interpreting how women deal with the challenges. Future researchers should, therefore, use other (multiple) relevant theories when exploring the topic.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

In the previous section and the other sections of this study, I offered suggestions for future research, however, here I will put more emphasizes on those recommendations and add more areas for future research. Based on my best knowledge, the findings

presented in this study provide one of the first, if not the first, evidence into the experiences of women in African immigrant churches. This study, therefore, is best suited to act as the foundational study for further research into the topic in African immigrant churches.

I believe that for adequate information to be obtained regarding the experiences of women in leadership positions within African immigrant churches, there is a need to interview the individuals who are close to the women leaders. Future researchers need to interview the spouses of the women leaders (if married). Interviewing of the spouses will add to the observations and will fill gaps such as on how women deal with tasks at home and work and whether they feel women are burdened and rendered ineffective by their work-related roles. Such information will help provide insight into possible experiences of work-family conflict among the women leaders.

The findings of this study also provide various aspects that can form a research focus for future researchers. One of the possible research problems that emerge from the findings is the doctrinal influence on gender-inclusive church leadership. The second possible future research problem is the role of women in the struggle for gender-inclusive church leadership. Future researchers can also focus on the successes of the women leaders in the top leadership positions in African immigrant churches. Based on the discussed limitations, future studies need to explore if the experiences of women leaders in the top leadership positions in African immigrant churches' domination vary based on the denomination. The future researcher should also consider employing multiple

relevant theories to better the complex experiences of women leaders in the top leadership positions.

### **Social Change Implications**

The study advanced information that is likely to have positive social implications. The findings provide one of the first evidence on the experiences of women leaders in the top leadership positions in African immigrant churches. This information provides a better understanding of the challenges and the opportunities that women leaders have in African immigrant churches and is likely to guide debate on steps that need to be taken to encourage inclusive leadership.

The findings are also likely to impact positively on social change by empowering the proponents of inclusive leadership in African immigrant churches with information on what to target. Findings indicate that challenges related to African culture, gender bias and doctrinal beliefs need to be solved for more women to have the opportunity to occupy the top leadership positions in African immigrant churches. Findings also encourage women to actively participate in efforts towards inclusive leadership. Findings that show successful women in top leadership positions such as eldership or pastor positions that were previously reserved for men is a motivation for women to aspire for such positions.

The outcome of this study is also likely to reduce stigma towards women. Women leaders and those seeking leadership positions face gender-based bias. The study notes that despite their qualifications, some are sometimes not allowed to lead. Those in leadership are not supported and they are often given zero budgets, which could be due to

the perception that they are incapable of managing huge budgets. However, the observation that women can occupy the topmost position in the African immigrant churches and perform well is expected to alter the perception towards women leaders.

### **Conclusion**

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore the experiences of women in leadership positions within African immigrant churches in the United States to inform the efforts towards an enhanced representation of women in church leadership. Following the interviews, women leaders were able to explain the challenges they experience in reaching leadership positions, which include African values and expectations, gender-related challenges, challenges related to available resources and doctrinal challenges. Women leaders also described the support that promotes or enables them to effectively perform their leadership roles or even increase their chances of being selected to the top leadership position. Some of the support they get include support when performing leadership roles and training and mentoring. Women leaders also shared insights into the personal factors that contribute to their success in their leadership role in the church. Some of the highlighted personal factors include family relationships, prior experiences, determination, and motivation. The views shared by women leaders also indicated the leadership approaches adopted by women leaders, and how they address the challenges in leadership. The views shared by the women leaders also indicated the women's role in determining their participation in church leadership. It emerged that women can choose to be silent and preserve the status quo, which is characterized by limited leadership opportunities for women or agitate for more inclusivity.



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## Appendix A: Participant Screening Guide

I am Abraham Wentum. I study Industrial and Organizational Psychology at Walden University. I will pose some questions to you check if your history and experience relevant to the purpose of this study is a good match to answer the research questions. I may ask for some information that is private. I will keep all the information confidential. This session will only last for approximately 10 minutes. Please note that you have the right not answer any question that sounds uncomfortable to you.

The following statements will be read to the person who is screened:

### **Recruitment Needs for the study**

The participant must:

- Be a woman in at least one leadership position (e.g., pastor, worship leaders, spiritual education leaders, evangelism leaders, and musician-spiritual leaders)
- Have obtained the said leadership position within the past 12 months
- Be at least 18 years old
- Be willing to participate in the research
- Can communicate in English
- Be a woman leader who will not leave their position in the church within the duration of the study (e.g., 6 months from beginning the recruitment)

### **Incentive**

The participant will be compensated by being given a 25-gift card at Target, Amazon.com, or a local store

### **Participant Screening questions**

- What is your gender? (If female continue, if not, then discontinue the screening process).
- How old are you? (If the response is above 18 continue, if not, then discontinue the screening process).
- Do you hold any leadership position in the church? (If yes, discontinue the screening process, if no, continue).
- Did you get into the leadership position within the last 12 months? (If yes, discontinue the screening process, if no, continue).
- Do you plan to stay in your leadership position past the coming 6 months? (if yes, discontinue the screening process, if no, continue).
- Are you willing to provide information regarding women in leadership positions within the African immigrant church in the United States? (If yes, discontinue the screening process, if no, continue).
- Are you comfortable answering face to face interview questions? (If yes, discontinue the screening process, if no, continue).
- Please let me know if you have any comment or clarification regarding the questions I have just asked  
If eligible, continue
- Would you like to participate in this study? \_\_\_\_\_

- Thank you, I would like to schedule an interview. Please let me know your preferred day and time \_\_\_\_\_
- Is it okay with you if forward the reminder of the interview schedule via an email? \_\_\_\_\_

If the respondent fails to meet the eligibility criteria say: I am grateful to you for availing yourself and cooperating with me through the session. However, I am looking for individuals that meet a specific criterion. Based on the information that you have provided, I am afraid I may not be able to interview you for this study.

If the participant does meet the requirements for the study, say: I am grateful to you for availing yourself and cooperating with me through the session. The interview will take approximately 1 hour and you will receive Target, Amazon.com, or a local store gift card at the end of the interview session. The gift will be forwarded through your email.

**End of the screening process**



## Appendix B: Interview Guide

### *Demographic Questions*

1. Age
2. Ethnicity
3. Country of origin
4. Academic achievement
5. Marital status
6. Type of leadership position you hold:
7. Length of time in this position:
8. Length of time in any position at church:
9. Church denomination:

*RQ1: What are the experiences of women in leadership positions within the African immigrant church in the United States?*

### Interview Questions:

1. In responding to the demographic items, you stated that you hold \_\_\_\_\_ position. Please tell me about your journey to get to this position.
  - a. How was your appointment received by other members of the church?
  - b. What tasks do you do in your leadership position on a daily basis?
  - c. Do you share leadership with others at your church?
  - d. If participant is immigrant, Were you leader in your church of origin?

Please, tell me more about this.
2. What process was used to select you in the leadership position?

*Sub-question 1: How do women describe the factors that contributed to their success in obtaining leadership positions within the African immigrant church?*

Interview Questions:

3. What factors contributed to your success in obtaining a leadership position?

*Sub-question 2: How do women describe barriers or challenges in obtaining leadership positions within the African immigrant church?*

Interview Questions:

4. Please describe your perceptions of barriers women in your church face when aspiring to top leadership positions in the church.
  - a. If not mentioned, please ask about specific barriers the participant experienced.
  - b. How did you overcome these barriers?
5. Could you describe your experience when the church's practices had a negative effect on your leadership in the church?

*Sub-question 3: How do women describe gender related issues in obtaining leadership positions within the African immigrant church?*

Interview Questions

6. How do you see gender involved in achieving leadership in your church?
7. How do you compare opportunities to leadership between males and females in your church?
8. Describe your experience as a woman in relation to the opportunities women have in your church.

9. How does being a woman influence your approach to leadership?
10. If it happened; could you describe specific situations where you felt you have been looked down upon as a leader due to your gender?
11. How does being a woman influence the interactions with congregants and community members?

In order to get deeper response, the interview the researcher will use probes as suggested by Creswell (2005) such as:

- I. Tell me more about that
- II. Please explain
- III. Please clarify that point you just made?
- IV. Please describe that
- V. Please provide an example

## Appendix C: Developed Codes

- 
- 1 Finding volunteers
  - 2 Women tend to experience bias and discrimination influenced by African culture
  - 3 Negative perceptions of women by men
  - 4 Men surprised at success of women
  - 5 Time-management
  - 6 Lack of desire and ambition
  - 7 Ministry lacks finances
  - 8 Women experience exclusion
  - 9 Women placed in gender-based roles
  - 10 Lack of opportunity
  - 11 Young women not assisted as should
  - 12 Lack of support
  - 13 Women not considered equal to men
  - 14 Not being informed
  - 15 Rejection of female authority
  - 16 Not allowed to let children preach
  - 17 People not educated about women
  - 18 Falsely accused by older gentleman
  - 19 Caught in middle because of position
  - 20 Vote
  - 21 Appointment well-received
  - 22 Nominated
  - 23 Confirmed by bishop
  - 24 Support from pastor/ female pastor/ leadership
  - 25 Leadership is shared
  - 26 Not looked down upon much
  - 27 Support from husband/ family
  - 28 Support received from volunteers
  - 29 Opportunities for leadership
  - 30 Assistance from leadership
  - 31 Women receive training
  - 32 Women allowed to be in leadership roles
  - 33 Women in leadership roles are increasing
  - 34 Completion of work tasks
  - 35 Performs above expectations
  - 36 Grew up around strong women in leadership
  - 37 Influenced by Grandfather
  - 38 Prayer and prioritizing God
  - 39 Support from family and staff
  - 40 Observes women in leadership
-

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- 41 Personal commitment
  - 42 Qualifications
  - 43 Prior experience
  - 44 Inner strength
  - 45 Life principles
  - 46 Being more vocal
  - 47 Opportunities increasing
  - 48 Women have had to fight to prove themselves
  - 49 Women's role in church is not equal to men
  - 50 Qualities of women
  - 51 Women carry out daily tasks
  - 52 Women's role and the Bible
  - 53 Leadership through carrying out duties
  - 54 Leadership through conflict resolution
  - 55 Leadership through compassion
  - 56 Leadership through connecting people
  - 57 Leadership through commitment
  - 58 Leadership through planning and organization
  - 59 Leadership through being vocal
  - 60 Leadership preparation by being a wife
  - 61 Leadership style rooted in life principles and ideas
-